Book Reviews


*The Good Heart* is a record of the proceedings of the tenth annual John Main Seminar. This seminar is sponsored by the World Community for Christian Meditation in honor of the Irish Benedictine monk, John Main, who taught the form of Christian meditation practiced by John Cassian and the desert fathers. Former guest speakers have included Charles Taylor, a Canadian philosopher; Bede Griffiths, an English Benedictine author and founder of an ashram in India; and Jean Vanier, the originator of L’Arche, Christian lay communities that are dedicated to living with the disabled.

This particular seminar was unusual because it was presided over by a Tibetan Buddhist meditation master, His Holiness the Dalai Lama. His Holiness was invited by Dom Laurence Freeman, OSB, the spiritual head of the World Community for Christian Meditation, to comment on well-known passages from each of the four Christian Gospels.

The purpose of the seminar is characterized on the book jacket as a meeting between Christians and Buddhists “to experience enlightened dialogue between religions conducted with respect, reverence and the joy of friendship.” This record of the proceeding provides ample evidence that an atmosphere of respect, reverence and friendship was created and maintained throughout the dialogue.

The text is introduced by Dom Laurence Freeman. In an extensive description of the structure of this particular dialogue, he outlines the
boundaries within which the discussion was carried out. Dom Laurence understands the seminar as an opportunity to explore much more than the scholarly similarities and differences between these two great religions. In keeping with John Main's insistence that Christians must "verify the truths of our faith in our own experience" (p. 7) to recover the contemplative practices of their faith, Dom Laurence characterizes the purpose of the seminar in terms of deeply personal spiritual awakening:

The intellectual discipline required for dialogue allows the natural tendency toward egotism to be filtered or contained. This releases the individuals involved in dialogue to find the deeper levels of their own consciousness where dialogue opens onto a common window of truth through an experience altogether beyond the conceptualizing mind. (p. 7)

This understanding is entirely in keeping with the Dalai Lama's assertion that: "The most effective dialogue is not intellectual exchange, but a conversation between sincere practitioners from the position of their own faiths, a conversation that arises from a sharing of their respective practices." (p. 5) Within that frame both the Dalai Lama and Dom Laurence were concerned to present themselves as true, rather than false, friends. Professional translators refer to certain words in two different languages that have a formal likeness but very different meanings as "false friends." (p. 15) Dom Laurence feels it is as important to avoid false friendship as to avoid "caricature, misrepresentation and dismissive judgement."

The Dalai Lama is determined to represent the doctrines and practices of Tibetan Buddhism fully and faithfully while, at the same time, exploring important aspects of the Christian faith. In his first talk, the Dalai Lama tells the story of a woman who, when her husband died, was quite confused, because, although she was a practicing Christian in this life, she felt that in the next she had no alternative but to become a Buddhist. The Dalai Lama comments:

How complicated! If you are a Christian, it is better to develop spirituality within your religion and be a genuine, good Christian. If you are a Buddhist, be a genuine Buddhist, not some half-and-half! This may cause confusion in your mind. (p. 46)

In a context of the presence which develops out of spiritual practice and the desire to develop genuine friendship, the dialogue developed around a commentary by the Dalai Lama on eight familiar quota-
tions from the gospels. In the text, the comments of both His Holiness and his Christian interlocutors followed directly after the introduction.

As an ethical theorist, I was most interested in the two chapters in which the practice of compassion was discussed. The chapter entitled “Love Your Enemy” is a fairly straightforward discussion of two quotations from Matthew. The first, Matthew 5:38–42, begins with the familiar instruction:

You have heard that they were told, “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.” But what I tell you is this: Do not resist those who wrong you. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn and offer him the other also. (p. 47)

The second quotation, Matthew 5:43–48, is equally familiar: “You have heard that they were told ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But what I tell you is this: Love your enemy....” (p. 48) In his discussion of these two passages, the Dalai Lama examines the similar emphasis of Christians and Buddhists on the practice of love and compassion. He also examines the difference in their understanding of the cause of universal capacity for compassion: Christians feel it is because all beings were created by God, whereas Buddhists feel it is because compassion is the direct expression of the Buddha-nature which is present in all beings.

In keeping with the meeting’s emphasis on direct spiritual experience, His Holiness briefly describes a meditative practice for merging intellect and heart. First, the practitioner moves from an analytic focus on a particular idea, “That is, your subjectivity is focussing on the idea or concept that you are analyzing,” (p. 47) to a non-conceptual state.

However, once you have arrived at a state of single-pointedness — when you experience that inner transformation, that compassion within you — there is no longer a meditating mind and a meditated object. Instead, your mind is generated in the form of compassion. (p. 47)

This is a particularly skillful discussion, in that the Dalai Lama refuses to conflate the quite different concepts of “God” and “Buddha-nature.” At the same time, he provides a subtle analysis of the important similarity between the Christian instruction to love your enemy and the Buddhist contention that it is your enemy which provides the opportunity to practice compassion.

The discussion in Chapter Four on the equanimity of the practice of compassion is an extension of the analysis in Chapter Two. Further
instructions are provided on meditative practices associated with the development of a compassionate state of mind.

This extended analysis of the respective forms of the practice of compassion in Christianity and Buddhism is a more successful commentary than some that follow, principally because in this context the ontological and epistemological differences between the two religions are less obtrusive. Commentaries that involve more subtle Buddhist doctrines are less successful because the seminar is too limited a venue to explore the more profound differences between Western and Eastern thought. For instance, the short description of the functions of the subtle body is too brief to be satisfying, but provocative enough to necessitate a much more developed explanation. Similarly, another short discussion which refers to the differences between the doctrines of various Buddhist schools is unsatisfying simply because the ontological and epistemological presuppositions within which these doctrines have been articulated must be explained at length if the differences to which the Dalai Lama refers are to be understood.

However, since this is an exploratory dialogue, the difficulties I have mentioned are inevitable. In fact, the need to dialogue at a much deeper level may promote a more profound sharing between Christian and Buddhist practitioners.

In future dialogues, the aspect of the seminar that is least satisfactory can be easily remedied. Possibly out of deference to His Holiness, to his status as a Nobel prize winner and the leader of an embattled people, the Dalai Lama's Christian interlocutors were unnecessarily timid. Their questions could have been more penetrating. In this way, a great deal more would have been revealed.

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To date, Professor Prebish's career in early Buddhist and Vinaya Studies has been admirable, but this book is a landmark achievement. Landmark in that it not only reflects the author's knowledgable association with the Vinaya tradition but it is concise enough to be useful to a researcher. Completed during his tenure as holder of the Numata Chair in Buddhist Studies at the University of Calgary, the book is a
functional work of art without being frivolous. The author has fashioned an indispensable tool to deal with the lack of "organizationally sound, functionally manageable bibliographic research aids." If this is indicative of the kind of work that we will be seeing more of with Professor Prebish and the newly formed Dharma Lamp Series of the Jin Luen Publishing House then a bright future awaits them both.

Concerning the purpose and breadth of this first volume, Prebish, in his preface, writes:

It is my intention in the following pages to present a bibliographic survey of Vinaya literature, covering both primary and secondary sources, that has appeared in print since 1800.... This survey is not intended to be encyclopedic in any sense of that word. Instead, it is true to its title. With regard to the texts and translations, it is quite thorough, but not exhaustive. With regard to the secondary literature, it is somewhat selective, but attempts not to omit any major studies. Although I have largely limited myself to language material savable in English, French, German, Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese, and Tibetan, I have also acknowledged the important, recent contributions of Japanese scholars in this area. (pp. xiii–ix)

Prior to the survey, however, Prebish presents a well written forty-one page introduction briefly detailing the "structure, contents, and application of the Vinaya." (p. 31) The introduction, indeed the entire book, is presented in a simple and easy to follow outline format with the Vinaya Pitaka being divided into three major sections; I. "Paracanonical," II. Canonical and, III. Non-Canonical Vinaya Literature. Each major section and its constituent parts are then briefly described in terms of their function and their place in the monastic community.

Chapters Two and Three contain the survey proper. Chapter Two cites the primary Vinaya literature of each of the major nikayas in the early Buddhist tradition in Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese, Tibetan, and Japanese sources. To assist the researcher, the primary sources referenced are further divided into the categories of "texts" and "translations." Several charts are also provided which cross-reference the resources in the various canonical languages, thus making the book that much more accessible. The survey finishes with Chapter Three referencing the secondary Vinaya literature in chronological order. The book is made complete by a series of useful indices under the headings: (1) Authors, Compilers, Editors, and Translators, (2) Article Titles, (3) Book Titles and, (4) Text Titles (Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan).

As Prebish indicates in his preface and elsewhere, the search for material in this endeavour was a long and sometimes difficult one. In
order to proceed over the years, numerous professors were consulted and a myriad of libraries scoured over. The process was not helped by the fact that only a few sources exist which, in any sense, "systematically review a substantial portion of Vinaya literature" (p. 44). These are Etienne Lamotte's *Historie du Bouddhisme Indien des origenes a l'ere Saka*, Akira Hirakawa's *Ritsuzo no Kenkyu (A Study of the Vinaya Pitaka)*, Akira Yuyama's *Systematische Ubersicht uber die Buddhistische Sanskrit-Literatur (Erster Teil: Vinaya-Texte)*, and Mitsuo Sato's *Genshi Bukkyo Kyoden no Kenkyu (A Study of the Early Buddhist Order in the Vinaya Pitaka)*. Prebish acknowledges and gives credit to the contribution these sources have made to Buddhist Studies but surpasses them all in comprehensiveness, organization, and accessibility — qualities necessary in any research tool.

Although very impressed with the book I do have a few, hopefully constructive criticisms, regarding each of the necessary requirements for a research tool. Prior to this, however, I would like to make a general comment on the introduction. To be useful, a research tool itself must be understandable to the researcher. On the whole the book is very well written but the sheer number of Sanskrit technical terms in the introduction might be a bit imposing to beginning students. Professor Prebish has, for the most part, addressed this issue by maintaining a clear context in which these terms function, as well as providing numerous English translations. Regarding the comprehensiveness of the work, it was previously mentioned that the book was concise enough to be useful. Some may argue that it might be too concise and would be better served if this book or that book were added. In some respects I share the opinion that the survey could contain more secondary sources. After all, the survey would still be compact enough even at two hundred pages. However, my main concern is with the potential lack of relevant material in Japanese other than the "important, recent contributions." I would have liked to see more scouring of the Japanese sources.

The material was quite well organized throughout the entire book, especially in the first two chapters which followed a basic outline pattern. Chapter Three, however, confused me at first. I was accustomed to the simple and efficient style of the previous chapters and expected a straightforward bibliographical rather than essay format. After reading through the chapter, however, my initial disappointment faded when I noticed the occasional snippets of valuable information that may or may not have been left out in a bibliographic style. Both styles have their merits, I was just surprised by the older and more unwieldy essay format.

All the charts, indices, and easy to find subject headings, made material in the book readily accessible. Given this, my next comment is
more of a grievance against many recent books than a specific criticism against Prebish's work. The reader will hopefully forgive this indulgence as I throw them into the debate of which transliterating system to use when working with Chinese. The two most popular systems are the long-established Wade-Giles system and the more recent and upcoming Pin Yin system. Both systems are widely used, but I find the Wade-Giles to be rather bulky and based on European rather than North American pronunciation, while Pin Yin is quite simple and becoming more popular. Regardless of one's opinion in this matter, it would have been nice to see both systems employed in Prebish's text, at least in the charts and indices. At any rate, these are all relatively minor criticisms and do not detract from the overall value of the book. Rather, it is to the great benefit of Buddhist Studies that we can now profit from Prebish's lengthy enterprise.

In sum, Prebish's volume has provided a comprehensive survey that is very user-friendly while at the same time supplying valuable tidbits of background information on primary and secondary sources. Supplemented with an excellent introduction to the Vinaya, helpful indices, and cross-referencing charts this book is a veritable treasure trove of essential information to one doing research in Buddhism. It is an indispensable research tool for Buddhist scholars.

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Partha Mitter is the author of Much Maligned Monsters, a chronicle of European reactions to Indian art, which has become essential reading for historians of Asian art and religion. That was published in 1977, the same year as Edward Said's Orientalism. The two share concern with the distortions that result from viewing another culture through a European lens. While Said developed a powerful political polemic of broad implications, Mitter focussed modestly upon India and has since denied that Indians are inevitably unbiased in viewing their own art. Thus it is no surprise that the present work begins with a disclaimer of intent to advance cultural theory.
This is an account of the conflicted reactions to Western art, particularly following the uprising of 1857, today known as the First War of Independence. It traces the co-option of the Indian artist, on the one hand by colonial art schools and on the other by British patronage, only to be gradually supplemented by the patronage of Indian urban elites. A fascinating chapter on the printed image weaves together the children's magazines and cartoons of Calcutta with Lewis Carrol and the German Simplicissimus. Raja Ravi Varma, born in Kerala but popular all over India by 1900, is presented as the charismatic individual who successfully adapted Western technique to Indian subjects and sensibilities.

Paraphrasing a great historian of Western art, Meyer Schapiro, one might call the present book “How Calcutta stole the Idea of Modern Indian Art.” This account revolves around Bengal, indeed an important and interesting center of intellectual ferment. Hence the overstatement of artists' concern with the West in the rest of India in the nineteenth century. In places such as Udaipur and Orissa indigenous artisan traditions were not swept off their feet by academic naturalism as the author asserts was the rule (p. 7). Likewise Mitter's final chapter presents a rapid collapse of Oriental art in the 1920s, which may be the case for the Bengal school but not for all of India's flourishing modern painting and crafts.

Dr. Mitter is a professor of history in England, and his strength is intellectual contextualization. Despite his association with Ernst Gombrich, this is not a work of art history, which of course is not an unforgivable sin. It is amply illustrated, including thirty color plates, which probably account for the volume's high price. The black and white photos are scattered throughout the text, a layout favored by publishers these days, which in this case is confusing because the text references are often several pages away from the actual picture. Moreover the text is usually very general and cursory in what it says about the images, and most information is found in the plate caption.

My final reservation about this attractive book is the unfamiliarity with Indian traditions before the nineteenth century that it reveals. For example the author asserts that in the Mughal period “for the first time we know the names of artists,” and that even then they worked mainly collaboratively (p. 13). In fact painters of the kayasth caste (which Mitter includes among the bhadralok or gentlemen of Calcutta, p. 55) are identified on earlier Jain works such as the Jaunpur Kalpasutra. Even ancient Indian sculpture is not entirely anonymous in its carving. Thus the assertion of Raja Ravi Varma's unique place as an identifiable artist who fits the topos of "artist as genius" rings a bit false. The Hindu painter Dasawanth, about whom there is a large scholarly literature, is
supposed to have had his genius discovered by Akbar, as was Ravi Varma by his royal uncle Raja Varma.

Readers of a journal of Buddhist studies may be surprised to find Sujata identified as “the shy maiden who brought the Buddha his first nourishment,” with no mention of the preceding fast (p.285). And when Ananda Coomaraswamy is quoted as writing, “I want to serve not merely India but humanity, and to be as universal as possible — like the Avalokiteśvara,” this is glossed as “A name of the Buddha[sic] as epitomizing universal compassion.” (p. 260). This book is the product of someone like the Bengali intellectuals it concerns, with more allegiance to modernity than to the past.

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1 Tapati Guha-Thakurta, The Making of a New ‘Indian’ Art: Art, Aesthetics, and Nationalism in Bengal. c. 1850–1920, also published by Cambridge University Press two years earlier, is more straightforward in the same bias.

2 Again Guha-Thakurta writes with more fresh, thoughtful observation about the same images, which occur on the page on which they are described.
List of Books Received for Review

Tibetan Buddhism (& Bon)


Theravāda Buddhism


Zen


Other Buddhist Topics


**Books Received for Review**


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**Non-Buddhist Topics in China & Hong Kong**


Other Non-Buddhist Topics


