Introduction

Christianity

Writing in the second half of the twentieth century, Catholic theologian Hans Küng notes that the global situation of religion has changed. He writes, "For the first time in world history, it is impossible today for any one religion to exist in splendid isolation and ignore others."[1] While Küng notes that Christianity has a long history of interacting with other religions, it has rarely done so in the spirit of dialogue and mutuality. The Second Vatican Council offers new insights into how Christianity, and Catholicism in particular, might proceed in such dialogues. In the declaration on religious liberty, the council teaches that the integral dignity of the human person entails that each person ought to be free from coercion in religious practice.[2] While the concept of the dignity of the person is most often applied in terms of bioethics,[3] the council sees here its importance in terms of religious freedom. This human dignity is central to how the council articulates the relationship of Catholic Christianity to other religions.

The Second Vatican Council teaches that because of a shared human dignity, "there is no basis…for any discrimination between individual and individual, or between people and people" including discrimination based upon various religious beliefs and practices.[4] Indeed, the Catholic Church teaches that there is much that is "true and holy" in other religions from which one might learn.[5] Such a dialogical engagement reflects the historical development of Christianity, and what the blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman described in the nineteenth century as the development of doctrine. While even a cursory history of Christianity is beyond the scope of this short introduction, it is important to highlight

some of the key historical moments in the development of Christian thought and practice in order to better understand the type of dialogue taking place in this book.

Christianity has its historical roots in Palestinian Judaism in the first century of the Common Era, when the Roman Empire was at its zenith. The followers of Jesus of Nazareth were Galilean Jews (Galilee was a northern, backwoods region of Palestine) and for some time Christianity was indistinguishable from the other Jewish subgroups also present at the time.[6] The historical relationship between Christianity and Judaism is so essential and formative to both Christian self-understanding and the understanding of dialogue between religious traditions for Christianity, that it may be viewed as paradigmatic in the dialogue Christians have with other members of other religions as well.[7] Central to the historical connection between Christianity and Judaism was an apocalyptic understanding of Jesus and God's kingdom. The early Christians maintained the Jewish understanding of Jesus as Messiah and that this would entail an end to history and the current world within a generation in favor of the manifestation of God's eternal kingdom. Once this expectation was not fulfilled, Christians had to accommodate other views of the relationship between history and Jesus. While the apocalyptic view of judgment and recreation never vanished, it was now reconceived as Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire and encountered Greek thought.[8]

The dialogue with and adoption of Greek metaphysics and modes of thought would transform Christianity's self-understanding and the development of its religious categories. Christ as the *logos* was no longer understood solely in terms of Jewish wisdom categories but was now conceptualized in Greek categories of metaphysics and eternity. This is reflected in the Christological debates surrounding the Council of Nicaea (325 CE). St. Athanasius argued for what would become the orthodox understanding of Jesus Christ as having two natures, fully human

and fully divine, and yet being one person. This was largely in disputes with Arius, a priest and presbyter who maintained that Christ was subordinate to the Father and was not fully divine as was the Father of the Trinity. The first ecumenical council decided in favor of Athanasius's *homoousion* formulation that Christ is "one in being" with the Father and therefore fully equal to the Father. These categories were drawn almost entirely from Greek metaphysics and so it was in dialogue with the central concepts in contemporary intellectual thought that Christianity came to articulate its own self-understanding and core doctrines.

As Christianity gained social and political prominence under Constantine (313 CE) and Theodosius (380 CE) the mode by which Christianity engaged other cultures, views, and religions moved from dialogue to conquest. This led to the first great division in Christianity in 1054 CE, where the disputes over the role of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity[9] were central alongside the more secular concerns over the political roles of Rome and Constantinople respectively. The confluence of imperial political concerns with religious ideas played out in the relationship between Christianity and other religions for centuries. Most famously, this was seen in the violent conflicts of the Crusades. The reasons for the crusades were both economic and spiritual. Economically, the development of farming techniques led to increases in food production, which enabled population growth and the need for geographic expansion. The geographic expansion was understood to necessitate political expansion through military conquest. Spiritually, reforms in the eleventh century fostered a religious zeal among medieval Christianity's adherents and these people regarded the land of biblical literature in particular esteem. This reverence led to the conclusion that the geographic region of historical Palestine must come under the political control of Christianity. The first crusade (1096–1099 CE) attempted to reunite Eastern and Western Christianity to no avail. The final

three crusades, occurring between 1147 and 1204 CE were mostly deemed unsuccessful endeavors and did nothing to enable unity within Christianity or a dialogue between Christianity and other faiths and cultures.

After the medieval era, conquest continued as the primary mode of Christianity's engagement with others and was brought together with Europe's colonial ambitions in what would become the American continents. Merging with colonial ambition for wealth and conquest, Christianity was often a willing participant in the forced conversion, and often the slaughter, of indigenous populations in North and South America.[10] The colonial and violent approaches between European Christianity with cultures and religions external to it mirrored the dialogical tensions internal to Europe and which resulted in the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. When an Augustinian monk named Martin Luther first nailed the famed 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany, he intended to spur conversation within Catholicism. The theses were written in Latin and, therefore, were intended for academic debate rather than public consumption. However, in the vitriolic responses both from Catholicism and from Luther, the Protestant Reformation was born.

From the Reformation's emphasis on the individual subject, choice, and freedom came the eventual development of the European Enlightenment. This intellectual and cultural movement emphasized individual rationality and the importance of the moral subject. The philosophical luminary of the Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant, argued that enlightenment was coming out from underneath the self-imposed tutelage of allowing traditions and authorities to shape one's mind apart from the individual responsibility to grow in reason, knowledge, and moral obligation to one's fellow human. The response to the Enlightenment—also called modernity—from the Catholic Church was initially one of animosity. Pope Pius IX published "The Syllabus of Errors" in

the nineteenth century, condemning theses he thought to be modernizing. This response of condemnation was short lived and other Popes, such as Pope Leo XIII sought to engage the realities of the modern world, especially that of the worker and those in economic and social need. This approach of dialogue with others would come to typify some of the central motifs of the Second Vatican Council and exemplifies the dialogue of the early Church with its intellectual and cultural surroundings.

When Pope Saint John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council, he famously stated that it was time to open the windows of the Church and let in fresh air. In doing so, the Church opened up a meaningful dialogue with the modern world and sought to emphasize the unity of humanity in a spirit of understanding and charity. This is based upon the classical Christian understanding of the dignity of the human person. This book carries out this dialogue between a Catholic Christian scholar and a Buddhist scholar in the same spirit of respect, charity, and desire to learn from one another to enhance our understanding of each other and ourselves. Christianity has dialogued with Buddhism throughout the post-conciliar era. Thomas Merton learned much from Buddhist practice, and in particular Zen practice, in his own monastic life.[11] Protestant theologians have also been impacted by the study of Buddhism. Paul Knitter engages in a dialogue with Buddhist thought in a comparative effort that mirrors some of the themes addressed in this book.[12] However, each of these is the work of an individual author approaching the questions from a singular perspective: that of the Christian.

This book is unique in that it is a genuine dialogue. In bringing both a Buddhist scholar and a Catholic Christian scholar together in a comparative approach to questions central to each religion, we are able to learn from one another and also note the points of connection and those instances where each tradition offers something unique and different from the conversation partner. The

work is written in a style intended to be approachable for a non-specialist audience. You do not need to be an expert to read this book. Each chapter revolves around common points of comparison between the two traditions, and while sometimes these comparisons are questioned, they are intended to introduce the reader to both. When writing, we had primarily a Christian audience in mind, with the hopes of introducing Christians living in the Western world to Buddhist thought and practice via different entrance points from their own tradition. However, in this the book actually has a twofold aim. It introduces Christians to the history, thought, and spiritual practice of Buddhism, but it also functions to reacquaint Christians with their own tradition through descriptions that are historical, systematic, and instructive of Christian thought and practice. This book is aimed at a genuine dialogue between traditions from scholars within each of those traditions. We invite you, the reader, to join us in this conversation.

Buddhism

DNA evidence informs us that the subcontinent of South Asia was inhabited by two races of people; the Australoid and a branch of the Indo-Europeans. Although the migrant central Asian peoples developed advanced civilization along the Indus River, we know very little about their religious beliefs as their writing has not been deciphered and their civilization was eclipsed. The Indo-Europeans who called themselves "Aryans" being the cousins of the ancient Greeks, Italic tribes and other peoples of Europe shared not only a source language but gods, cosmology, and theological underpinnings. For example, Jupiter (Gr. Zeus-patar) in India is called Dyaus-pitri and Mt. Olympus is called Mt. Meru. The religion of the Aryans called "Vedic," is preserved in

some of the oldest religious books and some of the rituals, more than 4,000 years old, are still performed. Indo-European religious elements are also preserved in Buddhism.[13]

The world along the Gangetic plane was rapidly changing in the half millennium before the Current Era. The ancient Vedic religion of the early Aryans had been undergoing significant changes producing both a shift in orientation which can be identified as "Brahmanism" and the incorporation of new ideas clearly not Vedic in origin. In addition, iron technology was slowly spreading and advancing from the North-west across the land. Into this world was born Siddhartha Gautama Shakya the man who would later become the Buddha. The area where he lived was considered to be on the outskirts of civilization as it did not accept Brahmanism in full yet.[14] The advances in iron technology started to allow for the rapid clearing of the thick Gangetic jungle producing surpluses in agricultural goods and more advance weaponry. These in turn radically changed society. The world Siddhartha was born into had a declining old order and the rising new world. Various social, economic, and religious factors created an environment for considerable religious speculation producing a host of non-Vedic religions and philosophies. Most of these groups we know only from accounts given in ancient works. Sharing the yogic tradition of wandering seekers, only two of these groups survived. Buddhism is one of these two and the other is Jainism.

The Shakya clan claimed decent from the Sun god and occupied the land in the area now the border region between India and South-west Nepal. Their kingdom was a democratic republic similar to Athens or Rome. Siddhartha's father was Shuddhodana, his mother was Mahamaya and he was born into an illustrious family during the sixth or fifth century BCE. His cremated ashes were found by the British when they ruled India, but scholars debate the exact dates of his life. Although enjoying the protected

life and all the benefits that a noble family can provide, Siddhartha left home when he was 29 years old. He was moved by the full impact of the suffering of humanity which was unbeknownst to him in his protected world. For six years he practiced various yogic disciplines and intense asceticism. Arriving at awakening while sitting under a pipal tree his new status as a Fully Awakened One, i.e., Buddha, was acknowledge by the gods and people. He taught, assisted people out of compassion, and passed into final Nirvana at the age of eighty.

Gautama Buddha did not seem to think he was establishing a new religion but believed that his teachings were universal and timeless and that he was only reintroducing them to mankind. In addition to providing teachings, he established a four-fold assembly of followers consisting of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen. The inclusion of nuns was controversial in his day. His teachings are called the Middle Way (between asceticism and sensual overindulgence) and consists of texts on doctrine/practice, analysis and monastic culture. If internal sources are accurate, thousands of people became his followers. This, however, did not exclude them from still being Hindus. His teaching called Buddha Dharma continued to develop and spread over the following centuries. Probably the first development after his death was the editing of the teachings on monastic culture. This was followed by the organization of the teachings and philosophical developments. These arrangements facilitated memorization of the multitude of teachings.

A major shift occurred when the Emperor Ashoka (304–232 BCE) became a Buddhist. Much of India was united under one ruler in reactions to Alexander the Great's conquests in the far North-west of the Subcontinent. One large powerful kingdom along the eastern coast resisted Ashoka's unification. It finally succumbed to the might of the Mauryan Dynasty wherein accounts of the war dead range from 100,000 to 200,000. The

sight of this much human tragedy turned the Emperor's mind towards religion and Buddhism garnered imperial support. Buddhism had already divided into at least two sects which would eventually develop into more than eighteen sects. Ashoka not only supported his local Buddhist establishment, but he also exported the teachings. His own son and daughter brought it to Sri Lanka after becoming a monk and nun respectively. Buddhism was spread to all parts of the empire as is documented in accounts and in rock edicts found at different locals. It is also held that some monks were sent as far as Alexandria.

The Buddhist community continued to fracture during this time with many new sects being established. Yet, there were also attempts at reuniting the various communities with the holding of several councils. These attempts failed in part because of the isolation of communities due to large tracks of land still being wild and shifts in priorities. For example, with the shift in India from scattered republics to true monarchies, authority patterns in Buddhism also changed with some sects holding on to the older patterns longer. In addition to differences in monastic culture there were significant philosophical differences that also developed. For example, one class of awakened individuals is called a Worthy (Sk. Arhat). Some sects held that Worthies and Buddhas were the same but others disagreed. Also gradually there developed a major chasm between those who took the period of Gautama Buddha's life from his leaving home until his awakening as the model of how to practice Buddhism and those who took the period of Buddha's life from the awakening to his death as the model. That is those who held that renunciation was the major emphasis (the Auditors' tradition with the eighteen sects) and those who held that compassion for others was an emphasis (the Great Vehicle with two philosophical schools, one philosophical movement and two major styles of practice).

Philosophical debate, being a competitive sport in ancient India, led to lofty developments and subtle distinctions in Buddhism that could easily be compared to the ancient Greek philosophical developments. The Buddhists were major contributors to the development of logic, linguistics, psychology, metaphysics, art, literature and more in classical times. Three examples may suffice. In logic they advanced syllogistic theory, in mathematics they developed the concept of zero which was unknown to the Romans and in art they blended Greco and Indian Buddhist currents. However, doctrinal developments were not the major driving force in sect affiliation. Instead, it was monastic culture that became the foundation for distinctions. Later Chinese travelers to India inform us that monasteries often had inhabitants who advocated different Buddhist philosophies living therein but all inhabitants followed the same one of five monastic cultures.

Sri Lanka received some of the various Auditors' sects and Great Vehicle teachings. However, over time only one of the sects survived. That sect is called Theravada or "followers of the elders." This sect thrived on the island and continued its development. It was also exported to South-East Asia in due course. This is still the dominant religious group on the island today and the only surviving sect from the Auditors branch.

In addition to Sri Lanka receiving Buddhism at the time of Ashoka, Buddhism also was being transmitted to other kingdoms in South-East Asia in the last centuries BCE and the first centuries CE. During this time India was trading with Rome via the Arabian Sea, Red Sea through Egypt and then the Mediterranean Sea. Not only were Indian goods moving along this sea route, but India acted as a transshipping point for South-East Asian and limited Chinese goods. This created the situation that Indian culture became a significant influence in South-East Asia. Buddhism was a major component of this mix. Both the Auditors' and the Great Vehicle traditions spread to this region initially during the early

centuries of the first millennium, but later mainland South-East Asia retained the Auditors' tradition and Indonesia maintained the Great Vehicle.

At the time of Ashoka, the Greeks in the wake of Alexander's conquests had a number of kingdoms in Asia and one of these was Bactria. In the second century BCE its king was Menander I. It is recorded that he became a Buddhist documenting that Buddhism had spread to Central Asia by this time. The Greeks were replaced by the Kushana an Indo-European people who created an empire that at its height spanned from its border with Sogdiana in the north to central India in the south and from Parthia to China west to east. Emperor Kanishka (second century CE) was also a promoter of Buddhism and controlling the Silk Route, spread it as far as China. However, by this time Buddhism was already known in China and found strong support in the palace with the Emperor's brother and to a lesser extent with the Emperor a century before. Both the Auditors' and the Great Vehicle traditions were found in Central Asia.

Central Asian culture was greatly influenced by India in the last centuries BCE and the first centuries CE and although Central Asian Buddhism can be distinguished from Indian Buddhism in some concerns, it considerably reflected its origins. This is not the case in China. Chinese spiritual dialogue was radically different from that found in India. Over a period of about five hundred years the Chinese translated, committed upon and ultimately sinicized Buddhism creating new schools that were clearly Chinese, but which respected their Indic origins.[15] These sinicized forms of Buddhism along with the monastic heritage and the Chinese translation of the Buddhist canon were exported to Korea, Vietnam, and Japan, and partially to Central Asia and Tibet. The height of Chinese creative efforts regarding Buddhism took place during the period spanning the fifth century to the tenth century. Consolidation of these creative development happened

during the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries. Encyclopedic scholasticism continued from the fourteenth century to the modern period. Although the Auditors' tradition was transmitted to China, it did not spark the Chinese imagination like the Great Vehicle tradition did and only the Great Vehicle tradition was retained.

Vietnam in ancient times received Buddhism directly from India primarily in the Great Vehicle form. However, when the sea route was cut off and because of the proximity to China, later Chinese Great Vehicle schools were transmitted and developed in Vietnam. Vietnam became a strong base for Buddhism through the centuries. In the early modern period, the Auditors' tradition began to migrate into Vietnam from border countries to the west.

Korean Buddhism was hardly distinguishable from Chinese Buddhism from its inception in the fourth century CE. In fact, some Korean monks seem to have been significant contributors to Chinese Buddhism at times. However, the Koreans were struck by the divisions in Chinese Buddhism and began striving to create a more consistent holistic version. Buddhism was state religion from the tenth century to the fourteenth century but faced repression from the fourteenth century to the modern period due to the prejudice of the neo-Confucians. However, it maintained its popularity during this period with the people.

Buddhism entered Japan from Korea and China by the sixth century CE. From the beginning it was connected with Japan's unique political structure and sectarian popularity rose and fell along with the fortunes of various clans. The regent Prince Shotoku (572–622) based Japan's first constitution on Buddhist and Confucian principles and wrote commentaries to Buddhist works. In time, all the major Chinese forms of Buddhism were transmitted to Japan and began their independent development in that country influenced by Japanese cultural. Japan produced one

new school of its own but also expanded and enhanced its inherited traditions in unique ways.

Tibet was near impenetrable from the South with the frontal range of the Himalayas acting as a barrier. Passes were found first by going to the extreme west and then down into Kashmir and later leading into Nepal. Buddhism arrived along these routes in the seventh century. It also arrived through the northern border with Central Asia/China. Tibet had internally united and began expanding into Central Asia gaining control of parts of the Silk Route and raiding into China at this time. It also raided into Nepal and parts of India. The Tibetan emperor in the seventh century, built Buddhist temples. His successors built monasteries and supported translation projects just like the Chinese emperors supported translation projects. Eventually, the Indian forms of Buddhism became the most influential and the imported Chinese forms died off. The empire lasted from the seventh to the ninth centuries with the last emperor being assassinated for persecuting Buddhism. Tibet fell back into regionalism, but Buddhism continued to grow. The Mongolians were greatly influenced by Tibetan Buddhism and after invading Tibet in the thirteenth century made an important monk their viceroy in Tibet. With this beginning, Tibet became a theocratic state with rule eventually passing to the Dalai Lama. The office of the Dalai Lama has maintained power until the Communist Chinese invaded the country in the 1950s.

Although Mongolia received different currents of Central Asian Buddhism it was Tibetan Buddhism that became the most influential beginning in the twelfth century. Mongolian monks were sent to Tibet for their education and this form of Buddhism became the dominant force in Mongolian culture. From Mongolia Buddhism spread westward in Russia but was clearly a minority religion. Be this as it may, Russia hosted the only Buddhist population of note in Europe (in Kalmykia) in the seventeeth century.

At its most expansive Buddhism was a major religion from within the eastern boundary of the Persian Empire in the west, to Japan in the east and from Mongolia in the north to Sri Lanka in the south. Further, according to European estimates, Buddhism was the most popular religion in the world at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It came to be known in Europe and slightly later in North America because of the colonies and imperial holding of the European powers. The first recorded encounters between Buddhist and Europeans was with the Portuguese and the Spanish as they ventured into Asian waters. Adventurers, colonials and missionaries studied Buddhism and sent back texts, reports, and artifacts of Buddhist to their native countries in Europe. Buddhist travelled to Europe and Europeans returning from Asia who had converted to Buddhism also began spreading the teachings in the west.

There are legends yet unproved of Buddhist contact with North America dating as far back as 500 CE, but most experts are highly skeptical. The earliest of these was a Chinese expedition but other stories tell of Japanese travelling to the west coast of North America. Provable accounts are later in dating. Japanese Buddhists already inhabited Hawaii before it became a state. The Chinese built a system of temples from Victoria to San Diego in the mid eighteen-hundreds. These temples were often not purely Buddhist, but Buddhism was a major component. At the same time, East Coast Americans and Canadians were becoming interested in Buddhism because of the various activities in Europe. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau were influenced by Buddhist ideas. The Civil War colonel Henry Steel Olcott became the most public convert in the nineteenth century.

Buddhist temples, monasteries, and centers are now found in every major city in the west. There are representatives of every form of Asian Buddhism living in North America and cities like New York, Toronto, Vancouver, Los Angeles and others have

very dynamic Buddhist scenes. In addition, indigenous produced groups that are led by Americans or Canadians and are not affiliated with a particular Asian tradition is a growing current. The same situation prevails in Europe where Buddhism in all of its varieties forms a growing community. The largest Buddhist temple in Europe is only a short distance from the Vatican.

Buddhism from its initial expression by Shakyamuni and throughout its development has been in dialogue with other religions. This volume brings together information from Christianity and Buddhism in a manner not before seen, as noted above. The reader is asked to join in this discussion by thinking critically about the different points presented not to necessarily reach agreement but to achieve understanding of insights and expressions that avoid unjustified overlays. It is hoped that readers will find the beauty of difference, the inspiration from uniqueness, and the openness of the human spirit to reach fuller and deeper meaning in what makes us spiritual.

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[1] Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Doubleday Books, 1976), 89.
[2] Second Vatican Council, *Dignitatis Humanae*, nos. 1–8.
[3] See Andrew Kim, *An Introduction to Catholic Ethics Since Vatican II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 145–154.
[4] Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate*, no. 5.
[5] Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate*, no. 2.
[6] See Martin Goodman, "The Emergence of Christianity" *A World History of Christianity* Adrian Hastings ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 7–16.
[7] Jacques Dupuis, S.J., *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 8.
[8] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition Volume 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 123–171.
[9] This was the famous, and ongoing, dispute over the Latin West's later insertion of the Filioque phrase into the the Niceno–Constantinopolitan Creed of 381.

[10] See Bartolomé de Las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* trans. Nigel Griffin (London: Penguin Books, 1992); Bartolomé de Las Casas, *In Defense of the Indians* trans. Stafford Poole, C. M. (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992). See also, Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995).

[11] Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1967).

[12] Paul F. Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could Not Be A Christian* (London: Oneworld Academic, 2009). See also Malcolm David Eckel, "Perspectives on the Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," *The Christ and the Bodhisattva* Donald S. Lopez, Jr. and Steven C. Rockefeller eds., (New York: SUNY Press, 1987), 43–64.

[13] A.L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India*. (Calcutta: Rupa and Company,1991), 234 *ff.*

[14] Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India* 6th ed. (London: Routledge, 2016), 27 *ff.*

[15] A.W. Barber, *Sinicizing Buddhism Studies in Doctrine, Practice, Fine Arts, Performing Arts* (Calgary: Vogelstein Press, 2019).