

# The Sociology of Knowledge and Buddhist-Christian Forms of Faith, Practice and Knowledge

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## INTRODUCTION

*Crisis of confidence.* When Christians and Buddhists meet to discuss their own and humanity's future, it is imperative that they be honest with themselves. Today this is more than a little painful because, in my opinion at least, it involves the admission that both religions are in a state of deep crisis. In the past twenty years especially, a deep malaise has settled over even the leaders of both groups, robbing them of the robust confidence of their predecessors.

The first step towards resolving a crisis is to admit honestly that it exists, and the second step is to determine its nature. Only then can there be any reasonable likelihood of finding effective solutions. There is little doubt as to the nature of this present religious crisis: it is basically a crisis of confidence in religious faith, religious truth and religious knowledge itself. It is an epistemological crisis of doubt and uncertainty as to whether our religious manner of knowing man and the world and of solving our problems is really valid.

Let us then be even brutally honest with ourselves. The objection raised by Marx—that religion is of purely human contrivance and that religious consciousness is a “false consciousness,” not resting on the solid foundations of man's everyday life—is in fact a very powerful argument. It has been bolstered with much impressive evidence. Further, Freud's argument that religion arises out of neurotic projections of our need for security in the face of pain, calamity and death unquestionably contains far more than a grain of truth.

Such arguments have been mustered during the same period of impressive technological achievements of mathematics and the exact sciences, achievements that have brought *relative* abundance and a higher degree of physical well-being to large portions of the people in today's world. Perhaps even more importantly, this ubiquitous technology and its accompanying machine-oriented ways of thinking have changed our apperception of reality itself, greatly eroding the truth-value accorded to religious realities. Such factors have in fact convinced the greater portion of every nation's most educated, sincere and sensitive people that religious truth and knowledge do not make a dependable foundation on which to build a life, a society, or a world.

The following presentation will attempt two rather ambitious but necessary tasks. First it will study the notion of faith (*śraddhā*, *h'sin*, *shin* and *pistis*, *fides*) in Buddhism and Christianity and by a phenomenologically oriented social scientific analysis elaborate an understanding of the human dynamic of religious faith, which dynamic, it seems, Buddhists and Christians already share. Secondly, it will offer a plausible interpretation of the sociology of religious faith and knowledge according to which the different traditional and orthodox expressions of religious truth in Buddhism and Christianity can be seen to be valid and extremely important forms of human knowledge.

It is patently impossible to offer in the space of a few pages even an adequate summary of the data necessary to build up a solid case for both the human and the "theological" solidity of these two goals, and we will have to be satisfied with the briefest of sketches. I shall begin by tracing the outlines of an important emergent school in the sociology of religion whose major principles and orientations hold out genuine hope for a renewed legitimation of religious traditions such as Christianity and Buddhism.

The conference of social scientists and theologians held in Rome in 1969, entitled "The culture of unbelief," seems to have been the catalyst which crystalized concepts, orientations and practical modes of investigation which in effect created this new school.

Flowing into and out of this meeting were such seminal works as Thomas Luckmann's *The invisible religion* (1968), Robert Bellah's publications on the phenomenon of "civil religion" (1970 and 1973), Peter Berger's and Luckmann's works on the sociology of religious knowledge (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Berger 1967), and a series of sustained empirical investigations into contemporary patterns of religious expressions of great scope and significance.

*The principles of the Schutzian school.* This movement, which for want of a better name we will call the "Schutzian school" after the chief of its many mentors, might be described in the briefest terms as possessing five main characteristics:

1. It flows out of the sociological thought of Durkheim and Weber, as creatively brought forward by the synthetic efforts of social scientists such as Talcott Parsons and especially Alfred Schutz.
2. It rejects the positivistic and reductionistic bias against religion found in other schools of thought, and affirms religion to be an irreducible, *sui generis* and authentic social mode of human awareness.
3. Instead of adopting a reductionistic approach it bases itself on the phenomenological analysis of social reality and knowledge which Schutz (1967) amalgamated from the thought of Husserl, Weber and Scheler.
4. In spite of this rejection of earlier attempts to reduce religion to something "more authentic" such as neurotic projections or economic oppression it affirms the importance of traditional empirical methods of data gathering and interpretation.
5. The basis for its unique approach is the understanding of the sociology of knowledge, including a basic notion of religion and the type of knowledge it produces, worked out by Husserl and Schutz and applied by men like Luckmann and Berger.

To summarize in the briefest possible fashion the pertinent notions of this sociology of knowledge, it is sufficient to state and briefly explain but a single proposition: primordially and always, all of man's knowledge, including the scientific, mathematical and re-

ligious varieties, arises out of man's day-to-day "life-world." This "life-world," the womb of all knowledge, is composed of a community of fellows going about their most ordinary tasks of working, playing, eating, loving, reproducing and dying. Whatever kinds of knowledge, awareness, or symbolic intimations of the genuinely transcendent religious Ultimate any specific religious community may teach—not to mention the rest of ordinary human knowledge—all of these types of knowledge arise out of, depend utterly on, and take their specific symbolic forms from what Husserl (1969) has termed the everyday "life-world," or "world of daily life."

Using the categories of Berger and Luckmann we can say that the process of man's coming to anything and everything is accomplished in a three-stroke piston cycle, involving first the routinization of labor and action in the outer world, then the objectification of these habitual ways of doing things into social institutions, and finally an interiorization of these *de facto* structures, types, schemes and procedures so that they come to be perceived by man as the real structure of "the world," symbolized in his language and mobilized by his thought.

It is not difficult to comprehend what is perhaps the most important inference of this understanding of human knowledge: the specific geographical and meteorological environmental factors of any particular life-world, together with this particular life-world's specific modes of providing itself with food, shelter and a means of production, will exercise the crucial, decisive influences on the basic tenor of that society's whole knowledge system, from its common sense notions to its politics, its ideological and its religious movements. It is by now a truism that as human communities moved into various different stages such as the hunter-gatherer, agricultural and technological modes of providing themselves with their basic needs—as communities metamorphosed into new forms such as hunting bands, agricultural villages, medieval cities and contemporary urban technopolis—every facet of their knowledge was necessarily transformed.

In each of the earlier stages it was religion that drew the many

facets of man's world view together into a meaningful legitimate whole. Today, however, religion has temporarily at least lost the ability to do this. The most educated and knowledgeable find their world fragmented into a maze of unrelatable corridors and feel the alienation of what Berger aptly calls the "homeless mind." These people have not been able to find religious systems capable of comprehending, ordering and giving integral meaning to this complex world. It was the general consensus of the conference at Rome that as a result of this exploding, fragmented world, much of modern man's religious consciousness has come to be expressed outside traditional religious structures and systems. Whatever unity and meaning is achieved is most frequently the result of a private synthesis by the individual. But often as not it remains diffused in the form of "invisible" or "civil" religion.

*The Schutzian school's notion of religious faith.* Luckmann, Berger, Bellah and Parsons agree, in a general way at least, that the concepts of "belief" and "unbelief" in traditional doctrines of churches and similar religious institutions are not adequate foundations for solid investigations into the current status of the religious faith of modern societies. Rather, since religion serves to synthesize and express experiences of moral and metaphysical ultimates, these scholars think that essentially religious symbolism can be found scattered throughout a culture's social, political and cultural institutions.

As a result of this dual realization—first, that rational doctrinal "belief" in traditional religious systems could not be used to study modern man's religiosity, and second, that modern man's religiosity is expressed in forms that lie outside traditional religious institutions—these social scientists have focused their investigations on the ways by which religiosity is expressed outside the traditional religious institutions, and have paid relatively little attention to "belief" or "faith" in religions such as Christianity and Buddhism.

It is important to note that none of the major thinkers cited above has denied the validity and usefulness of "belief" in the

doctrines of traditional religions. On the contrary, they have been emphatic in their high evaluations of traditional belief systems as being both valid and of great personal worth. They have insisted that religious knowledge, whether only loosely connected or tightly knit into separate systems of religious doctrine, was indigenous to the very nature of human thought and is equal in epistemological validity to other symbolic systems of knowledge such as legal and philosophical systems or the great traditions of art and literature.

These scholars further agree that cross-cultural research into the nature of belief or faith and the human dynamic which underlies it would be of great importance. Talcott Parsons has gone so far as to say that "belief systems prominently involving cognitive components are essential ingredients in all religious systems which have a prospect of stabilization" (Caporale and Grumelli 1971, p. 242). Caporale has called for a cross-cultural study to determine the nature of belief or faith in religious systems (Caporale and Grumelli 1971, p. 247). The present effort is an attempt at a beginning of such a study.

*Religion and faith.* Another more recent and more philosophical study of the notion of belief helps furnish the missing link between the narrowly defined notion of cognitive religious belief and the deeper and broader phenomenon on which rationalized belief is based. It so happens that these social scientists' dissatisfaction with the concept of religious "belief" corresponds to a similar dissatisfaction among theologians and other religious thinkers. Paul Tillich (1958) had already drawn a sharp distinction between such doctrinal belief and the deeper trust and loyalty to symbolic presentations of the ultimate itself. Wilfred Cantwell Smith has brought such thinking into maturity in his recent work, *Faith and belief* (1979), in which he shows clearly that Christian, Buddhist and Islamic thinkers have long recognized the same dichotomy between subscription to certain official doctrines and a deeper commitment to and reliance on basic symbolic expressions of

ultimate reality. Whereas Smith himself does not allude to it, this distinction corresponds exactly to the dichotomy noticed by the above social scientists between commitment to certain religious doctrinal systems on the one hand and the deeper and broader commitment to symbolic appresentations of transcending religious ultimates on the other.

Neither theologians such as Tillich, historians such as Smith, nor social scientists such as Luckmann, Berger and Bellah are arguing against the wisdom or even the human necessity of some manner of cognitive belief systems. Each in his own way is rather contending that doctrinal commitment alone does not begin to adequately reveal the rich human dynamic by which man symbolizes and binds himself to his transcending religious experiences and brings these experiences into full development as religious knowledge.

The brief resume of an extensive comparative study of Buddhist and Christian notions of faith which follows proceeds from the same presuppositions. It applies Tillich's and Smith's distinctions between faith and belief and shows, I believe, that it is the same distinction which sociology of religion makes between broad religious commitment to cultural symbols of transcendence on the one hand and belief in circumscribed rationalizations on the other.

The notion and practice of "faith" (*śraddhā-pīṭis*) is central to both Buddhism and Christianity. In neither is it seen as mere intellectual belief in certain conceptual formulas about the ultimate—though in some periods of their long histories, both systems overemphasized this aspect. In both, "faith" is a far richer idea than a rational belief in. It connotes "faith in," "trust in," "reliance on" and "loyalty to" or "taking refuge in," not just with reference to religious doctrines and symbols but to a religious community and the primordial ultimate itself which is recognized as lying beyond all mere symbols.

We will look as carefully at the notion in the two systems as space permits and then carefully compare them to see if beneath the two very different systems of symbols one might not discern a

common human dynamic. If such a human dynamic or anthropology can be shown to exist, then religious knowledge can be seen to develop according to the same sociological dynamic which produces other important symbolic forms of knowledge, even though the referent—a transcendent ultimate—is different. Such a realization, if authentic, should not only have revolutionary implications concerning the human credibility and authenticity of differing religious systems such as Buddhism and Christianity; it could also reveal the solid basis for mutual respect and deepening encounter between these two ancient and world-encircling fonts of religious wisdom.

#### BUDDHIST FAITH

*The development of the concept.* The Buddhist notion of faith (*śraddhā*, *h'sin*, *shin*) received its first systematic formulation in the great scholastic synthesis of the *abhidharma*. The notion of faith expressed in the system is very similar in three works which form a bridge between the Pali and Sanskrit texts and between Theravāda and Mahāyāna traditions. These works are the *Visuddhimagga*, the *Abhidharmakośa* of Vasubandhu and the *Vijñāptimātra siddhi*. In each of these faith is seen as one of the good “faculties,” powers or “roots” of the mind. As such it can be awakened and brought into vigorous action, or allowed to remain dormant and unused. In a similar way, it is seen as the first of the five cardinal virtues, or *pāramitās*: faith, vigor, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.

The definitive development of these notions in the Mahāyāna tradition is to be found in the *Awakening of faith* (Japanese, *Daijō kishiron*). Here, as in all the previous sources, faith is seen as a wonderful power of the mind. However, the notion is now seen in the framework of one of the branches of the profound philosophy of the “Mind Only” (*Vijñāptimātra*; Japanese, *yuishiki*) school. What appears as a “power” (literally *kon*, or “root”) in the illusory egocentered consciousness of the individual is actually the permeation” or the “permeation” of the “eternal mind” (*tathatā*; Japanese, *shi'nyō*), of the ultimate Buddha himself (Tathāgata; Japanese,



Nyorai), whose heavenly light penetrates into the darkness and ignorance of the ego.

Since the eternal mind is the only real mind, the power called faith is really the mind itself, or enlightenment itself, as dimly perceived by the ignorant and illusory ego. It is this power or "root" that, when awakened by a Buddha's or a Bodhisattva's preaching, causes the individual sentient being first to despise worldly attractions such as pleasure, wealth and power, then to love Buddha's teaching, and ultimately to firmly commit himself to the way by "taking refuge in the Three Treasures (*kie sanbō*), or the Buddha, the *dharmā* and the *saṅgha*."

According to the *Awakening of faith*, this way is incredibly long and difficult. Only after countless lifetimes of laborious practice of the six *pāramitās* can those who are especially blessed with the proper karmic conditioning finally attain *hosshin* or *hotsubodaishin*, "aspiration for enlightenment, based on the perfection of faith." This stage, however, is itself but the absolutely resolute determination to attain enlightenment that marks the first of the Ten Stages of the Bodhisattva. Thus firm faith is seen as the first and indispensable step in the way of the Tathāgata.

The whole aim of *Awakening of faith* is to encourage devotees to work hard at the long and rigorous practice of the precepts and the *pāramitās* in order to attain this "perfection of faith" which marks the true Bodhisattva. Faith, in this most basic and influential interpretation of the Mahāyāna understanding, is the awakening and nurturing of that deep and good power or "root" in man's mind to cause him to loath ignorance, love true wisdom and resolutely set himself to practice in consolidarity with the *saṅgha*, the Buddhist precepts and Buddhism's six cardinal virtues or *pāramitās*.

This fundamental understanding was taken up and further developed in all the Mahāyāna sects in both China and Japan. At this point I would like to briefly indicate how the two greatest Japanese patriarchs of the Kamakura era, Dōgen Zenji and Shinran Shōnin, applied and added new insights and developments to this

central notion of Buddhist faith.

*Faith in Dōgen.* Dōgen took faith as one of the fundamental pivots of his *dharmā*. Time and again in the *Shōbōgenzō* (“The treasury of the eye [heart] of the true *dharmā*”) he insists on faith as a primary requirement for the true Zen way. The most striking of his own peculiar modes of teaching in this regard is what appears at first sight to be an absurd equation of faith with *zazen* (“Zen meditation”), with the practice of the precepts, and even with enlightenment itself:

Faith is properly so-called only when one’s entire body becomes faith itself [in the *samādhi* of *zazen*]. Faith is one with the fruit of enlightenment; the fruit of enlightenment is one with faith. If it is not the fruit of enlightenment, then faith is not fully realized (*Shōbōgenzō* 3, p. 131, my translation).

Thus Dōgen insists that truly sincere faith is already enlightenment, but that faith is not truly sincere unless it motivates one to the determined practice which produces *samādhi*. He says elsewhere that such faith produces obedience to the precepts and scrupulous observance of all Buddhist and monastic traditions of whatever kind.

The mystery of the equivalency of faith and practice and enlightenment itself becomes no less impenetrable when we note in the *Awakening of faith* the same basic notion: “beginning enlightenment” (*shigaku*), which begins with faith and is faith, is “none other than identical to ‘original enlightenment’ [*honkaku*].” In Dōgen, as in the *Awakening of faith*, Buddhist faith is a vision, albeit an indirect or extremely dim and distorted one, of the ultimate transcendent itself. But Dōgen emphasizes the immediate oneness of faith and enlightenment, whereas the previous text emphasizes the opposite aspect, the extremely long and laborious road from the beginning of faith to the end of full and unsurpassed enlightenment. In both cases, however, faith entails total submis-

sion to the precepts, absolutely resolute practice of the *pāramitās* and “taking refuge” in the Buddha, his teachings and the community of believers. That is to say, in both the *Awakening of faith* and in Dōgen, faith involves becoming totally at one with the almost self-enclosed society wherein the Buddha’s teachings were commonly espoused and practiced.

*Faith in Shinran.* Shinran taught basically the same notion of faith. In his teachings, too, faith is the deepest and best power of the mind that is really none other than the Buddha himself. Shinran explicitly refers to the *Awakening of faith* in his *Kyōgyō-shinshō* (“Teaching, practice, faith and enlightenment”). However, he stresses an aspect of this faith which is at opposite poles from what Dōgen stresses.

Whereas Dōgen was fierce and adamant in his demand for absolutely unreserved striving in the practice of all Buddhist prescriptions, especially *zazen*, Shinran was equally fierce in his demand that one abandon all practice whatever and simply cast himself via the *nenbutsu* (“Homage to Amida Buddha!”) in utter faith on the compassion of Amida and his vow to save all sinful beings. Faith was the one and only “practice” (*gyō*) required by Shinran, and even this faith did not arise from the power and good intentions of man in this utterly corrupt age of the *dharma’s* extinction (*mappō*). Faith itself, if it is pure, is Amida’s all-pervasive vow permeating through man’s ignorance and passion, for this vow is in fact one with the Tathāgata himself. Thus faith for Shinran was, as in the *Awakening of faith*, the deep movement within man’s innermost soul which, though like a power of the mind, is actually the stirrings of the transcendent Tathāgata himself.

Shinran summarized and developed the teachings of a long line of previous Pure Land patriarchs stretching from India to China and Japan. With them, he held that the one mind of the enlightened Tathāgata was identical to the “one mind” whereby the Pure Land believer abandons himself to utter faith in Amida. This was the way to rebirth in the Pure Land and to certain enlighten-

ment.

Any kind of ascetical practice was, for weak men in this age of degenerate *dharma*, corrupted by self-love, weak and ultimately a hindrance to the complete faith by which one spontaneously uttered "*Namu Amida Butsu.*" Perhaps the best way to see how this faith encompassed all of the traditional Mahāyāna notions of Buddhist faith and gave them a new interpretation is to consider the first words of the chapter of faith in *Kyōgyōshinshō*:

As I reverently consider the nature of the outgoing movement of Amida's merits, I find that there is a great faith, and as to this great believing mind I make this declaration . . . it is the miraculous act of longing for the pure and loathing the defiled . . . it is the true mind as indestructible as a diamond; it is the absolute faith cause leading to the realization of great Nirvana . . . . It is the ocean of faith of Suchness and One Reality. This mind indeed is no other than the one that is born of Amida's Vow (*Kyōgyōshinshō*, p. 85).

Before turning to Christian faith, we can summarize the Buddhist experience and interpretation of faith as follows: faith is an interior power, ultimately the mind of the Tathāgata himself, which, when awakened by hearing the *dharma*, impels the Buddhist to turn away from his ignorance and selfish passions and resolutely seek after and practice the truth by joining himself to the Buddha, his *dharma* and the community of the faithful.

#### CHRISTIAN FAITH

*Catholic and Protestant faith.* The outlines of the Christian notion of faith are much more easily drawn, though no less complicated than their Buddhist equivalents, since they have been the object of much more scholarly research during the past hundred-odd years.

We are all aware that the whole Protestant Reformation arose largely out of an apparently irreconcilably different understanding of faith on the part of the traditional Latin Church on the one hand and reformers such as Luther and Calvin on the other. This fact

can serve as the first good solid piece of evidence for our empirically oriented research into faith. The similarity between this clash and that between Shinran and traditionalists on Mt. Hiei is striking.

Luther and his followers held that faith is an act of the believer, whose weak and sinful will is seized by God's grace and borne to firm commitment to the revelation of a totally transcending God. According to this general Protestant understanding (here it is impossible to do justice to the almost innumerable shades of understanding within the various branches of the Protestant tradition), faith alone is necessary and sufficient for rebirth to the divine life, because it opens the floodgates of the infinite merits of Christ's redemptive death. Meritorious work and ascetical practice on the part of the individual were considered both unnecessary and impossible for man's corrupted nature. To even attempt them was a misunderstanding of and a lack of real faith in God's forgiveness and the efficacy of Jesus' redemptive death on the cross.

On the other hand, the Roman Catholic tradition as epitomized in the thought of Thomas Aquinas takes a quite different view. For this tradition, faith is not merely a strong act of the will, but is an act of both the intellect and the will so that man's natural reason can and must lead him to see the reasonableness of believing in Christ's teachings. It will even, with the help of grace, enable man to see "at least darkly as in a mirror" (I Cor. 13:12) the truth of the divine mysteries themselves. After man has with the help of God's grace believed, then reason, supported by the grace of the Holy Spirit's life in the soul, continues to grow in the insight which strengthens and upholds his faith at every turn. Further, faith alone is not enough for man's salvation.

Man must himself strive and work with all his might in cooperation with God's help. This combination of faith, grace-supported reason and earnest striving can and normally will enable man to grow towards perfect imitation of Christ's own life and thus attain ever deeper insight into the divine life of God's Son which he now shares.

This differing notion of the role of faith gives the whole of Catholic practice a different orientation from that of the major Protestant understanding. Like the Zen Buddhist, the Catholic is urged to struggle with all his powers in prayer, meditation, and acts of self-sacrifice. Faith without practice is, in the Catholic view, no true faith at all. The Catholic may say with Dōgen that "faith is practice, and practice is faith."

*Faith and conversion.* It is necessary to go back to the main source of Christian faith, the Bible, if we are to get a solid grasp on the overall common understanding of what Christian faith is and how it operates. Protestant and Catholic scholars today are agreed on the major outlines of the Biblical notion of faith.

In the Old Testament, faith generally had the notion of man's faithfulness to God and to his covenant with God in response to God's faithfulness to him. When Jesus preached his "good news" ("gospel," *euangelion*), those who believed his teaching were required first to *metanoiēn*, to "turn completely around" in their lives and to enter a completely new way of life in accord with Christ's teaching of love, selflessness and forgiveness. This *metanoia*, usually translated insufficiently as "repentance," is closer in its fundamental meaning to "conversion."

Surely all Christians agree that Christian faith is first and foremost a "conversion" or turning around to harken to and obey the wonderful "good news" of Jesus about the new kingdom of God that was finally being inaugurated through his teaching. In the words of John the Baptist, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Mt. 4:17). Jesus, as the Christ (the Messiah, the anointed king and savior), conceived of his mission specifically as one of calling people to faith in himself as the Messiah and in his message of the Kingdom and his Church. The central notion of Christian faith is made clear in Matthew's account of the conversion of Peter, Andrew, James and John.

Jesus said to Peter and Andrew, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Mt. 4:18-23). They, as well as James and

John, completely abandoned their former lives and gave themselves totally over to Jesus, following after him in utter trust, or faith. This faith clearly involved first of all trust in and loyalty to the person of Christ, but it included taking upon themselves the complete renunciation of worldly ambitions and pleasures for the sake of actually living the Kingdom of Heaven which Jesus announced and which became his Church.

From the beginning, then, Christian faith required both absolute trust in Jesus and the kind of belief in his message that involved and motivated a complete change of life and becoming a member of the group of Jesus' followers. Those who doubted enough to be afraid of drowning in a storm on the Sea of Galilee were declared by Jesus to be men of "little faith" (Mt. 8:26). Jesus demanded absolute and unwavering faith and commitment.

*Systematizing the concept of faith.* Later, Paul developed the beginnings of a systematic understanding of this faith. He declared that if one's faith were genuine, it was itself the very grace-enlivened act by which the believer was reborn, shared God's own divine life and was "justified" (Rom. 5). It was this this divine sonship and divine life within the new creature which transformed him into a living branch on the vine which was Christ, or into a member of the divine body of which Christ was the head. Thus St. Paul gave a new clarity and meaning to the analogies which Jesus himself used. The believer, via the transforming power of God, became immediately *already* a member of the Kingdom, *already* saved in that in and by his faith he had become united to God in Christ. As such the believer differed only accidentally from the "saints" in heaven who were enjoying the full fruits of the rebirth that was accomplished by faith.

In addition to this, according to the common Catholic interpretation, it is the divine life itself that enlightens man's natural mind and enables him to understand the divine truth and have faith in it. Faith amounts to an actual direct contact between its object of source—God—and the living human being who holds

it.

Faith in the Christian view is thus not a mere blind belief in doctrines incapable of being understood, and is not only the door to membership in the Church, but is also and especially seen as the critical act of trusting commitment to Jesus and his words which, by God's power, make one "already saved" even though one remains *in statu viae*, or "on the way," while still in this life. The Christian sees his faith as a commitment that does not originate entirely within his own mind and heart, but which is rather the result of the movement and presence of a transcendent God who suffuses his own powers of mind and heart and lifts them to a level they are incapable of reaching themselves. Faith involves both an act of knowing (the truth revealed by God) and an act of the will (firm and utter commitment). Through faith the believer "sees darkly as in a mirror," whereas when in heaven he will "see face to face" (I Cor. 13:12).

Yet this utter faith certainly does not imply, even in the general Protestant exegesis which emphasizes God's transcendence and the inability of man's power to know God, a trust which contradicts sane rationality and logic. This presumes one obvious fact: that the believer realizes that his faith from these beginnings on always implies trust in a transcendent whose wisdom goes far beyond the reach of ordinary human reason.

Nevertheless, it never implies, as Buddhist thinkers have sometimes presumed, that faith involves a belief or trust which is actually in contradiction with reason. Various controversies and various individual thinkers—especially Kierkegaard—have at one time or another stressed the transcendence of God and hence the relatively "blind" quality of faith, and thinkers at other times have stressed its rationality and reasonableness. However, Christian thinkers have only very seldom implied that there is no solid connection at all between faith and human reason. Such a contention would be absurd, amounting to a rational argument that reason is not involved in faith on the one hand while at the same time teaching and explaining faith in rational categories.



*A rational theology of faith.* It was St. Paul in particular who used reason to develop Jesus' teachings on faith. In his Epistles especially we encounter a highly developed rational theology of faith. Here faith is seen as taking the place of circumcision and "works" of the old law of Moses in order to bring the whole world within reach of inheriting the Jewish privilege of being God's sons and chosen people (Rom. 2:6; Gal. 2:6).

During the great doctrinal controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries the notion of Christian faith underwent a great deal of development. In the Ecumenical Councils such as Ephesus and Chalcedon, crucial doctrinal issues were resolved and the result was that Christian faith began to closely take on a more doctrinal bent. For the Roman Catholic Church this tendency became more extreme in the Counter Reformation that in the sixteenth and subsequent centuries attempted to combat what were seen as the doctrinal errors of the Protestants. Only in the Second Vatican Council was a certain balance restored. The nature of faith as primarily assent to doctrinal propositions was finally played down and a more Biblical interpretation restored.

The extent of the variation in interpreting Christian faith is almost limitless, and anything one says about the subject should be balanced with nuances to the contrary if one tries to be fair to all the historical ramifications. Still, even the brief outline of the noncontroverted central notions of Christian faith which I have presented above is quite enough to form the basis of a comparison with Buddhist faith and to see the framework of a common human dynamic.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion we will concentrate on the common elements evident in Christian and Buddhist understandings of their respective experiences and expose the foundations of a philosophical anthropology of faith. That is to say, we will outline a notion of the human dynamics of religious faith which is theoretically applicable cross-culturally to any culture's religions.

In concentrating on the common elements I do not mean to ignore the great differences in the notions of faith to be found in the two systems. Chief among the many such differences are factors such as a personal versus an impersonal notion of the ultimate, central stress on love in one and on insight in the other, very different notions of the inerrancy of scriptures and totally different salvation histories. These different symbolic structures and cultural influences, however, have for too long been emphasized by both traditions to the point of obscuring very striking similarities that point to a common human religious dynamic at least on the level of anthropology.

*Towards an anthropology of faith.* Space permits only the briefest listing of the similarities that link Buddhist and Christian faith in what, I submit, is a common human dynamic. These similarities are of utmost importance, for they furnish us with solid, verifiable material out of which it is possible to disclose the outlines of the cross-cultural dynamic of religious faith. Their points of convergence are precisely at those social and psychological junctures that are crucial for all types of human knowledge: communitarian, intersubjective affirmation of an apperception of the ultimate, of the meaning of everything in the light of that ultimate and a resulting way which should guide all human action. The similarities follow:

1. Faith is a firm commitment to a symbolically appresented notion of the ultimate reality (*tathatā-Tathāgata* or God-creation) which gives a unified hierarchy of meaning to literally every aspect of one's everyday life.

2. This firm commitment of faith rests upon a special, though initially very dim, insight into the normally transcendent ultimate ground or source of all that is. This insight is seen as dependent on the presence and aid ("permeation" of the one mind or Amida's vow or the presence and inspiration of the Holy Spirit within the mind and soul) of the transcendent ground itself.

3. Faith is by its very nature an intersubjective or communitarian act, necessarily involving resolute consolidarity with a community (church or *saṅgha*) of fellow believers and practitioners.

4. Authentic faith goes beyond mere affirmation of theoretical doctrines. It engages all of the believer's feelings, emotions, and actions in an existential religious manner of living.

5. Faith's total existential engagement includes submission—to the degree that human weakness permits—to a body of rules or precepts (the Ten Commandments and the "law" of Christ's love, or the Ten Precepts and guidance by *prajñā* and *bodhi*) which guide human conduct into conformity with the ultimate nature of all things.

6. Authentic faith, involving as it does both commitment to a symbolic and systematic notion of the ultimate and an existential involvement in the believing community and its precepts, way of life and religious practices, is a world-building act which gives meaning and motivation to every facet of one's everyday life.

7. Authentic faith, permeating all of one's actions and thoughts, provokes an experiential spiral towards joy, freedom, compassion and wisdom. Faith is a process involving ideas, acts and experiences.

8. Faith involves inchoatively at first and more clearly as its spiral grows wider and stronger the experience of special nonordinary awareness which may generally be characterized as "non-egocentric levels of consciousness" such as love or compassion, humility or selflessness, wisdom or *bodhi*, obedience or submission, poverty or simplicity, thanksgiving or gratitude, ecstatic communion or enlightenment and the like.

Space will not allow me to give proper nuance of these elements of an anthropology of religious faith, nor will it permit a full and revealing documentation of the abundant material within Christian and Buddhist teaching which corroborates and substantiates the presence of such a common dynamic operating in both systems. I will therefore content myself with showing briefly that these cross-cultural elements correspond to the notions concerning

belief-faith which the principles of sociology of knowledge and culture would demand.

*Faith and the transcendence of self.* First of all, faith is seen to have always and universally been conceived as extending beyond and beneath mere cognitive belief in rational doctrinal formulas. Secondly, it is an essentially communitarian, intersubjective or social phenomenon—no one can claim to be a Christian, Buddhist or, apparently, a member of any other religion, except in solidarity with a living social entity.

Thirdly, faith as experienced in Buddhism and Christianity begins, develops under and finds its fulfillment in world views, emotions, moods, norms, hopes and existential modes of consciousness which are characterized throughout as nonegocentric. Whereas this element has not been noted by the social scientists, it seems not only compatible but a valuable aid in working out a full social scientific notion of faith which is consistent with believers' understanding of their own faith.

Buddhist *samādhi*, the *bodhi* mind, and nirvana, as well as Christian love of God and man—along with such commonly held virtues as humility; self-abnegation; obedience; simplicity of lifestyle; and rejection of killing, stealing, lying, sexual excess, pride and the like—all have one thing in common: they are strikingly nonegocentered. It is via these virtues, seen as having been inspired by the ultimate, that boundaries of self-centered reality are broken through and the eternal unchanging source of self is approached.

This notion in turn can be seen as a prime requirement for the very existence and survival of any society whatever. However true may be the insistence of thinkers from Hobbes and Hume to Freud and the socio-biologists that all of man's actions are essentially egocentered and ego-preserving, it nonetheless remains true, as these thinkers have all recognized, that sublimation of egocentered drives, postponement of gratification and the development of dependable, socially-oriented modes of behavior are an

absolutely necessary part of the healthy socialization of any individual and the healthy integration of any society.

Recent thinkers such as Eric Erikson and Lawrence Kohlberg (Erikson 1963; Kohlberg and Gilligan 1971) have shown the intimate correlation between these patterns and religious modes of symbolic expression, belief and action. This is not to say that religion and faith are mere functions of society's need for social integration. A different intergration is equally logical: society and man himself are a function of the transcendent completely non-egocentric source of reality which man's own actions and knowledge inevitably incorporate.

*The validity of Buddhist and Christian knowledge.* If, as was done above, we rely on Buddhist and Christian forms of faith to give us insight into the human cognitive dynamic that produced particularly profound and stable systematizations of such appresentations of or transcendent insights into the ultimate, then we have good grounds to believe that such appresentations of the ultimate rest on epistemologically solid grounds. I believe that this epistemological validity of Christian and Buddhist symbolic appresentations of the ultimate can best be disclosed by briefly developing two of the above eight elements of our anthropology of religious faith.

First, it is clear that relatively nonegocentered types of emotions, moods, experiences and modes of consciousness are daily experienced from infancy to adulthood. These include mother love, love between the sexes, patriotism, aesthetic wonder, the ecstasy of many kinds of transcendent insight, and benevolence of a hundred varieties. It is interesting to note that all of these have been treated as "sacred" and "hierophanic" by most traditional societies. Genuine human maturity is defined by psychologists and philosophers alike in terms of developing a firm, responsible and dependable ability to see beyond one's egocentered drives and spheres of interest and take into account the other as well as the abidingly nonegocentered cosmos.

Secondly, things such as the Buddha's enlightenment and Jesus'

selfless love of men are central symbols of religious systems that synthesize strikingly clear and stable world views grounded in a transcendent ultimate. This ultimate is indeed "beyond" the normal egocentered realities appresented in the necessarily egocentered work by which man gains his food, shelter, and protection. Nevertheless, these stable nonegocentric visions of an ego-transcending ultimate are still authenticated by frequent nonegocentered experiences in the everyday life-world.

Common sense estimation has always placed mature and responsible selfless awareness and concern in a special honored category. These traits are not thereby declared inauthentic or illusory, but rather to belong to a superior level of development. Every culture has its own way of affirming that beyond the "world" of narrow self-concern lies a realm of relatively free and joyful selflessness wherein even death can be met with relative equanimity.

The believer's notions of God or the Buddha, while clearly symbolic appresentations of a transcendent ultimate, are not therefore mere neurotic projections or sighs of the oppressed. Whether basically impersonal as in Buddhism or personal as in Christianity, such symbolic expressions of an ego-transcending ultimate appresent a lifelong process or way towards "redemption" or "release" from the bonds of the ordinary, pragmatic world of selfish concern. In the perspective of sociology of knowledge there seems to be no solid reason to believe that these dynamic schemes are any more illusory than schemes of law or kinship.

All such "multiple realities" or "finite provinces of meaning," as Schutz has so brilliantly disclosed, have their own special "tension of consciousness." But I wish to contend that unlike other finite provinces of meaning such as dreams, fantasies, play and the like, healthy, non-neurotic religious knowledge is thoroughly integrated into the primary reality of the everyday life-world in the same manner that law, science and systems of art and literature are. Individual groups may strive to thoroughly reject the "iron cage" built by science and technology and live in communal freedom within a "world of nature." It would seem, however, that the

everyday life-worlds of all people are simply not the real life-world without an integration in some form or another of both scientific and religious notions.

The conclusions that can be taken from such an analysis seem fairly obvious. First, "faith" as traditionally understood in the mainstream traditions of both Christianity and Buddhism is certainly not the narrowly cognitive "belief" that the social scientists in Rome rightly found to be epiphenomenal and not an apt object for empirical investigation.

Secondly, genuinely religious faith is a commitment to a symbolic synthesis of apperceptions of an ultimate ground and of the consequences for the living of human life. In the light of this fact it becomes provincial and unnecessary for Buddhists and Christians to contend that authentic religion must be confined within the boundaries of a single symbol system. An ever-greater theological appreciation of this fact within both communities would seem to be the most solid basis on which to build a deep encounter between Buddhism and Christianity with the kind of genuine and deep mutual respect and reverence that can be accorded only to equals. There are many encouraging signs within the various churches and groups of the *saṅgha* that this realization is growing.

Thirdly, the insight that Buddhist and Christian faith is united by a common anthropology holds out the potential of a new "ecumenism" between science and religion which is even more momentous in what it holds for the two religions. There is a whole host of problems and gaps in the above sketch of the sociology of religious faith and knowledge. To say that it is in its present state acceptable to any one of the mainstreams of Buddhist, Christian or scientific thought would be optimistic to say the least. Nevertheless, I would submit that such a cross-cultural application of the principles of sociology of knowledge to the theological systems of religious self-understanding holds out enough potential for a future religio-scientific reunification of human consciousness to warrant very serious consideration by all parties concerned.

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