

**THE PROCLAMATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE
IN A BUDDHIST ENVIRONMENT**

**A ESSAY IN CONTEMPORARY EVANGELIZATION
AND CATECHESIS**

by

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The relative absence of conversions among Buddhists, both in the present situation and in the history of the missions, is a well-known fact. In the countries of Hinayâna Buddhism it was only in Ceylon that numerous conversions took place in the 17th century, when the island was in a state of social and political disintegration. In the countries of Mahayâna Buddhism (Vietnam, Korea, Japan) there has been no lack of conversions, even in recent times; but in these countries Buddhism remains the religion of a minority and the masses practise the indigenous religions, such as Shintoism, Confucianism, Shamanism or animism. This absence of conversions among Buddhists deserves to be studied in order to discover its causes and theological significances and to draw pastoral conclusions. Of course, the Church's role is not confined to proclaiming the Gospel message so that men may know Jesus Christ and make a personal decision when he is brought to them; her mission also consists in being present in the

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midst of religions and human groups as a leaven of liberation and salvation.

But noting the absence of conversions, the Church must ponder on the reasons for this failure, not in order to excuse herself or to condemn others, but to rethink her mode of presence and proclamation; and, finally, in order to gain a clearer understanding of the needs of others and of Christ's summons, and hence to deepen her own conversion.

Quite a few of these Asian peoples identify religion with their culture. According to the general mentality the Sinhalese, as also the Thai, the Laotian and the Khmer, is and must be a Buddhist; if one ceases to be a Buddhist, one is no longer wholly a Thai or a Khmer. This feeling is often shared by Christians of the same ethnic group. And this identification, combined with the awareness that Buddhism is superior to other religions and that Asian cultures are superior to Western cultures, hardly makes Christianity attractive. Religion is an inherited value that one retains and with which one lives, even if one does not practise it. The religion of others is therefore something that belongs to others and to their cultures.¹

Christianity has also failed to rouse Buddhist areas because these have seen it as joined to Western culture. The majority of missionaries was, and still is, white; their formation, their modes of life, their institutions, the company they keep, their means of subsistence and assistance are associated with the Western and colonial system. For example, the schools are often famed for the teaching of foreign languages; the churches and ceremonies evoke another culture. Buddhists do not regard missionaries as "religious men": the absence of a distinctive habit of dress and of religious rules like fasting and poverty, their participation in festivals, receptions and spectacles, social functions and all kinds of activities help to support this impression.²

Those who are in contact with Christians and with Catholic and Protestant institutions often admire the social work of the missionaries, the quality of the education given in the schools, their care of the sick and of lepers in particular, their interest in ethnic groups. Those who have had access to the Bible admire the spirit of renunciation shown by Christ, even if they affirm that they have not encountered it among Christians. They regard Christianity, in general, as a religion that rests more on faith than on a personal effort, on rites more than on inner spiritual progress. They consider the ideal of salvation proposed to them to be worldly and alienated by illusory happiness. They believe that its conceptions of the divinity and of man's relationship with it are animistic or materialistic.

For these reasons and others the Buddhists feel neither interested in nor concerned with the Christian message; they are not on the

right wave-length to hear the message. When the message does reach them, it remains incomprehensible to them. Or else they understand it according to their own categories and in a sense that distorts the Good News, with the result that the latter does not fit in with their own fundamental enterprise of liberation.

I. A MESSAGE THAT IS UNINTELLIGIBLE OR DISTORTED BY BUDDHIST PRECONCEPTIONS

In the Buddhist environment one notes as typical the lack of understanding of the Christian message as it is expressed in catechetical or biblical categories. The problem of language becomes really acute and therefore basic. Following the best catechetical theory, we present the message according to biblical categories. Let us look at their predominant characteristics.

God, Lord of heaven and earth, creator of everything and of all beings, cares for men and loves them. To this end he has always come to their assistance. He has chosen a people to honour him and to witness to him among the nations. Finally, he sent us his Son, the supreme sign of his love.

Christ, God made man, has revealed God's plan to us through his life and his teaching; he died in order to save us, but on the third day he rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. Yet he is still present in his Church. He now invites us to be converted. If we accept his invitation, if we believe in him, if we form part of his Church by receiving baptism, and if we live in accordance with his teaching, then we will be saved. Salvation begins with the remission of sins; it is progressively realized through the divine life which is imparted to us, and it will attain its fullness in heaven where we will see God face to face, and where we will be happy with the angels and the saints. We must therefore be converted to Christ if we are to have the means of salvation.

The handing-on of this message presents serious problems at the level of language and vocabulary. For example, it is not as simple as one may imagine to translate the words God, incarnation, sin, baptism, salvation, heaven, and the like. For the hearer understands each of these words according to his own general vision and experience. It is the total language which nuances its parts³. Hence the message is understood incorrectly. Here are a few examples from within our present discussion of Buddhism.

1. God

God is not understood as an absolute value but as an existent, a temporary being who is still subject to transmigration, and who has not yet attained definitive liberation. The comparison with Brahmâ is

made instinctively, and therefore with a God who in Hinduism is the personal manifestation of Brahman, the transpersonal Absolute, but who in Buddhism is demoted to the point of having no more than a temporary function as the head of beings who have not yet progressed beyond the stage of the world of pleasures (*kmalôka*), even if he does reside in one of the six temporary heavens. For man true salvation cannot be communion with Brahmâ, nor identity of life with him, because he himself is still in the order of alienation, misery and transmigration. To attribute the created world to God is not a perfection: the Buddhist canon interprets creation as an illusion of Brahmâ and a deception for other men. The true cause of every "being-in-the-world," in the Buddhist perspective, is desire and ignorance; therefore God, understood as the creator, would be the personification of desire and ignorance. Furthermore, God's quality as person, the peak of the Judeo-Christian religious experience, is equally incomprehensible because person is not distinguished from individuality and by that very fact it indicates possession of self, a falling back on the self, egoism. That is why a personal character is not attributed to beings who have reached the last stages of the pyramid of existence.

The concept of providence also leads Buddhists to situate God among the protective divinities, who are well-known in popular animistic religion, even in its evolved forms, like Shintoism. Then he is envisaged as a *kami*, a *deva*, a *nat*, a *neak* or a *phi*, depending on the beliefs of the various peoples.⁴ All this is already classified and reinterpreted by Buddhism as something intramundane in its nature and function.⁵

2. Christ

Christ is easily understood as a temporary manifestation of a god who is merciful to his followers, some thing that is fairly well-known in the literature of Hindu origin like the Ramayâna, or even in Buddhist scriptures and animistic beliefs. He is interpreted by the more clear-sighted as a kind and merciful *boddhisattwa*, but one who has not yet attained definitive liberation and awakening. His death on the cross can be understood as an act of goodness but in the Hinayâna environment it is seen mainly as a punishment for his personal sins committed in previous existences. His resurrection, ascension and glorification at the right hand of the Father are interpreted as signs of another existence, at the most similar to that of the *boddhisattwas* who devote themselves to the salvation of others before attaining *nirvâna*.

3. Salvation

Buddhists regard the salvation brought by Christ as a religious alienation, a relinquishment of personal effort. Man, indeed, is responsible for and the artisan of his actions; his own sins cannot,

therefore, be eliminated or washed away by another. Each person must suffer all their consequences. To follow Christ's example and teaching may be good but, as one gradually grows in perfection, one must free oneself from him. Now in Christianity the contrary is taught. For Buddhists, to receive life from Christ and to share his life increasingly is, in some way, a regression to the round of rebirths.

The fulfilment of salvation, expressed in categories of happiness, heaven and even personal communion, reminds them of the illusory state of the various heavens where one resides until personal merits are extinguished. Fundamentally, this state is less privileged than that of men here; enjoyment prevents one from understanding the true reality of misery and from opting finally for salvation. Salvation as the fruit of Christ's merits can only be understood within this mundane logic; they consider it to be tainted by egoism and by a closed natural ethic.

The movement of salvation, then, seems to them to indicate merely the first steps towards spiritual progress. Precepts and sacraments are only props, or the bark of a tree as compared to its sap. Even charity appears to them to be of the external order.

II. THE GOING-FORWARD OF A QUEST

The presentation of the Christian message remains incomprehensible to Buddhists, or let us say that it is understood in a distorted fashion. They do not discover in it the liberating and joyful proclamation of definitive salvation or of the path by which it can be attained. They do not regard this message as an answer to their own interior endeavour, to their ideal and to the quest for man's definitive liberation. They do not recognize in it "a genuine spiritual aim and tension, having some relationship—or, better still, convergence—with the aim and spiritual tension of their Master".⁶ According to their viewpoint this message does not deserve to be accepted either by spiritual men, who are caught in a higher tension, or by ordinary Buddhists who find an inner harmony with what is proposed to them in their own rites and beliefs, even though the possibility is offered them of attaining the happiness of the heavens and the gods.

In consequence, it can be affirmed that the Good News of Christ has not yet resounded in the minds and hearts of Buddhists in such a way that they too can be summoned and can make a free decision before Christ. The fact that a few of them have been converted does not invalidate this conclusion. The few genuine converts whom I have known had already made deep contact with Western culture and its religious ideal, so that they had overcome the difficulties which are specific to Buddhists.

How, then, is one to proceed in such a situation? The solutions which I indicate here are the fruit of my own reflections; their different phases also represent the viewpoint of some other missionaries.

Entrusted with teaching in our mission schools, I used to think in the early years that a knowledge of history, literature and philosophy would help the young to perceive the true meaning of God, conscience, the originality of the human person, and to grasp the oneness of our human existence, the value of history and of logical reasoning. I hoped thereby to acculturate them to our Western way of seeing things and ultimately to help them not to identify culture with religion, thus enabling them to opt for the Truth in a free and personal manner. Even in that perspective I greatly respected their beliefs, their feasts and their religious values. But I soon came to understand that this method and perspective were neither valid nor sufficient.

As I came increasingly in contact with Buddhists, I had a desire to know them as they are and to make them understand what Christianity is really all about. What I had in mind was a centre for information and documentation on the Church and the Christian message—an idea that I was unable to put into practice because of a change in assignment. I believed that an objective knowledge of Christianity would render enormous services, but I was still unaware of the more profound difficulties involved in the formulation of the message.

Under the impulse of Vatican II, as a result of a deeper understanding of missiology, and especially of a systematic study of Buddhism in general and of Laotian Buddhism in particular, and also by examining our missionary presence and methods, I discovered that another type of action was necessary in the Buddhist setting. Our presence had to be different in its ways of operating and its objectives. It was necessary to be with the Buddhists in order to learn from them, to incarnate ourselves in their culture and values, to be a leaven in the dough and to make it rise from within. With this perspective I set up the centre for research and dialogue with Buddhists on behalf of the Episcopal Conference of Laos and Cambodia.

It was in carrying on dialogue that I encountered increasingly acute linguistic difficulties. For I was not merely dealing with a different vocabulary but also with a dissimilar vision and approach and with wholly other spiritual values. In addition to external religious manifestations, like the rites and ceremonies which characterize popular religion, there is the inner experience and the fundamental option in the face of salvation—an experience and option that are explicitly found among certain spiritual Buddhists.

In consequence, by gradually deepening the nature of the Christian kerygma I tried to understand the profound meaning of the Buddhist

message. In dialogue I was obliged to formulate my Christian witness; by trial and error I worked out a certain approach, which I believed to be a new orientation. I would like to set it out in broad outline so that those working in the same environment may react to it, criticize and complete it.

III. THE CRITERIA FOR A SOLUTION

In order to convey the Christian message intelligibly to Buddhists we have to revise our own language and expressions. This effort requires us to go more deeply into the nature of the kerygma by referring to the New Testament as to a paradigm. It also calls for a deepening understanding not only of the categories and the language of Buddhists but also of their spiritual quest, of their overall purpose, of their fundamental hope, and of their attitude to salvation. On the existential plane the missionary and the local Church must deepen and live their experience of Christ and his message and at the same time accept and live the values of the fundamental Buddhist ideal. Then we shall be able to formulate and proclaim a message that is not only intelligible News but also Good News.

The News is intelligible when it is expressed according to the categories of the recipient, who can also grasp the meaning conveyed by the message. The News is good when it responds to profound expectations and appears at the same time to be realizable for the self, because it has already been realized or is in process of being realized in the one who proclaims it. For a man who is proud of his culture and religion the News is good when it not only respects his ancestors in the genetic and family order but also respects and honours the heights of his wisdom and spirituality and those who represent and incarnate the most sublime realizations of these values. In our case the value of the message and the interior experience of Buddhism must be respected and the Buddha must be honoured. Finally, if the message is to be Good News, we have to present its newness and originality and enable men to discover them. If these features do not emerge, the person who is being summoned would have no reason for opting in favour of the Christian message. Thus we are touching upon the two poles of missionary experience and reflection: rupture and fulfilment, novelty and continuity, originality and communion. These two poles appear to be opposed but are in fact complementary. They are found in the formulation of the kerygma, in the realization of conversion, in the dynamism of adaptation, and so on. They find their ultimate reason in the paschal mystery of Christ, who is "death and resurrection." No one has the right to eliminate a single element of them; their complementarity must be retained.

1. Biblical Landmarks

The New Testament always remains a privileged paradigm and an important point of reference for theological reflection and pastoral action. It is not a matter of searching the Bible for models to be copied subserviently. Yet in the Bible we can discover ways of proceeding which are capable of illuminating our quest and our pastoral activity. As far as the missionary kerygma is concerned, the Bible gives us accounts of the first proclamation to the Jews and, in two cases, to pagan groups. It does not give precise word-for-word accounts of what was said in the circumstances indicated but gives the schemas used in similar situations. In addressing the Jews a certain schema was used; another was adopted in speaking to animistic pagans; and yet another in addressing cultured Greeks.

In the kerygma addressed to the Jews the disciples express themselves in eschatological terms. They recall the Jewish history of salvation; they cite scriptural texts. The kerygma adapts itself to eschatological categories: the imminence of the last days, the presence of God's Kingdom, the necessity of conversion. It also adapts itself to the conceptions and religious experience of the chosen people: God acts in history, he leads his people, he manifests himself in important events, he sends and guides his prophets, of whom Christ is the summit. The Christian message is an answer to the quest and profound expectation of this people: the fulfilment of God's Kingdom and the coming of the Messiah and Saviour. It is necessary to adhere to this invitation of God and to enter into this new history if one does not wish to be cut off and therefore lost. Consequently, it is necessary to accept Christ, the sign of God's love and the answer of the saved man. At all levels of the kerygma we find elements of rupture and elements of fulfilment: in God's action and in man's answer, in the expectation and in its realization.

If we examine the kerygma addressed by Paul to the Athenians (Acts 17), we find a wholly different formulation. Here the apostle does not appeal to eschatological categories, nor to the sacred history of the Jews, nor to biblical testimonies. The teaching about God is more developed and the presentation of Christ is limited by the Greeks' lack of understanding of the mystery of the resurrection. Paul therefore relies on the religious experience of the Greeks: "You are the most religious of men." He appeals to their literature and quotes one of their poets; he expresses himself in the Stoic categories of the epoch. God is not presented in an historical perspective but in an existential Stoic perspective. All this was bound to provide an answer to their profound expectation and did in the case of "the few who joined him and embraced the faith." The new formulation was not only a *captatio benevolentiae* but a completion of the Greeks' spiritual development. Yet Paul's message is characterized by its originality: he discloses

to them "what they already worship without knowing it," and presents to them a different God concerning whom they must make choices which commit them. The restricted number of conversions reminds us of the difficulty of proclaiming the Good News to a developed cultural environment—a fact well-known to all missionaries working in similar environments. But the results cannot be measured by quantity alone. Conversions in the Greek world were difficult for several centuries, and yet the Greek culture influenced the thinking, the expression and the deepening of Christianity more than any other culture. I believe that the same holds true of the encounter between Christianity and Buddhism.

The second type of kerygma to the Gentiles, narrated in chapter 14 of the Acts of the Apostles, is addressed to a population of Asia Minor, the Lycaonians. It is not a complete kerygma but a presentation of God which is made differently from that addressed to the Jews and the Greeks. God is proclaimed in animistic categories; he manifests himself in the rhythm of the seasons and in atmospheric phenomena, all of which corresponds to the religious experience of an agricultural people like the Lycaonians.

It is clear, then, that with regard to its content the kerygma is a message addressed to non-Christians in categories that are comprehensible to them as an continuation of their religious experience and as an answer to their profound quest, so that they may recognize the action and invitation of God in Christ and hence respond to them by accepting him as their guide and saviour. Speaking always of the content, K. Rahner affirms that the concise message should present the essentials of Christianity. I believe that when it is addressed to non-believers, its content is even more concise, as the New Testament equally makes clear. There are three poles, as it were: God, Christ and man, perceived not as notions but as actors involved in man's liberation and salvation.

In the three types of kerygma indicated above, God is presented in various ways which conform to the categories and the experience of the hearers. What appears to be a common feature constituting the originality of Christianity is that God is presented in his relationship with the listeners who are being summoned. God is always shown to be present and acting now in favour of the listeners, who by that very fact are summoned by him. They have to answer him if they are to take a position. This existential and exacting way of revealing God was also practised by Christ, who spoke of God's providence and fatherhood, not so that his listeners may gain a new notion of God but so they may adopt new attitudes in relation to God and towards mankind.⁷

Christ is the summit of God's intervention and presence on behalf of mankind and at the same time he is the guide and the way of

salvation. From a theological standpoint Christ is the centre of the kerygma: in him God's initiative and the answer of the man who accepts salvation and conversion encounter one another. But in the three types of kerygma the same place is not reserved for him. In the kerygma to the Jews the emphasis laid on Christ is obvious. In the message to the Greeks he is introduced by means of the resurrection, which becomes a stumbling block for most of the hearers, and this indicates its central importance. In the message to the Lycaonians he is not mentioned. But in any case conversion is determined by reason of Christ and because of him.

The message is a summons to the listeners. Man does not enter into it as a definition or as a means of discovery of self. We are not presenting a new anthropology but we are asking man to effect a radical change. This change is variously called conversion, faith, illumination, charity.

If one considers the order of presentation in the New Testament, Christ comes to call man and to provoke him to make a fundamental decision. This was quite normal, not only for the Jews but also for the pagans of his time. They all belonged to sacral societies in which the experience of the divine and of divinities was essential and primordial. But this order may be reversed in societies which are secularized or refuse to accept God. The important thing is to set man before Christ and, with him and in his example, for him to discover and accept God.

2. In Search of the Buddhist Endeavour

If the message is to be the "Good News to the Buddhists," it must link up with the fundamental aim of Buddhism. It must be inserted into the most authentic development of this human and religious quest.

To adapt oneself to Buddhist categories without attaining to its spirit and without validating the inner hope that quickens its search would be to invite Buddhists to don an outer garment which attracts them by the beauty of its colours but in no way changes their lives. Consequently, we must strive to understand and recognize the spiritual tension of Buddhism, so that we may be ready to be summoned by it, to appropriate it into our Christian experience and to present it in terms of its own fulfilment, realized in and by Christ. I believe that this project can be detected in the experience of the "Founder," in his fundamental message and in the achievements of his best disciples.

The Founder, Siddharta Gautama, having previously known the riches, honours, pleasures and satisfactions of life, abandoned everything and set out as an ascetic in search of liberation. His relinquishment of pleasures was radical. He rejected all vocabulary connected with them; he even rejected the perspective of a salvation realized

through heavenly pleasures, which he regarded as an alienating sublimation.

Having studied and practised the quest for salvation in the school of the great masters, Siddharta Gautama also abandoned this path. In that very act he rejected or went beyond the search for liberation on a speculative, scholastic, ritual and communitarian plane. Each person must fashion his salvation by his own efforts, without relying on the help of others and by seeking his own path. To follow another can only be a beginning.

He then set out on the path of yoga and practised the most austere exercises. After six years of rigorous mortifications Gautama understood that extremes were to be avoided, that external control did not suffice, and that spiritual powers were ambiguous and dangerous. Taking the middle path, he proceeded towards an interior progress, which is expressed in various stages of "meditation" or *bhâvânâ*. This inner progress transcends the search for good and evil in order to attain to man's ultimate depth, his intention, which must be wholly cleansed of every root of evil. After terrible ordeals Siddharta Gautama, sitting beneath a tree, attained the liberating awakening whereby he permanently became known as the Buddha, the Awakened, the Enlightened One. The Buddha was aware of the wretched, impermanent and inconsistent nature of everything that exists and can be taken up into our human experience. He discovered that the deep-seated cause of this lies in ourselves. He discovered a true liberation for which he definitively opted, and he experienced its qualities. He saw the path which must be covered in order to realize it, the only path valid for men.

This perfect liberation was the fulfilment of his quest; he could have stopped there. Having hesitated a long time, the Buddha decided to proclaim the Good News of the liberation he had achieved and which was possible for other men. Out of compassion for men and the gods the Buddha spent the next forty-five years as an itinerant missionary and the master of a growing community, in order to witness to his experience and to show the path of liberation. This last phase has been developed in the schools of Mahâyâna Buddhism and it is emphasized by modern thinkers of the Theravâda School who seek the selfless dimension demanded by the present situation. Finally, the Buddha attained *paranirvâna*, leaving to the world his teaching and the example of his disciples.

This experience of the Founder remains an example and a paradigm of the spiritual experience of Buddhism, a figure of the Buddhist endeavour, a call and a manifestation of the hope of Buddhists, within which his message must be understood.

The Buddhist message, expressed in the four Noble Truths,⁸ is addressed to the man in search of salvation. It discloses to him that

alienation and liberation are within his power and within him. By that very fact the message in its explication and its means of realization invites him to advance beyond the domain of rites and beliefs, of cosmogenies and heavens, of sacralizations and theologies — in short, to transcend every self-grasping and alienating expression, which it regards as a camouflaging of the real human problem. Man remains the point of departure, where there is the deepening and fulfilment of the quest for salvation and its realization.

As a first step we must note, especially through meditation, that misery, suffering and impermanence are not simply external to us but have their roots in our inmost depths. Their cause also resides in us. The Buddhist message reminds man, who always tries to run away from himself and always seeks the cause of evil externally, that he must now look for it within himself and his own actions, and finally within his own intentionality. This cause is variously expressed as desire, ignorance, attachment: terms which must be interpreted within the Buddhist perspective. In his actual experience of this cause man has a glimpse of disalienation or liberation, this final goal of his designated by the terms *nirvâna* (extinction), *bodhi* (illumination), *vimuddi* (liberation). In face of the ultimate meaning of human life it is not important to uncover its nature, to describe its characteristics or to form a clear idea of it. The message asserts that we have to set out on a path towards this fulfilment, to orient all our actions in relation to it, to opt for its attainment; in short, to adopt an attitude that is existential, not speculative. This inward and progressive advance is indicated by the last noble truth, which can be expressed in different ways: by taking the eightfold path, or by the triple duty (*sila-panna-samâdhi*), or finally by the opposition of worldly-transcendent (*lokiya-lokuttara*) which stresses the primacy of intentionality.

It is within this fundamental message that one must understand Buddhist philosophy as a whole and some of its assertions, like: "There is no *Atta* or *Atman* on the individual or universal plane"; "everything is *suniattha* or void"; "salvation is extinction or *nirvâna*", etc. All this has a spiritual meaning, even if non-spiritual men of every religious tradition seek to absolutize these concepts and hence to shield themselves.

The enterprise of definitive liberation, realized by the Master and expressed in the Buddhist message, continues to be the ideal and hope of countless Buddhists. The members of the Buddhist monastic order (*sangha*) see in it the aim of their lives. In effect, they are spiritual men who try, especially through the practice of meditation, to transcend an ethical practice based on the search for merit, who seek progressive interiorization and the purification of every root of evil in man's heart. The majority of Buddhists remains ritualistic and animistic, and yet are responsive to the values of interiority, as expressed

in the current saying: "Hell is in the breast, paradise in the heart." For them, too, man remains the centre of the problem of salvation.⁹

According to Buddhist conception and the fundamental hope of Buddhists the ultimate meaning of human life resides neither in happiness, which is alienating and false, nor in a cosmological order (that is, in worlds similar to our own called the heavens), nor in the desire of reward, which is a worldly and selfish interest, nor in the domain of explicative knowledge, which is often an evasion, nor in a change induced by external activities, such as rites and yoga positions, nor in a gift received from without which is a substitution for human commitment, nor in a cosmic automatism which can only be alienating.

The realization of human life's total meaning is perceived as a definitive liberation from everything that "exists" and is "worldly"; as an opposition to everything that is conditioned; a purification of everything that is polluted; an immediate knowledge that frees man from all illusion.

Man, who is the centre of the quest and its advancement, must make a fundamental, interior and existential choice in order to realize in his inmost depths that Transcendent (*lokuttara*) which is the only definitive liberation.

This objective, which is the fundamental value of Buddhism, conditions the meaning of the speculative categories and the language adopted in the Buddhist setting. That is why God, who is too often presented in "worldly" and anthropological categories, is not perceived as the Absolute and as the Goal of man's ultimate quest. Christ is seen as an "existent" who has not yet attained final liberation. Christian salvation is seen as a "worldly" and non-definitive stage and Christianity as an external religion that is worldly, materialistic, and so on.

III. THE PRESENTATION OF THE MESSAGE

Having analysed the problem of language and sought the components of a solution, we indicate in broad outline the content and method of a kerygma which can be addressed to Buddhists, so that they may grasp the validity of the Christian message, and have the opportunity to recognize that they are summoned—and therefore are free—to make a personal choice which can lead them to a self-fulfilment in line with their own interior endeavour.

This presentation can also help Christians express their witness in a Buddhist setting, to manifest in a knowledgeable way the hope they carry within them, and to accept and purify within themselves a religious growth that seems harmonious with their cultural traditions.

And finally, this brief survey, which is necessarily limited and defective, can provide a new viewpoint and a new starting point for a

more detailed presentation of Christianity to Buddhists, and for a catechesis, as well, addressed to Christians. It is in this direction that I would sometime like to pursue my own research and reflection.

In order to present the content of the kerygma in a Buddhist perspective I shall start with man, his conscientization and his search for salvation, having as my aim a listening to the summons of Christ, who "reveals" to us the Ultimate Goal, which Christians call God, and who invites us to enter into the experience of this definitive liberation with him. For each of these points I shall indicate the lines of presentation; then I shall explain the "why" of this approach; and finally I take note of certain questions which still remain.

1. Starting with Man's Search

a) Man, that is to say, each one of us, acquires an experience of misery, limitation, impermanence, imperfection and evil. Around us, in world and society, injustice, egoism, slavery and misery prevail. In what we find surrounding us there can be no true refuge; there is no total and authentic liberation. Likewise, each one of us is affected by misery; the experience of suffering touches every man through illness, old age, death. But this misery lies within us, as our dissatisfaction and the impermanence of our feelings and of our joys make clear. It touches our very existence, which is transitory and also incapable of being a definitive refuge.¹⁰

The roots of this misery are not simply external to us; they lie mainly within us, in an attachment which is alienating for us and our experiences, in a blind and never satisfied concupiscence, in a disquieting aversion to many things and persons, in a laziness and an indecision which prevent us from seeing the path of liberation and following it. It is because of these deep roots of evil that there is so much misery in the world and in ourselves, despite changes in socio-political and religious structures and despite programmes of betterment and the good will of men.¹¹

And yet, deep down each one of us feels that it should be possible to achieve true liberation and that an escape must be within our reach. Since the root of misery is within us, the beginning of liberation must also be within us. We must therefore seek the path and the means by which it can be attained.¹²

Our good will alone does not suffice to achieve this liberation.¹³ Because of our imperfection and blindness, we need a guide, a master, who shows us the path and also points out the final goal and the means that are equal to this individual and social transformation. All peoples have had spiritual men; these have testified that this liberation is possible and realizable. Those who followed their teaching have undoubtedly progressed in goodness and have attained salvation. But

although many men affirm that they have a master, fundamentally they do not take the trouble to understand his teaching or to follow his example; they are content to belong to a religion or to follow an easy religious practice, without wishing to change their hearts. This does not suffice.

Today, because of our means of communication and because of cultural changes—and especially because of new problems—every man must choose his master anew in order to accomplish this liberating journey. The Buddha, whom we all admire and honour, was a great master. He helped and continues to help countless people to avoid evil, to do good, to purify their hearts. Still respecting our cultural traditions and in continuity with the religious experience of our fathers and our spiritual masters, someone presents himself to us today with the aim of fulfilling (and not destroying) all these. He is Jesus the Christ. If we wish to know what is our goal, if we wish to opt for what is transcendent, to advance towards what is immortal and to perfect liberation, if we wish to gain the experience of this onward liberation, we must know him and listen to him.

b) The presentation indicated here proposes to start with man in order to respect and build upon the spiritual development of our Buddhist brethren, who themselves start with man, discover in him the roots of evil and recognize that liberation is possible for him only by eliminating passions, transcending ethical practices, opting for the Absolute, aiming at the Goal with pure intention, and progressing in the interior life. We must therefore begin by respecting the fundamental hope of Buddhists and their basic design about the ultimate meaning of human life.

Some will object that such a goal and such a method are neither admitted nor followed by the majority of Buddhists. Even if we were to accept this, it must be acknowledged that through this approach one can stir up a spiritual tension and help men to follow an interior path by rising above a vague kind of salvation sought only by external means.

We do not start with God, because he is not the first experience and especially because such an approach would be interpreted negatively in Buddhist tradition.¹⁴ We do not speak of original sin, because the Buddhist seeks the origin of evil within himself and other men; to seek it elsewhere would be to avoid personal commitment.¹⁵

c) The questions raised with regard to the presentation proposed here are many. One may ask whether it is opportune to invoke the memory of the Buddha, either as a witness to the possibility of salvation or as a guide. One can undoubtedly use the Buddhist message

in its bearing upon spiritual development but would it not also be wise to point out at the same time its limitations or ambiguities?

Every people has had its own path to salvation. This reminds us of the kerygmata to the Gentiles used in the Acts of the Apostles. Yet we may ask ourselves how we should present the here and now in which a choice must be made before Christ. Does it suffice to remind our listeners of the social changes which permit of a choice, or to create problems new to them, which would find their ideal solution in Christ? Should we indicate that this is the propitious time willed by God—which would bring us back to the impasse that we are seeking to avoid? Should we emphasize the apologetic factors in favour of Christ? Or allow the option for Christ to remain on the same plane as the option for the Buddha?

2. Christ's Summons

a) In the search for a definitive liberation Christ is our guide by his example and teaching. He always showed himself the man perfectly cleansed of all passions, the perfectly awakened and liberated man. His life is characterized by this perfect freedom from his first moment on earth to his death. God though he is, he chose detachment and poverty (Phil 2), and in the end gave up his life with total detachment (Mt 26, 39). He always rejected pleasure and power, even when the crowds wished to make him king (Jn 6, 15).

Christ did not find his path and his wisdom in the school of the masters from his earliest childhood. He was able to hold discussions with them (Lk 2, 41 sq.), and his fellow countrymen were full of admiration for his teaching which he had not learned (Lk 4, 16 sq.; Mt 13, 53 sq.).

He kept a happy mean: he was willing to eat and drink at meals with others, which drew upon him the criticisms of his enemies.

He was free in regard to the Law, in particular that of the Sabbath, which was considered the most important (Lk 6). He was free in regard to rites and customs by indicating the primacy of interiority (Lk 11, 37 sq.). He transcended every form of egoistic and worldly ethic and proclaimed the true beatitudes of human action (Mt 5).

Christ was always turned towards the Absolute; he always opted in the line of the Absolute. His intention and conduct were perfectly pure, which shows how much he was in a state of perfect liberation, in the unconditioned state. (Here the theme of God's will and of his unity with the Father).

In this freedom Christ was completely devoted to others. Hence, he understood the needs and the aspirations of men. He showed them

the path of liberation. He manifested his loving kindness and mercy through the miracles which he performed on their behalf.

Although he was perfectly free, illumined, inwardly enlightened, and although he did not have to achieve the immortal and unconditioned goal which was already in his possession, Christ shared our human existence with its needs and difficulties.

The culmination of this spiritual experience of Christ among us was his death and resurrection. In death he manifested his freedom in the face of evil, his complete detachment even with regard to his own life, his irrevocable option for the Transcendent, his total gift to others. The resurrection is not a new worldly existence but the sign for us of his perfect victory over evil, over human passions and the world. It is the sign of liberation wholly fulfilled in relation to our bodily chains, the manifestation that he is in the Unconditioned.

Christ is the liberator of men, the one who points to liberation and leads men to it through his word and example. He shows us how good and evil are in man's heart, how the Kingdom of God is within us. Kindness and mercy are the fundamental virtues. This gratuitous love for others is not only a means of purification but also of limitless interior progress. Christ is our guide towards the Absolute, towards perfect liberation; he reveals it to us and above all he shows us how we must act in order to realize it within ourselves.

In order to follow the path which he walked and to test the value and validity of his message, we must, above all, put ourselves in his hands and allow ourselves to be guided by him.¹⁶

b) We present Christ before speaking of God because of the vision and the experience of Buddhists, who seek a guide in the realization of definitive liberation. It is through Christ that God will be discovered as man's fulfilment.

Christ is presented as a guide and in a global fashion. Our aim is not to speak of Christ's incarnation and infancy, for this would divert attention from the essential points, essential, that is, because of their resemblance to the Buddha's life. The New Testament kerygmata do not speak of them either; Christ is mainly shown in terms of what he can be for us. This purpose of our exposition should be explained. The miracles must be presented as a sign of Christ's effective and gratuitous love of the poor and the unfortunate; and indeed this does point up the Christian originality of the miracle as such, for Buddhists consider the miracle to be within the power of every spiritual man. In speaking of Christ's death we might indicate how the *Jataka* appreciates the greatness of sacrificing one's life, even to the point of martyrdom, for the good of others.¹⁷

c) Questions fairly important to our presentation of Christ remain to be solved. We must ask ourselves, above all, how we can express the originality and oneness of Christ; in other words, how we can give our listeners a glimpse of Christ's divinity. For Buddhists the comparison with the Buddha is spontaneous. Would it suffice to arouse the same sympathy, the same trust in Christ, as they entertain for the Buddha?

Christ is not only a guide to the realization of salvation; he is also the cause of salvation. Should we teach this from the start, and how can we do this in a way that is comprehensible to people who recognize personal responsibility and the necessity of bearing the consequences of their own actions?

Should we speak of Christ's presence and continuing activity in our initial presentation? Undoubtedly these elements are important in the biblical kerygma and they appear to be essential to every kerygma. It is Christ who calls man; it is to him that one must be converted; it is he whom we must accept in our lives.

And finally the problem of language cannot be avoided. And to use an example from music, perhaps the Buddhist, who is used to an interpretation on a double keyboard, should be reminded of this.

3. God as Our Perfect Liberation

a) Christ shows us the goal of our spiritual journey and also points out the path by which it can be attained. He calls this goal God, Lord. For Christ and for those who accept his message, God is our perfect liberation (*vimutti*), the extinction and absence of all misery (*nirodhā*), the transcendent or that which is wholly different from the worldly (*lokuttara*), the truth (*sacca*), the immortal (*amatta*), the perfect cleansing of every passion (*visuddhi*), Protection (*tāna*), the supreme Goal (*parâyāna*), the Refuge (*sarana*), the Unconditioned or Absolute (*asakhata*), the inexpressible (*anidassana*) . . . All these titles have been given by our masters to indicate the final realization of the human enterprise. Man cannot perfectly name this realized liberation. Those who have experienced it can, however, illumine our quest. All religions and all their founders and saints shed light upon this final goal. Obviously what is important for us is not to be found with a perfect notion of this Absolute, which indeed is a notion we cannot gain. The important thing is to go forward in order to attain it and to make a choice in order to tend towards it through our intention and our actions.¹⁸

Christ has also spoken to us of God, our final liberation and total purification, in another way. He calls him our Father in whom we must trust (Lk 11 and 12). This God is not simply at the end of the

path; he is within us and we can reach him at this very moment and accept him at this very moment. (Lk 27, 20).

Christ has a unique relationship with the Father. He has a unique experience of him. He is the manifestation of this Transcendent who is also the Father. He is in him. He fully realizes God in his own person.¹⁹

That is why Christ can speak of what is inexpressible for man. He reveals God to us not in order to bind us to theories and notions that would turn us from a true search for definitive salvation. He speaks to us of God in order to change our hearts, to detach us from ourselves and from all "worldly" things, to show our path clearly to us and to strengthen our courage in this growing experience.

The revelation that the Absolute is our Father is the mystery hidden for centuries and generations and it is revealed in and by Christ. He who accepts Christ will be able to gain a perfect experience of it together with him, and therefore to realize even in this life the liberation that every man has always sought (Col 1, 24 sq.; Lk 10, 21-22).²⁰

b) We present God to the Buddhists as final liberation, which is equivalent not only to the category of *nirvāṇa* but also and mainly to the whole existential search for the absolute in doctrine and life. This Absolute is not so much a concept as the ultimate reality (*dhamma*) which influences the whole of man's activity and desire for salvation. At this time we do not present God as the creator, which would in any case be rejected as an ingredient of a false and alienating cosmogony; nor as Providence, because he would then be seen as one of many local protectors who are acknowledged as having a positive or negative "worldly" influence and at the same time a status inferior to that of man in the order of salvation.

In the language we adopt here we must be careful how we use mental categories that are understood in an animistic, impermanent and worldly sense, for example, words that signify God to be only a divine existent, or again, words like paradise, heaven and so on.

Nor should we use the *dhamma* category to designate God, as some well-meaning Buddhists have suggested. It might be useful in a notional and philosophical approach to God but we must not forget the ambiguities of immanentism.²¹

In presenting God as final liberation, as Absolute and Transcendent, we have made a transition to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the Father. Thereby we offer our listeners a glimpse of Christ's own divinity.

This search for God and the experience of him are realized to a greater extent by the paths of God's profundity and man's depth.²²

3) Again, questions arise concerning this presentation of God. God is certainly the ultimate goal of our existence; he is our salvation. But how can we present God as the source of this same salvation, as he who summons and he who gives?

And also to what extent can we stress the continuity between the Buddhist Absolute and the God of Jesus Christ? To what extent should we emphasize the originality of the Christian concept of God?

What use can we make of the biblical texts? Our problematic has required us to pose the question of language from the Buddhist viewpoint: popular-performative language and existential and religious language. The message, while putting the listener in a "state of crisis" and in a situation of choosing, must take into account not only the moment of grace but also what the listener is capable of tolerating and understanding.²³

God as our liberation has perhaps been insufficiently stressed.²⁴

4. The Path of Our Liberation

a) If we wish to understand the true wretchedness of the world and of our human condition, if we desire to know its cause in order to eliminate it in its deepest roots, if we wish to realize our authentic liberation and attain to the Unconditioned, we must convert ourselves, change our hearts, reorient our definitive aim and direct our intentionality in its depths towards the Transcendent.²⁵

It is not simply a question of doing good and avoiding evil. Every man believes that he acts in this way, even when he is still completely attached to himself and to his worldly interests. Thus, the importance of transcending ethical systems.

It is necessary to progress beyond justice, which is satisfied with the law and remains external because it treats the symptoms without eliminating the cause of evil. Thus, the importance of transcending legalism.²⁶ We have to cleanse our hearts of passions which blind and enslave us; we have to purify our intention.

The precondition of such a conversion is man's readiness to follow Christ, who alone can be the perfect guide in this journey. It is he whom we must follow so that we may share his experience, strive towards his own liberation, and attain to the same victory, until that day when we shall understand everything directly (1 Cor 13, 12).

By following his example we shall attain a definitive awakening and the state of transcendence.

We do not gradually free ourselves of Christ. Because he does not do away with our personal effort, he does not take our place and he does not obscure our light. The more we advance, the more clearly

we discover that we are in him to the point of being one in him. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me".

The "following of Christ" demands we renounce everything that is evil, to the point of self-renunciation, which signifies progressive purification and an orientation towards that which constitutes our unique liberation. In this spirit the practice of precepts (*sila* for the commandments) is both a condition and a means. Then we have to renounce ourselves (Mt 16, 24-26). This renunciation is contrary to the views of the world and to egoism. The beatitudes are its most widely known formulation (Mt 5, 1-12).²⁷

But the main path of Christian perfection is charity. Christ taught it is the soul and the sign, the means and the end of the disciple's spiritual growth. The Christian's spiritual progress is accomplished and measured by charity, which is both exterior and interior and knows no limits to its realization.

Charity eliminates the inner passions. It makes us renounce ourselves; it assists our own transformation and that of others; it can improve men and societies; it progressively realizes in us the final liberation which will be illumination, perfect understanding and at the same time unconditioned and unlimited love.

That is why God, our liberation, is called love (1 Jn 4, 8; 16); that is why Christ is the very manifestation of love; that is why in our liberation faith and hope will disappear. Only charity will remain (1 Cor 13, 8; 13). Obviously we are not speaking of an interested, "worldly" love; and yet it must be manifested and incarnated in our present existence.

In this conversion and spiritual development we must not confine our search to our own liberation; we must help others. Salvation is not only interior but also exterior; it lies not only in the future but also in the present.

b) Our reasons for these steps towards conversion are fairly easy to see. They continue the Buddhist endeavour and bring depth to Christian commitment from the start.

Conversion must transcend ethics, if this is understood as a change of behaviour based on selfish reasons. It must also transcend legalism or the external fulfilment of the law. In this we are following the innermost march of Buddhism and making such interiority a strict requirement.

Christian conversion is the acceptance of Christ in our lives. Trust in the "Founder" follows the Buddhist line, but the progressive integration of Christ in us follows a direction that is, at the very least, contrary to Buddhist doctrine. Because of this viewpoint baptism can

be presented, on our side, as the definitive commitment to follow Christ and, on Christ's side, as his acceptance of us.

Renunciation is essential to Buddhism and to Christianity. But the heart of Christian conduct is charity which in the Gospel message and in Christian conduct plays the same central role as meditation (*bhâvanâ*) in Buddhism. Furthermore, the novelty of Christian charity fits in with the search now going on in the Buddhist renewal movement, which feels a need for altruism and its motivations, ourselves not forgetting that kindness and mercy are Buddhist virtues laid down as supreme qualities for the saint of Mahâyâna Buddhism. Finally, through charity conversion is bound to take on a social dimension and here it becomes easier for them to understand the meaning of the Church.

c) We may ask ourselves, however, whether this kind of spiritual development is not too elitist for Buddhists as a whole, who remain at the level of morality and ethical practices. Finally, should we not give a clearer presentation of God's personal love and of our personal love for him? God's personal nature remains essential to the Christian message and is a major stumbling block for Buddhists. How can we avoid an impasse?

Conversion is a free option by man but it is also a gift of God; this twofold dimension wholly dominates Christian life. Should we indicate it in our first kerygma? In what way? Can we start with the human experience of our inability to realize all the good that we propose to do, as St. Paul does in his argument to the Romans?

IV. THE USE OF THIS KERYGMA

The design of the kerygma provided can serve for an initial proclamation of the Christian message to Buddhists. It can equally serve as a general explanation of Christianity to Buddhists. It can be used as well as a means of evangelizing Christians living in a Buddhist environment and, finally, as a new catechetical approach.

This presentation in its broad outline, however, is primarily conceived as a first proclamation of the Christian message to Buddhists. Obviously we do not have here at hand a text book to be repeated or to be simply translated as such, but a preliminary reflection to be examined and reviewed by people who work in the same setting and are conversant with Buddhism and kerygmatic theology. Of course, some points have to be revised and modified, and the skeleton must be built up with skin and muscles. However, in any first presentation we should not aim at transmitting the whole content of the Christian message. We are dealing with an initial summons which can manifest the "credibility" of the message and contribute to an encounter with

Christ, an act of trust in him, a conversion. All this must subsequently be deepened and completed in a catechumenal catechesis.²⁸

In today's world and in a climate of dialogue—which must be neither a mode nor a means directed to conversion but a requirement and an essential dimension of pastoral work—it is important to give Buddhists the possibility of knowing what Christianity and its religious ideal really are. The present plan can help towards a more comprehensible formulation. This presentation does not aim at conversion, even if every authentic message does challenge the person who understands it. The broad outline of the Christian message and practice can be given, but in each instance only in so far as Buddhists are capable of understanding it and in a way they may understand it. This presentation should differ from a catechesis, because the latter presupposes faith and the acceptance of Christ. From the start we should stress the problem of language, not only within the perspective of the Buddhist interpretation (language and popular interpretation, language and spiritual interpretation) but also within the cultural perspective. It is always difficult to express a message to a person or a group of another culture and religion, despite the use of the same language. The Christian will have difficulties understanding the Buddhist message and a Buddhist will always have difficulties understanding the Christian message. The same words and categories are understood differently according to one's outlook and basic option. Both sides must be aware of this and try to overcome their prejudices and lack of understanding.

Christians living in a Buddhist environment need to be summoned by the keygma in order to renew their faith or even to awaken it. A presentation similar to the one shown here can help them to come to a new accommodation, to understand their own faith in new categories and according to the prevalent values, to rise above criticisms that bring about a crisis in their faith, and to be prepared to witness to Christ in a way their Buddhist fellow-citizens can understand. In this context certain harmonizing aspects should be stressed. Then it will be possible to emphasize the centrality of Christ and God's personal character. It will be necessary to draw attention to interiority as essential, without which any religious practice is lifeless. Faith and the gift of God should not free us from the obligation of personal effort and progress. For the Christian spiritual progress (*bhâvanâ*) is mainly charity, in its interior and exterior fulfilment, encompassing the whole of our human existence.

In our search for a congruous catechesis we ask ourselves where we should begin and how we should proceed. The approach presented here is offered as one point of departure. But it will be necessary to integrate and deepen many other elements, keeping in mind the totality of the Christian message, the gradual development of persons

and communities (for example, catechumenal catechesis and catechesis of the baptized), and also prevailing religious and cultural categories and values. Dissimilarities between Buddhism and Christianity must be underscored, as well as their common features. Such an project requires time and experience.

V. THE RECIPIENT OF THIS KERYGMA

The Western reader is perhaps wondering why we are laying so much emphasis on the presentation of the kerygma to Buddhists according to Buddhist categories in a world advancing towards secularization.²⁹ The missionary, who is in daily contact with Buddhists, asks himself whether for his part his formulation of the kerygma ought not to be adapted more particularly to the religious man who lives out his Buddhism in a popular fashion closely linked to traditional animism. Therefore a fundamental question remains: should the kerygma in a Buddhist setting reach out to Buddhists who practise in accord with the message and design of the Buddha and are the spiritually elite? Or should it rather be directed to men of the popular religion, whose dimensions are both Buddhist and animistic? Or should it simply be addressed to people in general? To approach the same problem in another way: is the broad outline indicated above valid only for the Buddhist elite who live according to the Buddha's ideal or also for Buddhists who live more in accord with a ritualistic and animistic religion?

Some tend to embrace the hopes and values of canonical Buddhism in a closed fashion, thereby appearing to be more Buddhist than the Buddhists themselves. Undoubtedly canonical Buddhism has dimensions and values which approximate authentic Christianity, viz., the necessity of going beyond ritualism and moralism, an interiority, the importance of personal effort and of fundamental option, the duty of continuous growth, and the like. In all this Buddhism is to a greater extent an aid to spiritual development "in spirit and in truth."

Our harmonization with the Buddhist endeavour, however, is valid, more because of its propaedeutic value for the Christian experience. The true goals of Buddhism are often hidden deep beneath its animistic covering. The animistic experience must be also considered attentively; it can convey certain values at the level of religious models, myths and functions. In presenting the message we must bear this in mind. For example, when we speak of God in certain Thai environments, we can allude to the "Heavenly Father," whom men believe in and honour as the supreme divinity in whom ultimate blessedness is realized. And we can refer also to his providential care. These allusions must be made carefully, for animism differs according to human groupings and regions. Animistic beliefs are reinterpreted in turn by Buddhism and the liturgy, because rites and symbolisms

are more closely connected with the actual culture and tradition of a people.³⁰

To conclude, I must bring up again our fundamental principle of pastoral work. Ought we not take account in evangelization of man's religious and cultural systems, of his religious dimension, or rather of man in his totality and in the diverse manifestations of his whole life? Christ is primarily for man; he saves the whole of man; he provides the answer to man's fundamental quest, which orients and motivates his whole life. Yet man is structured by his culture and religion. That is why we have to take account of religious and cultural values, of categories and models that enable us to reach man in the very formulation of his ideal and hope. And yet man has a certain autonomy, even more so in this time of many changes. In today's climate the socio-political is taking on new dimensions, and personal options are becoming more possible, especially in the towns. New values are being perceived and sought. It is always to man that an answer must be given; it is man who must be summoned by the Good News; it is man in all his dimensions who must be renewed; and it is primarily to serve men that we are sent.

FOOTNOTES

¹ In the countries of Hinayāna Buddhism juridical and administrative freedom undoubtedly exists, and yet the people are not in a position to search or to make a religious choice. One may say that there is no cultural and psychological freedom.

From missionary experience in Laos it is clear that conversions have occurred in moments of radical crisis at the social, economic and religious levels. These crises have mainly affected the minority groups; for example, at the end of the last century before "the peace of French colonization"; in the 50's, after the Japanese and Viet war, in the province of Xieng Khouang; in the middle of the 60's among the refugees of the Nam Ta province; in the 70's among the Ta Hoi refugees of the South. In these moments of crisis it is not the kerygma which draws these groups to Christianity but rather the witness of the missionaries' devotion and presence. At the same time there exists an impossibility of practising the traditional religion which involves great expense, while the need exists of practising some religion all the same. In these moments of crisis missionaries must be present without concerns of self-interest but with a devotion suggested by the charity of Christ.

In the missionary effort as a whole one must not be concerned with conversions as a form of increase of numbers, but rather one must discover and live Christ in the new situation and help non-Christians to follow Christ consciously or unconsciously. This "following" of Christ can involve different stages and forms, a fact which has perhaps been forgotten in the past.

² Foreign missionaries and their native counterparts always encounter difficulties in adapting themselves to the local cultural and religious context by reason of their close links with the West. Even when they have the highest of principles, as many young missionaries do, they remain attached to the West and turned towards it. We must at least be aware of this in order to be less harsh towards those who have preceded us and to avoid making the same fundamental mistakes.

³ Some people believe that the message is unintelligible because of the incorrect vocabulary and that the solution lies in the choice of new, unambiguous and better adapted terms. Undoubtedly some words must be corrected and changed. But to envisage the problem only at this level would be to remain at the surface of human communication. Every word — like every human gesture and religious rite—is understood inwardly and related to the categories of thought and expression, the general vision, the values and personal and social experience of the hearer. It is because of all these that the message is wrongly understood by Buddhists.

⁴ *Kami*, or the spirits, for the Japanese; *nât* for the Burmese; *neak* for the Khmers; *phi* for the Thai-Laotians.

⁵ An article on the notion of Absolute and man's attitude in the face of this Absolute is being prepared for the review *Eglise et Théologie* of Saint Paul's University, Ottawa.

⁶ E. Pezet, "Message du Buddha et Message Biblique," in *Eglise Vivante*, XXIII, 1971, 403. This article deserves to be read attentively; as also his other article: "Avec les bouddhistes de Thaïlande, Dimensions du dialogue et de la rencontre," *Spiritus*, 53, 1973, 231-246.

⁷ K. Schafer, "Jesus' Indirect Discourse and Practice Concerning God," *Concilium*, February 1972.

⁸ See complementary details and perspectives in the article by A. Fernando, O.M.I., "Salvation and Liberation in Buddhism," *Lumen Vitae*, 1972 (Vol. XXVII), No. 2, 304-318.

⁹ In Buddhism, as in other religions, the authentic ideal must be sought among the "saints": those who seek and achieve perfection "in spirit and in truth." There is also the mass of the faithful. In the Buddhism of our mission lands several groups or tendencies can be distinguished:

—The group of those who seek *renewal by returning to the sources* (scriptures, the value given to meditation, elimination of animism and superstition...); these are recruited from among the religious, the young people of the Buddhist associations and the intellectuals.

—A group consisting mainly of politicians and nationalists refers to Buddhism as a *cultural dimension and a means of national unity*.

—A small group is concerned with a kind of *adaptation of Buddhism to the new social requirements* and stresses the altruistic aspects of the Master's teaching.

—The majority, mainly peasants, practises a religion which is a *satisfactory symbiosis of Buddhism and animism*. It nonetheless remains responsive to certain aspects of the spiritual endeavour.

—Finally, there is a group, consisting of students and immigrants in the towns, which tends *towards secularization* and takes no further interest in religion. Its opposition to the past is aimed at cultural and social structures rather than at religious institutions, for example, the concept and exercise of authority.

Within this spectrum I believe that we must take into account three major tendencies or dimensions: the Buddhist dimension, the social dimension and the animistic dimension.

This essay in evangelization takes account mainly of the Buddhist dimension and looks not only to the spiritual elite but also to the popular majority which is inspired by and holds on to the example of this spiritual elite. I believe that the procedure proposed here is valid as well for the secularized people of our mission lands, mainly because Buddhism has a secularized approach which places man and his problems at the centre, and also because the secularized folk of these lands retain their basic traditions. (It has been said

that Mao incarnated and fulfilled the role of Confucius for modern times and for a socialist society and it was for this reason that the ancient Master of Chinese wisdom was ostracized). At the end of this article we have added some remarks which take account of the social and animistic directions.

¹⁰ In the awareness of misery under all its aspects there can be three stages: cosmic misery, social misery and personal misery. Buddhism stresses personal misery but in the social awakening which is beginning to take place it is becoming aware of the social dimension.

¹¹ In Buddhism the causality of evil is explained at the personal level. According to popular beliefs cosmic evil is attributed to the action of the spirits (*phi*) and social evil is explained by the law of *karma* (every person suffers the effects of his previous existences). While it is useful to identify causality at this triple level: cosmic, social and personal, individual responsibility remains fundamental. Egoism and the other passions are the cause of social evil and therefore individuals are often responsible for it. In this perspective the doctrine of original sin and of *karma* can mutually illuminate and correct each other.

¹² True liberation must not be conceived solely in "extramundane" (*lokuttara*) categories, as Buddhist tradition tends to do. Present liberation and social justice must be stressed as necessary, valid but insufficient in themselves.

¹³ In our situation personal and collective efforts are important and necessary and yet they do not seem sufficient to realize this liberation in all its dimensions.

¹⁴ For animistic Buddhists the experience of the "divine" as perceived through the "spirits" remains fundamental. And yet I believe that we ought not to start with this approach, especially because this experience is mainly associated with fear and the threat of these "beings". There is a growing disaffection about their cult and a secularizing reinterpretation of myths. Finally, the Buddhist renewal and the new society are making these believers increasingly responsive to man, his full development and his liberation.

¹⁵ Original sin can be understood in its social dimension as the mutual interaction of human actions, not only in the past but also in the present.

¹⁶ Christ is not an ideal or a doctrine but an historical person whom we must discover in order to be summoned. The Buddhist, on the one hand, does not attach importance to the historical dimension; on the other, he seeks to justify his traditions and doctrines in reference to the Buddha.

¹⁷ The *Bodhisatta Sibi*, for example, sacrificed himself and gave his own flesh to save the dove from the vulture (*Jâtaka* 499); and the *Bodhisatta*, in the form of a deer, gave his life to save the other animals from the deluge (*Jâtaka* 12). Cf. De Lubac, *Aspects du Bouddhisme*, Seuil, 1950, ch. 1.

¹⁸ The *nirvâna* as Absolute cannot be known or described by those or for those who have not experienced it. This attitude reveals a sense of "mystery." It is so "other" and "great" that it cannot be given a name. Those who have experienced it cannot disclose it to others but they can point out the path that leads to it. This "mystery" can nonetheless be attained and known through personal effort.

¹⁹ This unique relationship of Christ with God indicates his divinity. He is the summit of Revelation because he is God and Man.

²⁰ God as Otherness is not easily perceived in the Buddhist tradition of the Absolute, and yet this teaching is at the heart of Christianity.

²¹ Buddhadasa, the Thai bonze and philosopher, proposes this equivalence in several of his works. Cf. *Christianity and Buddhism*, Bangkok, Sinclair

Thompson Memorial Lecture, 1967. From the Christian viewpoint, cf. Lynn A. De Silva, *Why Believe in God? The Christian Answer in Relation to Buddhism*, Colombo, 1970.

22 Cf. Y. Raguin, *La profondeur de Dieu*, Desclée, 1973. "This depth of God will help many Asian Christians to live their faith more truly in the context and in the perspectives of their own cultures."

23 On the question of language several books by Buddhâdasa may be consulted. Cf. especially *The Two Languages*, Bangkok, 1966. Cf. also E. Pezet, "Langage," in *Bouddhisme et Présence chrétienne*, Vientiane, 15-20.

24 God as our liberation can be considered at the initial, progressive and final points. He liberates us from ignorance through his revelation, and finally by his vision. He liberates us from passions and cosmic powers. Through his grace he liberates all the positive potentialities in us for the good of others.

25 In Lao-Thai "conversion" is translated by *a turning round of the heart*, an expression used by Buddhists. But in the Buddhist tradition this is expressed by right or pure intention (*visuddhi cetanâ*), which indicates the interior dimension of valid conduct. This pure intention finds its definitive efficacy in the wish (*panidhi* or *panidhâna*) to attain illumination (*bodhicitta*).

26 According to the Buddhists the mere fulfilment of the law or of precepts does not lead to definitive salvation but confines the individual to a human-worldly situation. For Christians the most scrupulous practice of the Law does not save: cf. Christ's attitude to the Pharisees who observed the Law and Paul's doctrine to the Romans on the inefficacy of the Law. For Buddhists it is the logic of *karma* which must be transcended and for Christians it is the logic of the law. Cf. Swearer, *A Theology of Dialogue*, Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lecture, Bangkok, 1973, 40-51.

27 The Christian's journey forwards can be known by three stages, dear to the Buddhist categories: the precepts, the beatitudes and contemplation. The heart and fruit of this journey is charity in its twofold dimension.

28 The great missionaries concerned with Asian adaptation in the 17th century had conceived of stages in evangelization, codified in the *catechismus* which readopted the traditional religious procedure, and in *doctrina* which provided the heart of the Christian message.

29 It is especially in an environment affected by secularization, even of the Asian type (as I have already indicated above in footnote 8), that certain aspects must be underlined:

- The analysis of human misery and its causes fits in with the contemporary process of "conscientization."

- The theme of liberation must be developed in all its aspects, not forgetting the depth indicated by Buddhism. This Buddhist depth can make a contribution to the thought and practice now being pursued in Latin America.

- The personal dimension is in process of being discovered and appreciated, as well as the communal dimension.

- Christianity must play a role of incarnation in relation to Buddhism's spiritual quest; liberation must be total.

- God is the source of liberation at all levels, as shown by the account of creation (cosmic liberation), the history of the Jewish people (social liberation), and the work of Christ (interior liberation).

- We must help Buddhists to overcome their fear of anything of a religious-cosmic nature (*phi*, the spirits) and of a political nature. So different from the Buddhist tendency, our social commitment flows from our Christian life.

—We must be conscious of the practical ambiguities they have, which stem from our association with certain persons or institutions.

³⁰ The broad outline of a kerygma for animistic Buddhists is the same as the one indicated in this article, and for the reasons already stated. Here we can indicate certain points capable of being nuanced and adapted in a kerygma addressed to them:

—The fundamental attitude to the "spirits" points up a relation with what transcends us; but it is also the cause of misery. God frees us from this domination and fear.

—God is apprehended and sought in myths and worship; in these he is even called "the Heavenly Father."

—In the beginning God directly cared for men and, at present, he cares for them through the intermediary of the "spirits" (e.g., providence).

—Creation, understood as the divine intervention whereby the cosmos is organized and man assisted, is known to them (e.g., in the myths of *Khoun Borom* and *Nithan*).

—In their worship and prayers, and even with regard to the Buddha, they are responsive to the personal-relational aspect of God and man.

—In animism the personal guide is lacking, yet myths can be recalled: e.g., that of the Heavenly Father who sent his Son, *Tiao Khoun Bulom*, to found the Laotian Kingdom.

—The sharing and communication of merits can help men to understand Christ's salvific work.

—The origin of man and his relationship with the divinity are known, as well as the concept of social sin.

All these aspects of belief and religious experience have been developed in my book: *Rites et Cérémonies en milieu bouddhiste Lao*, Univ. Gregoriana, Rome, 1972.

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