

Dialogue with Chinese Buddhism

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Interreligious dialogue is becoming an increasingly important factor in the lives of Christians. While few may be engaged professionally, thousands if not millions of ordinary Christians are in constant dialogue with members of non-Christian religions. Sometimes the dialogue may be directed towards the performance of a common task, such as a work of charity aimed at alleviating the distress of refugees or disaster victims. Here dialogue has for its purpose reaching a general agreement on how best to get the job done, and it often takes the form of friendly encounters over tea cups and hot coffee. There is also the more formal dialogue, which brings religious "experts" together to discuss a particular topic or exchange ideas on a chosen theme. This, unfortunately, may easily turn into a purely academic exercise where participants, holding doggedly to their original positions, become more conscious of their differences than their points of convergence. There is, finally, a dialogue more direct and less likely to take place on the philosophical or theological level, which consists in sharing spiritual experience. Because it centers on the articulation of concrete spiritual experience, it is, perhaps, the only form of interreligious dialogue that can be truly fruitful and productive.



For those Christians animated by the desire to convince others of Christianity's superiority over all religions, dialogue is seen as a medium for evangelization. This view only serves to make a sham of dialogue by introducing an objective extraneous to its essential nature. The purpose of dialogue is to increase our understanding of other religions, and thereby heighten our appreciation of their proper place and value. It is hardly a question of claiming "we are superior to you because we believe

in a personal God," or bringing to the dialogue a construct of values based on our own preconceived personal ideas. Sentiment of superiority convey a condescending attitude that often give people the impression they are being patronized as objects of an act of charity performed on their behalf. Dialogue is not a work of charity but a work of justice. Through dialogue we render justice to the beliefs of others who are not of our own faith. This is the attitude of God our Father, who holds all human beings in just such high regard.

The stages through which dialogue passes are quite simple. After initially coming to understand and respect the beliefs of others, we are led to reflect on our own beliefs, and even more important, to correct those aspects our own faith-understanding which no longer seem to be as well-founded as we had previously thought. In this manner, dialogue brings us to the highest level of human relations where personal spiritual growth is made possible.

No one grows in isolation. Nor can we expect to grow intellectually or spiritually if we confine ourselves only to the company of people who think and act much along the same lines as we do. We need to encounter difference or we atrophy, remaining like little children who never go beyond their own family circle. This is a law of life, and it is a law that also governs our growth in faith.

It is not my intention here to review the present state and development of the Chinese Christian-Buddhist dialogue. We lack the necessary documentation from mainland China to make such a study feasible; nor am I in a position to assess the work now being done in this area in either Taiwan or Hong Kong. I shall, therefore, content myself with presenting some aspects of the Christian-Buddhist relationship, both past and present. And I begin with an episode from the life of Matteo Ricci (1551-1610).

Contact with Buddhism from the Past

In the year 1599 or 1600, Matteo Ricci was living in Nanjing. At the time he had a close friend, a retired teacher and Buddhist, who was known for his wisdom and learning. His friend was also a close acquaintance of the Buddhist monk

Huang Hongen (1542-1606) whose religious name was San-Huai (三淮). Contemporary sources describe San Huai as having "a high forehead, penetrating eyes, a square chin and creamy complexion". He also had the reputation of being one of the most brilliant intellectuals of his day, an outstanding poet, and, of course, he was deeply versed in the Buddhist scriptures. Ricci's friend was anxious that the two should meet, so he arranged a dinner in honour of the priest and invited the bonze.

When Ricci arrived at the banquet hall, he found San-Huai was already seated at table, surrounded by about 20 of his admirers. The bonze came over to the priest, and immediately invited Ricci to engage in a discussion. What follows is a contemporary account of what took place.

"The invitation of the bonze was accepted by Father Matteo, who opened the discussion saying: 'Before we begin our debate, I would like to know what you think about the First Principle of heaven and earth, the Creator of all living things?' His adversary eagerly replied that while he did not deny the existence of a Moderator of heaven and earth, and a Creator of all things, he did not believe him to be a god endowed with any special majesty. 'I think,' he added, 'that I and others are his equals, and I see no reason to cede to him any special respect.' He said this with furrowed brow and in a disdainful tone, as if he himself wanted to be accorded greater respect than the previously mentioned Moderator of heaven and earth. Father Matteo asked him if he was capable of doing the things that the Creator had done, since it seemed to follow logically from his argument. The bonze then stated that he, too, could create heaven and earth. Now there happened to be in the dining room a fireplace filled with smoldering ashes. Father Matteo pointed to it and said: 'Pray, then, create now for us a fireplace like this one.' The idol-worshiper became indignant and raising his voice said that it was unbecoming of Father Matteo to ask him to do such a thing. At which point, Father Matteo raised his voice in kind and retorted that it was also unbecoming to pretend to be able to do something of which he was not capable. Then the others, who had been listening to the two, joined in the argument, setting off a great clamour, each demanding the other to explain what everyone else was talking about."¹

Here is a dialogue that begins poorly and ends badly, largely because of the attitudes of the two main participants. It is obvi-

ous that Ricci was not so much interested in dialogue as he was in confounding his adversary. And it did not help matters when he began the discussion by posing the question of a personal God's transcendent nature, one of the most controversial of all religious issues.

"The discussion having taken a turn for the worse, San-Huai then inquired about Ricci's knowledge of astronomy, diverting the subject from religion to science. When Ricci admitted to some knowledge in this area, the bonze pressed forward with his argument. 'Good!' he said. 'Now tell me. When you look upon the sun or the moon, do you go up into the sky or do the planets come down to you?' To this Ricci replied: 'Neither. When we see something, we form an image of it in our minds, and when we want to talk about what we have seen, we reflect on the image and draw it out from where it has been stored in our memory.' With this San-Huai rose from his chair in triumph. 'That is the answer then!' he said. 'You have created a new sun and a new moon, and in the same way anything else can be created.' Whereupon, looking about with an air of smug satisfaction, he took his seat, immediately assuming a posture of relaxation, as one who had clearly proven his point..²

What was meant to be dialogue, had now become a polemic.

"The host then decided it was best to separate the two during dinner, giving Ricci the seat of honour and leading the bonze to a place further down the table. He also told San Huai to show some restraint and not indulge further in fruitless arguments. As the dinner began, the bonze and his friends soon became involved in an animated discussion on the perennial question of whether human nature (人性) was good or evil. Ricci remained silent. His silence at first seemed to give the impression to the guests that the arguments were too subtle for him to grasp, but he had, in fact, been following the discussion with care and attention. When he was finally asked to speak, he responded by offering a solution to the problem based on perspectives drawn from Confucianism. One of the scholars present became so enthusiastic at Ricci's answers that he stood up and elaborated on them further, making sure everyone understood the priest clearly. Then, he turned to San-Huai and asked him what he thought. The bonze began a heated reply that went on for some time. Father Ricci finally broke in and said to him: 'Our arguments must be drawn not from authority but from

reason. Since we disagree in doctrine and neither of us admits the validity of the books of the other, and since I could quote any number of examples from my books, our arguments must be settled by reason, which is common to us both.³

"As the discussion continued, more and more of the guests sided with Ricci until San Huai soon found himself standing alone, still adamantly refusing to admit that he had been bested in the contest. Many more topics were discussed that evening, which would fuel conversations among the scholars for many months to come."

At the time of his encounter with San Huai, Ricci had already been in China for 16 or 17 years. He could hardly have claimed ignorance of Buddhism's basic teachings, since for 12 of those years he had presented himself to the Chinese as a 'bonze from the West'. In fact, in his journal he sets down in detail the major tenets of San Huai and his particular school of Buddhism, adding: "Their great error, fatal to the idea of divinity; namely, that God and all material things are one and the same substance, taken from the doctrine of the idol worshippers, has gradually crept into other schools of the literati, who imagine that God is the soul of the material universe; and one mind, as it were, of a great body."⁴ Here Ricci does exemplify for those of us who would enter a dialogue with Buddhists the necessity to become knowledgeable in the particular teachings of its different schools of thought. The world of Buddhism is a universe in itself.

Tian Zhu: God and Buddhism

One of the ironies of history, perhaps also indicative of God's sense of humour, is that the Chinese term chosen to designate the Christian God, 'Tian Zhu' (天主), is itself of Buddhist origin. We do not know who the first missionary was to employ the term, but we can trace its history to the early years of the Jesuit mission to China during the 16th century.

By the year 1514, Portuguese merchants from their base in Goa were trading with Chinese merchants along the coast of South China. By the middle of the century, they had been granted permission to establish a trading settlement in Macau at the Pearl River estuary. In 1552, Francis Xavier died on

Shangchuan (上川島), an island lying just off the coast of Guangdong Province, having failed in his efforts to enter the China mainland. It was not until 1565 that two Portuguese Jesuits set up a residence in Macau, which was to serve as a centre for missionaries waiting for permission to enter Japan and China. Those assigned to China were to wait a long time. The door to the mainland was closed so tightly that some despaired of attaining their goal during their own lifetime.

This situation changed with the arrival of Father Alessandro Valignano (范禮安) who came to Macau from Goa in September of 1577.⁵ Valignano saw no need to despair, but he did suggest a change in tactics. He counseled his priests to devote themselves to studying the Chinese language and culture. And before leaving for Japan in July of 1579, he wrote to Goa requesting that a priest be assigned to Macau specifically for this purpose. When Father Michele Ruggieri, (羅明堅) an Italian, arrived on the heels of Valignano's departure, he was alarmed to find that the priests at the centre were violently opposed to Valignano's project. His local superior and other priests did all in their power to discourage his efforts to study Chinese. In later years, Father Ricci was to write a letter to the Jesuit Superior General in Rome in which he described Ruggieri's first three years in Macau as "a virtual martyrdom", since he was kept busy performing every kind of task but the one assigned him by Valignano.

Michele Ruggieri, however, had the drive and zeal of an apostle. He began preparing himself for his future ministry by composing short evangelical tracts in Chinese. At the same time, he searched out ways and means to penetrate the China mainland. At first, the only door open to him was to accompany the Portuguese merchants on their trade missions to Canton; but then on one such mission, after presenting himself and his companion, Father François Pasio (巴範濟) to the local authorities as 'Christian bonzes from India', he asked for authorization to travel to the provincial capital Zhaoqing (肇慶).⁶

Permission was forthcoming and having received an invitation from the Viceroy of Zhaoqing, he and Pasio arrived there on December 27, 1582. Since the priests were dressed as bonzes, they were sent to lodge in a Buddhist pagoda.⁷

One year later Ruggieri was to write to the Jesuit Superior General in Rome: "During my three years here in China, I have

busied myself with studying Chinese characters and have written some tracts on Christian dogma, a catechism, a *Flos Sanctorum*, an aid for sacramental Penance, and a book on Christian doctrine. This latter work I was told to have printed, as it fulfilled a need here to introduce pagans to a general knowledge of the things of God, so that they might come to love Him and His holy law."⁸ This work has come down to us under the Chinese title *T'ien-chu Shih-lu* (天主實錄), *The True Record of the Lord of Heaven*. It would seem that it was the first time 'Tian Zhu', (天主) or 'Lord of Heaven', was used in print as a formal designation in Chinese of the Christian God. And while Ruggieri may not have been the first to employ the term, he certainly chose it only after consulting with the literati who helped him translate his text into Chinese. Ruggieri, from the very beginning, presented himself as a bonze, and many of the terms he uses in his writings were taken over from Buddhism. It happened that 'Tian Zhu' was very much in vogue among Buddhists at that time, and it is still used in modern Buddhism to designate those deities who govern the heavens. In a Chinese Buddhist dictionary we find four kings (王) or lords (主) who rule the heavens. It seems quite natural that the Buddhist scholars would suggest this term to Ruggieri, or to another before him, as it was enough to give the Chinese character for 'Heaven', in conjunction with the personal connotation of 'Lord', a Christian meaning; and the term posed no theological problems. This Heaven is the heaven where God dwells, and this God is a personal God. Ruggieri and Pasio always called themselves 'bonzes of the religion of the Lord of Heaven' in their frequent contacts with Chinese officialdom.⁹

In March of 1583, the two priests returned to Macau at the request of the Viceroy who was recalled to Peking. Soon after, Pasio was sent to Japan. On September 10 of the same year, Ruggieri received an invitation from the newly appointed Viceroy to return to Zhaoqing. This time he brought with him the young Matteo Ricci, who had arrived in Macau on August 7, 1582. The Viceroy welcomed them and gave them a small piece of land on which to live. Immediately upon their arrival, they went to visit a young neophyte into whose care Ruggieri had entrusted the altar on which he and Pasio had said Mass during their first sojourn. The young man and his family welcomed the two priests with great joy. This visit, which Ricci recorded in

his Journal, helped to confirm the missionaries in their use of 'Tian Zhu' to designate the Christian God.

"The young man had placed the altar in a large room and above it had hung an elaborate signboard on which 'Tian Zhu' or 'Lord of Heaven' was inscribed in large characters. On the altar itself, he kept seven or eight ornate vases in which he burned sweet smelling incense. Here he to had developed the habit of praying at stated times and of offering sacrifice, as he explained it, to God of whose existence he had some knowledge."¹⁰

Ricci continues: "It was a source of no little consolation for the returning missionaries to find at least one person praying to the true God, and after he long ages of spiritual darkness that had enveloped this great multitude of people."¹¹

During his first years in China, Ricci, as Ruggieri had done before him, introduced himself as a Western bonze. But during his six year sojourn in Zhaoqing, from 1583 to 1589 he gradually began to realize that if he hoped to establish Christianity among the Chinese, he would have to leave the Buddhist world for that of the Confucian intellectuals, who exerted a more profound influence on Chinese society. In August of 1589, he and his new companion Father Antonio d'Almeida (Ruggieri had by this time left to return to Europe) were obliged to leave Zhaoqing. They were, however, granted permission to reside further north in the city of Shaozhou, where they remained until April of 1595. During the interim, Ricci had occasion to meet several times with Valignano both in Zhaoqing and Macau. They discussed together Ricci's intention to present himself in the future as a Western scholar rather than as a religious bonze. Many years of studying the Chinese classics had persuaded him that the Chinese could be more easily approached through their Confucian tradition than through the strictly religious approach of Buddhism. It was on April 18, 1595, after 13 years in China, that Ricci donned the robes of a Chinese scholar for the first time, as he began his journey from Shaozhou to Nanchang, the capital of Jiangxi Province. Arriving there on June 28, 1595, he lost no time in establishing friendly contacts with the Chinese literati, who received him not as a bonze from India, but as an intellectual from the distant West.¹²

Ricci thus abandoned the religious approach advocated by Ruggieri for the humanistic--one might even say secular--world

of the Confucian scholar. In Nanchang, he began work on his book *T'ien-chu Shiyi* (天主實義), which was to replace Ruggieri's *T'ien-chu Shih-lu*. He refused to bring out a new edition of the earlier work, and the plates of its text were subsequently destroyed. Ricci chose not to use the terminology Ruggieri had borrowed from Buddhism; but what, then, was to be done about 'T'ien-chu', for it had by now passed into Christian usage and found ready acceptance among the missionaries? We find it being used in the Dominican Juan Cobo's *Apologia de la Verdadera Religion*, (辯正教真傳實錄) which was published in Manila in 1593 nine years after Ruggieri's *The True Record of the Lord of Heaven* (天主實錄) and three years before Ricci's text was submitted for revisions in 1596. Ricci's work was finally published in 1603.¹³

In place of Ruggieri's Buddhist inspired vocabulary, Ricci preferred to use terms that were more in conformity with the Chinese classical tradition. That is why we find him sometimes using 'Shangdi' (上帝) 'Supreme Ruler of the Universe' or 'Tian' (天) 'Heaven' by itself, but without ever setting aside 'Tian Zhu' as the Christian term for God. He explains in *T'ien-chu Shiyi* the meaning of these terms to a Christian audience as well as to his other readers.

We know how quickly opposition formed against Ricci's use of 'Shangdi' and 'Tian'. Objections were based on allegations that the Chinese did not give to these terms a meaning consonant with the Christian idea of God. In fact, Ricci himself could just as easily have written a book entitled *Shangdi Shiyi* which could have given the term a Christian meaning and interpretation, just as Ruggieri had done for 'Tian Zhu'. And I am personally convinced he would have been happy to have done so, had he not been confronted with so much ignorance and misunderstanding at the time.

The two episodes I have outlined above can be considered as case histories from the early years of the Christian-Buddhist dialogue.¹⁴ They should be kept in mind as we turn now to a consideration of our present contacts with Chinese Buddhism.

Contacts with Chinese Buddhism in the Present

I do not intend here to offer an account of the contacts that

have taken place through the various forms of dialogue mentioned at the beginning of this article, from cooperating in a common task to the mutual sharing of spiritual experience. I shall only make reference here to certain important aspects of the Christian-Buddhist dialogue in itself, and indicate how each religion exerts a reciprocal influence on the beliefs of the other.

The first has to do with the increased receptiveness of modern Chinese Buddhism to become more involved in social welfare and works of charity as an expression of the presence of Buddhism in everyday life. Buddhists in Taiwan, for example, admit that Christianity has helped them to renew their consciousness of certain fundamentals in the Buddhist tradition: compassion and concern for others, responsiveness to social problems, such as poverty and destitution, medical care and education for the young. It is an historical fact that for centuries in China, Buddhism was relegated to the level of religious superstition, making it impossible for it to open itself up to serve the larger society. But this is no longer the case; Chinese Buddhism has indeed opened itself to greater social involvement. Nor do influential Buddhists attempt to hide the fact that this has been spurred along by the example of the Christian churches and the continual challenge they represent. While more might be said on this subject, let us leave it for the present and turn our attention to address another aspect of the dialogue, dealing with theological rather than social contacts.

The great theological problem posed by Buddhists to Christians is their assertion that they do not believe in God. In order to understand what they mean by this, we must go back to Gautama Buddha himself and the religion that dominated India during his lifetime in the 6th century B.C.E.

If we go back to the origins of Buddhism in northern India, we see the Buddha reacting against Brahminism, with its multiplicity of gods both big and small. These were the gods the Buddha rejected. When he rejects the existence of a Supreme God, he is not denying his existence as such, as he is asserting that knowledge of him is not all important. What is important is not God, but man and his destiny. That is why the Buddha insists strongly on the law of deeds (*karma*), for *karma* places human destiny in the hands of human beings. For the Buddha man and not God is supreme.

This attitude still hold true in all schools of Buddhism. In

Taiwan, for example, the Buddhists go on record as rejecting the deities of Chinese popular religion and Taoism. Specifically, they say that both these religions are *Shenjiao* (神教) 'Deity religions', while theirs is the Religion of Buddha, *Fojiao* (佛教). Thus do the Buddhists reject both a supreme deity and all the other lesser deities whose statues decorate the temples and other places of worship. What the adherents of Chinese popular religion have done in divinizing Buddhist bodhisattvas is their own affair, say the Buddhists, who regard these dignitaries as 'saints' but not as divine beings. The problem here is clearly theological.

This problem is also of the utmost importance for Christians, since the Supreme Deity we call God is central to our Christian faith. Buddhists simply say: "We do not believe in a God such as your God." Here again we are confronted with a theological issue. Buddhists do believe in an "Absolute" whose definition is "Thusness" or "Suchness" or "What-is-as-it-is"--in Sanskrit *Tathagata* and in 'Chinese *Zhenru* (真如). This magnificent definition of the "Absolute" corresponds to the Western classical definition of God as the Ultimate Reality. St. Augustine would have had little difficulty in recognizing his own God here and on this basis entering into a dialogue with the Buddhists. In fact the words he uses when describing the vision of God that he and his mother shared as they looked out on a starlit night from a window in their home in Ostia, corresponds to the Buddhist concept of the absolute. "Then raising ourselves up with a more glowing affection towards the 'Selfsame', we did by degrees pass through all things bodily, even heaven itself..."¹⁵ Here the Supreme Being is first seen as the Absolute, then as Eternal Wisdom, and finally as the Personal God.

St. Augustine is not so constrained by the notion of a personal God so as to make him forget that God is, to use modern terminology, a Being who is as impersonal as personal. Contact with Buddhism immediately raises the question of personhood. For Westerners, the concept of person is limiting and restrictive. When Buddhists insist on *wu-wo* (無我) the non-substantiality of the *wo* or the "ego", it is because their concept of what constitutes the human person is different from ours. When they deny the reality of *wo* on the empirical level of human experience, they insist at the same time that there does exist a *ta-wo* (大我), a supra-ego in the 'depth of the depths' which is identi-

cal with what we call the Absolute. It was just such a theory Matteo Ricci's adversary was defending during the dialogue that failed in Nanjing.

Dialogue with Chinese Buddhists invites us to disassemble the philosophical structures that undergird our fundamental theological notions. Can there exist a person with a universal nature?--a simple question. Our own theology would prompt a negative response, but that answer is not really self-evident. It is by encouraging such questions that the dialogue with other religions--in this case with Chinese Buddhists--invites us to a reconsideration of our own beliefs, and how to reformulate them in a language that makes it possible to transform two irreconcilable monologues into an authentic dialogue.

Another point on which contact with Buddhists invites us to reflect is the nature of salvific grace. Of recent years the notion has become wide-spread that Buddhists rely on themselves alone to achieve salvation. This is a common reaction to spiritual movements which have emanated from Chan (禪) or the Zen (Meditation) school of Buddhism. One merely has to broach the subject of spiritual values or methods of contemplation inspired by Chan to hear an immediate retort that "these Zen people rely solely on their own personal efforts and not on grace, while we believe in grace."

It is true that in the Small Vehicle or Theravada, Hinayana (小乘), there is a special insistence on personal effort. But the fact that human nature is essentially the Buddha-nature (佛性) makes the final effort, as passive as it is active. Dr. Susuki has written thousands of pages on the value of personal efforts in Zen, then in a few brief lines he acknowledges that final illumination is a gift--a gift of "what while being myself is nevertheless beyond myself."

The Chan is not the most widespread tradition among Chinese Buddhists. Most belong to the Jingtū (淨土) or Pure Land tradition, in which faith is centred on the Amida Buddha (阿彌陀佛) and the bodhisattva Guanyin (觀音). These personages possess hearts of compassionate mercy (*dabeixin*: (大悲心) and devote themselves to helping human beings to attain salvation. If I pray to Amida or Guanyin, they will hear my prayer and come to my assistance, especially at the hour of my death. If I put my trust in Amida, he will take me in hand and lead me to his Western Paradise (西天). This is why

Buddhists of the Pure Land School constantly repeat the pray: "Nanwu Amitufo, (南無阿彌陀佛) Nanwu Guanyin pusa" (南無觀音菩薩). "I place my trust in Amida, I rely on Guanyin."

The Buddhists have a term for this: *tali* (他力), which means relying on "the power of another". This attitude is entirely different from that of a Theravada monk who relies entirely on his own personal effort *Zili* (自力). Once we become aware of their faith in Amida and Guanyin, it is hard for us to maintain that Buddhists have no notion of grace. And is it not only fair to recognize that their belief in help from a world cloaked in mystery is equivalent to our belief in the world we call divine? Belief in the saving power of Amida has been developed most extensively by the Japanese Shinshu school of Buddhism, in Chinese called Jingtū Zhenzong (淨土真宗) or in its shortened form Zhenzong, Shinshu in Japanese. The True School of the Pure Land was founded by Qinluan (親鸞), 1173-1261, and teaches that in order to achieve salvation one must make an act of absolute faith in Amida and rely on him totally.

Another point of entry for Christians into the dialogue with Buddhists is to recognize the primary value they place on spiritual experience. The Christian West has developed a dogmatic theology to express our Christian faith which is held in such high regard by the Magisterium so as to almost exclude all other expressions. Since the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church has viewed personal spiritual experience with a certain amount of mistrust. But if we wish to enter a dialogue with Buddhists, we must rediscover the primordial value of religious experience. We tend to forget that the Christian faith is based on Jesus of Nazareth's human experience of his spiritual relationship with the One he called Father. His disciples and friends also underwent this unique religious experience; and thus in Peter, John, Paul and others we are given a wide variety of similar experiences. The Buddhists, too, have given expression to their religious experience, but not in the style of dogmatic formulas which we find in the Western Catholic Church.

One of the fruits a dialogue with Buddhism might well produce would be a renewed appreciation among Christians of the value of spiritual experience. While there is a danger that this experience can lead us astray, and granting that it must be

made subject to certain controls, still, the dialogue could restore an equilibrium to the role of experience and dogma in our faith-life. Teresa of Avila was faced with just such a problem. She had not studied much theology and the division of body and soul in defining human nature posed no problem for her. One day, following a religious experience, she realized that God was present in the depths of her soul, which caused her to conclude that while the soul is one, the centre of the soul is special and must be called the Spirit. She was well aware that she was going counter to the general theological currents of the time by introducing a new element into the simple body-soul composite, i.e. the presence of the Spirit at its centre. This is how she describes her reaction to a dogmatic formulation which seemed to her to be incomplete in light of her own spiritual experience. "You will think this absurd, daughters, but it is what actually happens. Although of course the soul is not divided, what I have said is not fancy, but a very common experience. As I was saying, it is possible to make observations concerning interior matters and in this way we know that there is some kind of difference, and a very definite one, between the soul and the spirit, although they are both one. So subtle is the division perceptible between them that sometimes the operation of the one seems as different from that of the other as are the respective joys that the Lord is pleased to give them."¹⁶

The spirit is to be found at the centre of the soul, that is to say, in its deepest depths. this is where spiritual nuptials take place.

Here perhaps is where we find the most precious of all fruits produced by our contact with Buddhists, especially with those of the Chan school, who invite us to follow the interior way and in the depths of our being to explore our human nature, which for us is made in the image of God. I think this one of the more remarkable results of Christianity's encounter with Buddhism: that we are led to a rediscovery of the interior way, which our insistence on God's transcendence has often caused us to neglect in the past.

This simple example is meant to show how a mature Christian-Buddhist dialogue can be highly fruitful for both parties involved. We could mention here further aspects of the dialogue by introducing other Buddhist schools of thought, such as Tantric Buddhism, *mizong* (密宗) which was introduced into

Tibet from northern India in the 8th century, and not only is still flourishing there but is now making in-roads in Taiwan as well. All this, however, would carry us further afield from our present concern. The examples given should suffice to place the Christian dialogue with Chinese Buddhism within a more positive and helpful framework.

Notes

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16. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle* In the *Complete Works of Teresa of Jesus*. Translated by Allison Peers, Sheed and Ward, London, 1982. Vol. 2, p. 333.