

***Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian.* Oxford, second edition, by Paul F. Knitter. UK: Oneworld Publications, 2013. xvii + 250 pp. ISBN 978-1-85168-963-7. US \$ 22.95, paper.**

Containing seven chapters, a preface, and two conclusions (one for the original version and another for the updated edition), the reviewed book, *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian*, pertains to cross-religion discussion between Christianity and Buddhism, reflecting Western and Eastern culture. It also includes autobiographic narratives of the author concerning insight into Christian doctrines that stemmed from his learning Buddhist teachings and practice, aiming to go beyond conventional Christianity to understand and live within the Christian faith. This is structured systematically with each chapter containing a section called “My Struggles” related to a Christian topic of his experience in religious faith, followed by a section titled “Passing Over”, which contains Buddhist intelligence on the same topic; and finally a section on how Buddhism could theoretically and practically contribute to “Passing Back”, revitalising the Christian identity. Knitter claims himself to be a Buddhist Christian, remarking on the gains he received from Buddhism that positively reinforced his Christian beliefs.

The first three chapters discuss the association between nirvana (enlightenment or awakening) and God. In chapter 1, Knitter adopts the Buddhist notion of interbeing to manifest an interconnecting energy of God as the Spirit to shorten the distance between God and the disciples whereas God is believed to be the Creator. The next chapter argues that God is personal, referring to the praxis of Buddhist wisdom and compassion. Concluding these chapters, the author de-mystifies God as a symbol of truth in Chapter 3. The fourth chapter differentiates nirvana from Heaven, both of which relate to life after death. The former declares rebirth while the latter points to eternal life. This analysis strengthens Knitter’s hope regarding death. In chapter 5, the author compares Jesus (the Savior) to the Buddha (the searcher and teacher of awakening). Subsequently, he asserts that salvation is an awakening and a saviour is one who reveals. Such an assertion holds promise for integrating the two religious theories. Chapter 6 elaborates on prayer and meditation in forms of Christianity and Buddhism. By exercising Buddhist methods, the author dilutes mysterious Christian rituals and better connects with God, resulting in exceptional spiritual activities and interactive effects within his theological framework and practices. Chapter 7 illuminates the well-being of mankind from Christian and Buddhist perspectives, regarding global concerns of peace and justice. The author steps past individual spiritual life to social benefits, through which selfishness, sinfulness and ignorance are eliminated, achieving passion and love towards sentient beings. In his conclusions, Knitter finds himself a newborn Christian with a hybrid identity, enhancing his religious commitment.

Knitter deepens Christian doctrines through the aid of Buddhist views. For instance, the fundamental human nature of sin is induced by ignorance which results in suffering. Enlightenment is a solution for overcoming ignorance, by which awakened individuals can profoundly understand the phenomenal reality and enjoy a compassionate life linked to all people of the world. This interpretation minimises the negative aspects of sin and gives more choices for dealing with sin. In addition to elucidation throughout the individual chapters, the author also shares his personal experience with Buddhist tenets and practices, which definitely makes this book more convincing and empowers Christians to be more receptive of their beliefs other than their own.

Since the book involves two very different religions, readers must have a basic knowledge of both Christian theology and Buddhist principles in order to evaluate the quality of this author's assessment of each. This requirement creates difficulties in digesting the author's shared viewpoints. These include Buddhist terminology such as *skilful means*, *wisdom* and *compassion* which comprise profound meaning that needs detailed explanation; otherwise, misunderstanding will undermine the dynamic of these religions. Furthermore, the book includes different sects of Buddhism (for example, early Buddhism, Mahayana, Tibetan Buddhism and Zen), which weakens its readability because one term may pertain to various dimensions unless readers are familiar with Buddhist theories. Despite presenting a broad knowledge of Buddhism, the book portrays some incorrect Buddhist notions such as explaining *bodhicitta* as being the heart of loving kindness, when in fact it should be that of the awakened mind. If these limitations could have been reduced, the author's ideas would have been presented more clearly.

This book could serve as a guide for a dialogue between Christians and Buddhists, in that each chapter could be the starting point for an interesting conversation. The author shows his open mind and inclusiveness to religions other than Christianity. In short, this book is inspirational for both Christians and Buddhists, and recognises the harmonious and invigorating contexts of these religions. It also affirms the contribution of Buddhism to other religions and to the well-being of human beings, pertaining to religious collaboration, rather than conflict against one another. The author has demonstrated his fruitful experiences and this book offers references for those who are willing to enrich their spiritual life through openness to scholarship about other religions.

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