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Many Tongues, Many Buddhisms in a Pluralistic World A Christian Interpretation at the Interreligious Crossroads

Perry SCHMIDT-LEUKEL's recent four-volume *Buddhism and Religious Diversity: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies* (2013) is a major publishing event, not only in Buddhist studies but also for those working in the area of interfaith encounter and theology of religions. This article reviews the achievements of the Schmidt-Leukel project against the backdrop of his pluralistic theology of religions and suggests a complementary pneumatological perspective to not only understand the phenomenon of the plurality of Buddhisms and their various dispositions and approaches to religious otherness, but also to nurture the spectrum of practices needed in a world of many faiths.

KEYWORDS: Perry Schmidt-Leukel—Buddhist theology—pneumatology—inclusivism—exclusivism—pluralism—theology of religions—Buddhist-Christian dialogue

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PERRY SCHMIDT-LEUKEL, even if limited to only his English-language publications,¹ has done more than anyone else to document the range of Buddhist responses to other religions.² His own pluralist theology of religions not only accommodates such facets of a pluralistic world but perhaps also motivates his efforts to record and understand them. I would like to suggest an alternative pneumatological approach to the theology of religions that may accomplish much of what the pluralist model achieves but yet bypasses what for some critics remain formidable challenges. Simultaneously, my pneumatological perspective, when focused on the variety of Buddhist views of and engagements with religious others, also invites adjustment in Christian attitudes and approaches to people of other faiths. I begin with Buddhist diversity vis-à-vis religious pluralism, and then—in the longest section of this article—I present my pneumatological response (in dialogue with Schmidt-Leukel), and end with implications for Christian practice in a pluralist world.³

Buddhism and the Religions: A Plurality of Responses

To be clear, the four volumes and over 1,400 pages of SCHMIDT-LEUKEL's recent publication (2013) barely begin to catalogue the diversity of Buddhist responses

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1. As I have had a hard time keeping up with Schmidt-Leukel's more than two dozen books, I have not expended any effort applying my limited German skills to reading the half of his growing corpus in that language; fortunately, for our purposes, his central contributions are also accessible in English, and we will refer to the most important works below.

2. Including but not limited to SCHMIDT-LEUKEL (2008), SCHMIDT-LEUKEL and GENTZ (2013), and SCHMIDT-LEUKEL (2013). This last reference (*Buddhism and Religious Diversity*; from here on BRD) is an anthology of previously published materials. I will also include original publication data as these may be more easily accessible than the set, which will probably end up only in a small number of academic libraries because of the exorbitant price. See also SCHMIDT-LEUKEL and GÖTZ (2001).

3. Note that I will use Schmidt-Leukel's work as a springboard into the field of Buddhism and interreligious diversity knowing that much more has been, can be, and should be said. Arguably, for instance, any history of Buddhism, particularly one now sensitized to its unfolding reality as a "world religion" (for example, BERKWITZ 2006), could retell the history of Buddhism in terms of its interreligious interactions and encounters. Our goals here are, however, more theological, so the mapping by Schmidt-Leukel suffices for these limited purposes.

to pluralism. Even essays depicting “six Buddhist attitudes toward other religions” and then explicating five types of Buddhist inclusivisms only introduce the plurality of Buddhist attitudes to, assessments of, and interactions with religious others (CHAPPELL 1990, in BRD 4.10–24; KIBLINGER 2003, in BRD 4.25–45; and see, for example, KIBLINGER 2005). In what follows, I selectively highlight some historical-political perspectives and then unfold mostly what might be called Buddhist “exclusivisms” and “inclusivisms” regarding other religions.⁴ The discussion of course cannot pretend to be exhaustive, but will merely give an overview of some of the major issues at the interreligious crossroads, at least as refracted through my own biases and interests.⁵

To adopt, at least initially, a more historical approach is to be introduced, from the beginning, to many Buddhist approaches to religious otherness. Obviously, this includes not only the fact that the “tradition” of the Buddha emerged in the pluralistic field of sixth century Vedic and Brahmanic India, but also that a variety of interpretations and understandings can be observed as lodged at the very heart of this primordial sequence of events from its inception so that “other religions” discourse in the early literature include as much intra-Buddhist disputes and contestations as those directed outward to others (FREIBERGER 2011, in BRD 4.46–56).⁶ Then, if we shift to the next millennium and onto the East Asian space where Buddhism flourished (as opposed to the South Asian land of its origins where it was subsumed if not almost swallowed up by Indic traditions), we find it is better described in terms of waxing and waning according to its integration into or marginalization from the political centers of civilization.⁷

4. HOLT 2000 (BRD 1.126–48) argues that Buddhist responses to other religions, including their assimilation, incorporation, or appropriation of others, are more often motivated not theologically, doctrinally, or soteriologically, but politically (see also BELTZ 2004, in BRD 1.97–113).

5. In the interests of initial disclosure—which ought to be more fully clarified by the end of this article—I approach Buddhist traditions as a Christian systematician and comparative theologian; for a more autobiographical perspective, see YONG (2012a).

6. HUBBARD (1995, in BRD 1.171–87) also observes that the language of “tolerance” of others in the various Buddhist texts, in this case the Mahayana *Lotus Sutra*, is a veiled polemic that ultimately subordinates alternative ways to the one being defended.

7. The doyen of Chinese Buddhism, ARTHUR WRIGHT (1957, in BRD 1.206–33; see also WRIGHT 1971), provides a fourfold periodization of Buddhism’s fortunes as it unfolded in relationship to the Chinese dynasties: that of the initial Chinese encounter with Buddhist traditions, which he calls preparation (65–317 CE); that during which Buddhist traditions were initially assimilated into Chinese political and religious life, which he calls domestication (317–589 CE); that wherein Buddhism emerged in many respects into the center of Chinese religious and political life, which he calls acceptance and independent growth (589–900 CE); and that where after Buddhist beliefs and practices were woven, almost seamlessly, into the fabric of the Chinese way of *san chiao*—or the “Three Teachings” of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism—that he calls appropriation (since 900 CE). The story of Buddhism in Korea exhibits a similar waxing and waning as in China (see GRAYSON 1984, in BRD 1.318–30).

From this perspective, we can appreciate how the more mature expressions of the tradition feature efforts to integrate religious, philosophical, and cultural aspects of the Chinese context within a predominantly Buddhist framework.⁸

Yet of course Buddhist dominance has not always persisted, and the periods in which its practitioners have found themselves in threatened situations, for various reasons, have triggered their most vigorous, even “exclusivistic,” responses. The four selections focused on Buddhism in Japan highlight some of the precipitating factors. Thus the well-known exclusivism of the Kamakura (1185–1333) monk Nichiren (1222–1282) emerges as “a unifying force and a strategy of legitimation” in the context of the Mongol invasion so that, “In Nichiren’s eyes, it had been slander of the Dharma—rejection of the *Lotus Sutra*—that had brought Japan to the brink of destruction by the Mongols” (STONE 1994, in BRD 4.252–77; quotations from BRD 4.252 and 271).⁹ Then four centuries later, a Jesuit priest turned Buddhist-monk, Fukan Fabian (1565–1621), used his Catholic learning after converting to argue against Christianity on both doctrinal and nationalist grounds—on a platform of, among other elements, the unity of the Three Teachings—in the wake of the ascendancy of the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868) and the banning of Roman Catholicism and the expulsion of its orders in 1614 (SCHRIMPF 2008, in BRD 2.24–44). By the time of the later Tokugawa period, when Buddhist intellectuals felt beset by both the arrival of the modern West and the revival of Confucian traditions, they reconstituted themselves both by purging Buddhism from perceived superstitions (as measured by the canons of Western rationalism) and by urging its complementarity with its chief competitors (thus reasserting Buddhist practice, alongside Confucian political postures, as sociopolitically relevant

8. In terms of beliefs, for instance, there is the inclusive Buddhist apologetic of Huayen patriarch Chengguan (738–839) that critically engaged but absorbed the other “two teachings” (HAMAR 2000, in BRD 1.252–62), and the massive work of synthesis by Tsung-mi, a Tang dynasty scholar-monk (see GREGORY 1995, 74–104, in BRD 1.263–89). In terms of practices, there is what might be called the “syncretism” of the Three Teachings, discussed by BROOK 1993 (BRD 1.290–317); Brook prefers the image of the “condominium” over “syncretism” which “connotes that the Three Teachings lived together in late-imperial China with a considerable degree of harmony equal in principle, equally available to worshippers, and free to associate and interact in a multitude of ways” (BRD 1.292). See also GENTZ (2013).

9. Recall that the ancient Hebrews also interpreted the exile as punishment for not keeping the covenant, and Augustine’s *City of God* was written in the wake of the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410 and its destruction was interpreted as an omen regarding Christianity’s failure to keep the faith. Analogously, the Indo-Tibetan Kālacakra tantra also presents “a prophetic vision in which Buddhism, allied with a subordinated Hinduism, triumphs over the ‘barbarian’ religion of Islam in a final apocalyptic war,” reflecting its primordial interfaces with Muslim forays into South Asia (NEWMAN 1995, in BRD 3.30–36, quotation from BRD 3.30).

against outside intruders; for example, see JOSEPHSON (2006, in BRD 4.57–81), and SAWADA (1994, in BRD 1.370–87).¹⁰

The intensity of modern Buddhist polemics against religious others is also observable outside of Japan. Turn-of-the-twentieth century colonial Ceylon and contemporary postcolonial Sri Lanka, for example, have generated two of the most renowned Buddhist apologists—Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933) and Gunapala Dharmasiri (1940–2015)—whose efforts were and are marked by their resistance to Western (Christian) imperialism (DHARMAPALA 1965, in BRD 2.96–104; and DHARMASIRI 1988, 259–71, in BRD 2.105–15). In the very different political environment of officially Buddhist Thailand, the Buddhist majority has long demonized the Muslim minority, particularly in the Malay Peninsula region, perennially mobilizing and exerting its rhetorical capacities for religious and political gain (KEYES 2008–2009, in BRD 3.59–80). The point is that Buddhist assertiveness is facilitated at least in part by the political environment, and this needs to be considered in any assessment of its interreligious interactions.¹¹

When we turn to more explicitly doctrinal, philosophical, or religious considerations, we shall see that at least over the course of the increasingly global context of the last few generations, Buddhists have undertaken deeper engagements with other faiths but inevitably—unavoidably and understandably so in our postmodern, post-Enlightenment, and postcolonial time and context—comprehended these from their own perspective and according to their own commitments. Thus by the mid- to late-twentieth century, the representative thinkers of the so-called Kyoto School had begun to theorize about the religious experience of humankind from their Zen awakening to nothingness, so as to understand religious meaning and their differences (the “many”) as constituted ultimately out of the dynamic formless and boundless reality of Emptiness (the “one”).¹² In a parallel trajectory, Tibetan Buddhists in exile (beyond Asia and to the West) have begun coming to terms with a pluralistic world and therefore developed attitudes of hospitality toward others, but not via compromising their own traditions and

10. Similar strategies of adaptation can be observed in contemporary Muslim-majority Indonesia wherein the “monotheistization” of Buddhism is observed as an effort to fit into the Pancasila doctrine constructed to ensure multireligious harmony in that islandic context (see BROWN 1987, in BRD 3.90–102).

11. Thus the Communist revolution in China has effectively quelled formal interfaith engagements on the mainland (as shown in LAI 1986, in BRD 2.293–308), even if informal interactions have persisted.

12. See NISHITANI (1970, in BRD 2.159–74); ABE (1985, in BRD 4.278–96); ABE (1990, in BRD 2.175–93); and ABE (1995, in BRD 3.226–31). Central to the Kyoto School is NISHITANI (1982). For non-Kyoto School but yet very similar approaches grounded broadly in the Mahayana tradition, see HANH (1995, 34–59, in BRD 2.194–204); IZUTSU (1994, 66–97, in BRD 3.109–28); YAMASHITA (1987, in BRD 3.196–206); and LAVIN (2004, in BRD 3.232–47).

commitments.¹³ Going beyond these more “inclusivist” approaches, contemporary Pure Land Buddhists have also advocated, out of resources in their own tradition, a *pluralist* theory of religions that, if not withholding judgment on the ultimate nature of their similarities and agreements, at least grants that other religious paths are also ways of salvation for their adherents and that religious others may even be bodhisattvic figures to Pure Land practitioners (see TAKEDA 1998, in BRD 2.231–64; and TANAKA 2008, in BRD 4.307–20). We are here not able to analyze the arguments provided for their cohesiveness (to and within the traditions from which they are promulgated) or plausibility (in relationship to external constraints and pressures), nor is there space to do so. I simply note that whether inclusivist or pluralist, or even arguably when exclusive in orientation,¹⁴ specifically Buddhist arguments of some sort or other are provided, which is to be expected from those reasoning or apologizing as followers of the awakened one on the Middle Way.

Many Buddhisms, Many Tongues: A Pneumatological Theology of Pluralism

I now want to step back momentarily from this Schmidt-Leukel project of detailing the plurality of Buddhist responses to religious diversity and ask a more properly theological question. How might such Buddhist pluralism—or the plurality of Buddhisms and of Buddhist responses to religious others (these notions are intended to be synonymous for the rest of this article)—be accounted for from a Christian theological perspective? In some respects, this is a species of the more general question: how can religious pluralism be explained within a Christian framework? From this standpoint, the set of “answers” that have been posed now for the last generation may remain sufficient: an “exclusivist” response would grant that religious pluralism, including Buddhist pluralism, is a mere historical fact with no theological significance except as contrasting with the way of salva-

13. See the DALAI LAMA (2010, 93–105, in BRD 3.177–84); and WILLIAMS (1991, in BRD 4.229–40). Note that Williams’s critical response to Panikkar, a pluralist philosopher-theologian, was written when Williams was a scholar-practitioner of the dGe lugs (pronounced “Geluk”) Tibetan tradition, but he later converted to Christianity (WILLIAMS 2002). Also, for more on Tibetan Buddhism interfaces in the modern world, see YONG (2008a; 2008b).

14. Beyond what might be perceived as classical forms of exclusivism that insists that there is only one way to the ultimate goal of nirvana as recounted by HAYES (1991, in BRD 4.130–51), even the more inclusive approaches are founded on the particularity of the Buddha’s enlightenment. For instance, the earliest layers of canonical sutras indicate that when Buddhists were already wondering if enlightenment could be obtained apart from knowledge of or encountering the Buddha, an “inclusivist” response emerged: that yes, there were “paceka buddhas”—“free thinkers”—who come upon versions of the Eightfold Path, whose experiences of awakening were salvific even if not identical to that of the Buddha, but it was unlikely if not impossible that other traditions and paths of practice could effect such salvation (see DHAMMAVISUDDHI 1986–1987, in BRD 4.109–16; VÉLEZ DE CEA 2013).

tion Christians understand to be found in Jesus Christ; “inclusivist” rejoinders might clarify that whatever goodness, truth, and beauty, or other transcendental values, found in other traditions, Buddhism included, are ultimately fulfilled in Christ; or “pluralist” alternatives would posit at least the possibility that the many faiths, including the many forms of Buddhisms expressed in their encounters with other traditions, are on par, in principle, mediating goodness, truth, beauty, and even salvation on their own terms to their adherents (even if not all religions need to be considered as equals in actuality). This is vastly simplified, to be sure, although there is a certain logical sense in which these remain the primary even if not mutually exclusive options, particularly when the theological issues related to Christian salvation are factored into the discussion.¹⁵

Schmidt-Leukel himself, as mentioned, adopts a pluralist stance. This is laid out in his English-language publications most clearly in SCHMIDT-LEUKEL (2009). A summary of the rationale advocated here for the pluralist perspective is that it allows for embracing both traditions as complementary rather than antagonistic, that both the Buddha and Christ can be recognized as mediating the transcendent but yet historically realized experiences of salvation (the latter understood at least in part according to the Christian tradition’s classical doctrine of incarnation but not as excluding the possibility of other divine-human mediator figures like the Buddha), and that a pluralist hermeneutic provides non-exclusivistic perspectives on the sacred texts of both traditions. In the end, however, as the title of his book *Transformation by Integration: How Inter-faith Encounter Changes Christianity* intimates, Schmidt-Leukel’s pluralist theology of religions is not an abstract metaphysical scheme but a vision for interfaith relations, and even more pointedly, a program for Christian self-transformation amid, and engaging with, religious others in a pluralistic world.

Although I am very sympathetic to the *whence* and *whither* (the *telos*) of Schmidt-Leukel’s pluralist theology of religions, some basic considerations prevent my full embrace of such a stance. First, from a logical point of view, our convergent goals and objectives for engaging self-transformatively with other traditions do not rely on adopting a pluralist stance. Even exclusivists are recognizing that encounter with others transforms us (for example, MCDERMOTT 2000; METZGER and CARLSON 2015). Pluralist approaches are not the only means toward self-transformation vis-à-vis religious others, even if the extent of such might be inhibited.

Second, whereas in the previous generation Christian theologians like Karl Rahner could talk publicly about those in other faiths as “anonymous Christians,”

15. Here I agree with SCHMIDT-LEUKEL (2005) with regard to the logic of the threefold typology, even if I also agree with KIBLINGER (2010) that there are variations within and even across the typology that complicate (enrich, for me) the discussion; this is why I can accept as a self-designation what Schmidt-Leukel would label as “inclusivism” even if much of my work proceeds as if attempting to overcome the liabilities of this position.

in the present climate it is more politically correct to allow others to define themselves. In this context, political correctness is not merely about being appropriately deferential to those in other faiths, but registers the epistemic humility needed when confronted by the fact that the many religions of the world each posit their own ends, and that these should be acknowledged rather than defined according to one religious or philosophical framework. Schmidt-Leukel is less susceptible than many other pluralist theologians to imposing a Christian interpretive framework on other faiths from the so-called pluralist position, but my instincts are to allow others to self-define in the face of recalcitrant plurality. So, although Schmidt-Leukel is deeply committed to engaging seriously the Christian New Testament and theological tradition from his position, this results in pluralist readings and formulations that many Christians would have difficulty recognizing, for instance whether the message and symbolic reality of the Buddha is amenable to an incarnational interpretation.

Last but not least, while Schmidt-Leukel is impressively informed about the Buddhist tradition, having studied it seriously for almost four decades (SCHMIDT-LEUKEL 2006), I am not sure to what degree his pluralist ideas are grounded in Buddhist communal praxis and ways of life.¹⁶ Even with the increasing number of those who embrace both Buddhist and Christian traditions and identities,¹⁷ most are treading these paths as individuals, few in substantive communities of practice. Schmidt-Leukel himself has long practiced meditation in dialogue with Buddhist traditions, although this only anticipates, potentially, the much longer term needed for the emergence of a fully hybridic Buddhist-Christian community of praxis that can validate the possibility of such a mutually informing theological construction. My point is that pluralist theologies need communities of practice to shore up their theoretical (or theological) credentials. Although I do not want to reduce theological ideas to their practical utility, it is also the case that theology is a second-order activity that emerges out of religious life.

It is here that I want to spring off Schmidt-Leukel's fundamental objectives and suggest why at least at the present historical juncture my own pneumatological approach to the theology of religions is no less viable than the pluralist option, if not also providing complementary warrants for facilitating mutual transformation through interreligious interaction. Although I have been work-

16. In YONG (2008c, 86–98), I suggest that the ideas of pluralist theologians like Raimon Panikkar are best engaged critically only by others who have inhabited at length two or more religious traditions.

17. See, for example, HABITO (2007, in BRD 2.280–92), and DREW (2011). Note though in this connection that some scholars (for example, see VAN BRAGT [2002], in BRD 1.388–402) believe the prevalent notion of dual- or multiple-religious identity or belonging is a misnomer when applied in Asian contexts.

ing at the interreligious intersection only half as long (for two decades) as has Schmidt-Leukel, from the beginning I have suggested that starting with the Holy Spirit provides new approaches, perspectives, and routes for dealing with the hard questions of religious pluralism in the third millennium.¹⁸ The following sketch is horribly self-referential (given our space constraints), and can be summarized in four basic theses.

First, a pneumatological or pentecostal model, here based more on the Day of Pentecost narrative central to the Christian understanding of salvation history (Acts 2) than on the modern Pentecostal movement (although the latter has been my primary religious home), understands that the outpouring of the Spirit inaugurates the redemptive work of God that includes, rather than bypasses, human language, culture, and participation (see YONG 2005, chapter 4). Those present from around the Mediterranean world gathered in Jerusalem for the Pentecost Feast Day were astounded that “we hear, each of us, in our own native language” (Acts 2: 8). The many tongues of Pentecost are central to a pneumatological theology of Christian salvation history: that God saves human creatures not from their cultural-linguistic constitutedness but precisely in and through these distinctive modes of being in the world.

Second is the important corollary step for the theology of religions that recognizes that human religiosity is intrinsically intertwined with the cultural dimension and hence both that human language is in that sense also fundamentally religious and that religious language is not isolatable and cannot exist as its own discursive sphere. So if the Pentecost narrative classically understood Christian evangelism in the many tongues and languages of people “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1: 8, NRSV), refracted through the multifaith arena it invites Christian witnesses in tandem with receiving the testimony of others on their own terms. In other words, interreligious interaction is constituted by the mutuality of give and take that occurs whenever people of various and no faith meet and share of themselves and their lives with others. Here the *mutuality* is theologically justified from the particularity of the Christian self-understanding without resorting to a pluralistic frame of reference.

But, third, the Spirit of Pentecost is, for Christians, also the Spirit of Jesus Christ and of his Father. Peter’s Pentecost message points not to other faiths but to Jesus of Nazareth and the coming reign of the triune God. This is the unique testimony of the Christian faith: that the work of the Spirit lifts up Jesus as the anointed Messiah. Yet the Spirit’s outpouring also inaugurates the “last days” (Acts 2: 17) and this brings with it the eschatological reserve of the present dispensation wherein even followers of Christ “see in a mirror, dimly” (1 Cor. 13: 12). A pneumatological theology highlights that Jesus is savior precisely as the

18. My first book, my PhD dissertation, laid out the research programme (YONG 2000).

one anointed “with the Holy Spirit and with [the Spirit’s] power” (Acts 10: 38). So if the Johannine Logos christology insists the Logos is the “true light, which enlightens everyone” (John 1: 9), the Lukan Spirit christology suggests that witness to this cosmic Christ possibly emerges from out of the many tongues of those from other cultural-linguistic and even religious ways. The difference is that the former witness starkly contrasts the light of Christ with the darkness of the world, while the latter opens up discovery of the fullness of Christ in a pluralistic world amidst encounter and through interaction with those in other faiths (YONG 2009b; 2014b, 281–90).

Last but not least, note that the many tongues of Pentecost thus also open up, given the interconnections between beliefs and especially mission practices if not also the priority of the latter for the former, to reconsidering interfaith encounter as constituted by a diversity of practices (YONG 2007b; 2008e; 2010). Christian pneumatology recognizes that abstract propositions about the Spirit derive from the winds and works of the divine breath, and that these latter relate to what the wind of God does and accomplishes in creation and redemptive history. Theological beliefs hence emerge from out of the divine missions, in this case, the Spirit’s achievements in the economy of salvation. Hence Christian theologies of mission are related to Christian mission practices, and Christian theologies, or pneumatologies, of religions are thereby also interwoven with Christian practices of relating to and with those in other faiths. At this level, then, to the degree that Christian mission exists across a spectrum of practices, so also Christian dealings with religious others are also diverse, including not only evangelism historically understood but also dialogue and collaborative social action, for instance, and this for theological—or pneumatological, to be more precise—and not just practical reasons. Hence the interfaith encounter includes the full range of practices and approaches non-exclusive of historic Christian presence and witness and this facilitates the transfiguration of Christian identity in today’s pluralistic world, even of the sort aspired to by pluralist theologians like Schmidt-Leukel.

Many Tongues, Many (Buddhist and Christian) Practices in a Pluralistic World

In other work, I have already applied my pneumatological theology not only to comparative theologies of the Buddhist-Christian dialogue (YONG 2012b; 2012c) but also to understanding at least the phenomenological pluralism of Buddhist-Christian encounters (YONG 2008d). In this closing section I want to return to Schmidt-Leukel’s anthology in order to map the diversity of Buddhist practices both described and recommended, even normatively, at the interreligious nexus. We shall see how the more promising ways forward recommended by Buddhists in a pluralistic world are rooted in praxis rather than merely the theoretical,

and this invites further consideration for Christian belief (pneumatology) and behaviors at this same interval.

When revisited from a *practices* perspective, I was intrigued by the range of Buddhist modes of engagement inserted in the interreligious realm. Here it is helpful to begin with Buddhist praxis, and more specifically, the Eightfold Path and its cultivation of moral habits (*sila*), mental culture/concentration (*samadhi*), and wisdom (*pañña*) that overcomes the self-centeredness that is the cause of creaturely suffering. At the interreligious crossroads, the Eightfold Path is no mere theoretical concern, but rather embarking on it is crucial to the alleviation of suffering that plagues not only sojourners on the way but also the way itself in its samsaric or mundane nature (see DE SILVA 1988, in BRD 4.117–29). In Mahayanist terminology, the awakening precipitated by meditation, among other central Buddhist practices, yields a “positionless position” of emptiness, at least epistemologically, that invites potentially self-transformative dialogical engagement with others (see SIMMER-BROWN 2000, in BRD 4.212–28).

From this praxis-orientation, it is striking to observe a range of Buddhist activities in regard to other faiths. Zen practice informs interreligious reading for some, even as Tantric practice shapes what might be called interreligious liturgizing or ritualizing for others.¹⁹ On the plane of Jewish-Buddhist encounter, Buddhist practice can be understood as providing what one participant called “post-Holocaust therapy” (GEZ 2011, in BRD 3.327–50), particularly in light of the seemingly recurrent history of Jewish exile and suffering. The point to be emphasized here is that religious praxis, in this case the various expressions of and on the Eightfold Path, serve as guides to the diversity of Buddhist means of encountering and interacting with religious others in a pluralistic world.

Although my own pneumatological theology of religions does not diminish the import of doctrinal formulations regarding religious plurality, I have also emphasized, as already noted, that the pneumatology of the Day of Pentecost narrative accents the interconnections and correlations between the multiplicity of languages and cultures on the one hand and the diversity of practices, in particular interfaith interrelations, on the other. From this horizon, a pneumatological theology of Buddhism, as cumbersome and even politically incorrect as such a phrase might be, would recognize, even expect, a plurality not only of Buddhist traditions but also of Buddhist responses—at the levels of both theory (or belief) and practice—to religious diversity, which is exactly the case. As a Christian theologian, I grant that such a depiction of Buddhist alterity is made first and foremost by and for the Christian community. Yet the strangeness and

19. FISCHER (2003, xi–xxix, in BRD 3.351–61) discusses encountering the Jewish/Christian sacred writings, and MAKRANSKY (2005, in BRD 2.214–30) unfolds approaching the Christian Eucharist.

difference of this otherness is also precisely what the theological model registers, and such dissonance foregrounds a certain withholding of judgment and attentiveness to the other so that the terms and practices of otherness can be appreciated.²⁰

Yet to come full circle, the pneumatological *theologia religionum* I propose is not just a means of categorizing other religions but also of grappling with Christian practices in a multifaith world. Just as the pneumatological optic thus comfortably indexes the diversity of Buddhist practices in the interfaith domain, so also such a perspective signals the bigger-picture reality that the “religions” themselves are perhaps less systems of ideas or sets of doctrinal claims than they are ways of life and of doing, and that there are not only a plurality of faiths but also many ways in which these traditions are practiced in themselves and in relationship to each other.²¹ These venues of interfaith encounter and exploration thus also ought to prompt Christian self-reflection on their own ways of inhabiting the pluralistic public square. As a pneumatological approach is or ought to be sensitive to issues of spiritual discernment—including the discernment of religious practices within the home tradition as well as vis-à-vis other traditions—so also might it be uniquely primed to facilitate discerning praxis that is appropriate to the diversity of interreligious contexts, concerns, and realities (see YONG 2004). At the very least, Christian attitudes ought to be flexible, their approaches dynamic, and their repertoire diverse, whether in terms of witness and evangelism, dialogical interaction, or collaboration on socioeconomic, political, environmental, and other issues (for example, YONG 2009a).

More precisely, pneumatically inspired Christian openness to an authentically mutual or reciprocal relationship with those in other faiths invites a posture of hospitality in a multi-religious world.²² Christian hospitality involves not only hosting religious others but sojourning as guests on their pathways. Hosts retain a degree of control of the nexus of encounter whereas guests are vulnerable to hosts in their own domains. Receiving the witness of those in

20. Hence I have always operated not only as a theologian of religions but also a comparative theologian; see YONG (2003, chapter 7), for the dynamics of moving from the former to the latter.

21. Just within the East Asian sphere, five ways of “doing religion” can be noted: the discursive or scriptural; the personal or cultivational (that is, meditation); the liturgical; the practical (for example, offering incense); and the relational (for instance, building temples, making offerings, taking vows, spreading miracle stories, celebrating deities’ birthdays, venerating ancestors, taking pilgrimage or mountain journeys, establishing religious communities, forming affiliations, organizing festivals, and so on). CHAU (2013, 152) thus admonishes that especially Westerners, prejudicially focused on religious teachings and doctrines, end up with a reductive perspective since the “vast majority of the world’s population who ‘do religion’ in other ways are thus deemed irrelevant (because they are discursively silent).”

22. I develop this line of thinking in various places, including YONG (2007a; 2008f; 2014a, 222–33); the book-length argument is YONG (2008c).

other faiths on their own terms means opening up not just to their ideas but also to their practices. Herein, the kind of self-transformational disposition urged by Schmidt-Leukel is pneumatologically and pentecostally founded, genuinely open to being challenged by the testimony of others, but yet retaining trust in the Spirit of Jesus to guide the journey.

For the moment, then—as there can be no conclusion to what I have long called a “pneumatology of quest” that is always *in via* (YONG 2002, 8; 2005, 10)—suffice to say that my Christian proposal that begins with the Spirit both provides a particularistic confessional framework for grasping our religiously pluralistic world and commends a pluralistic praxis for engaging with it. To the degree that diverse practices feed back into theological self-articulation, a pneumatological approach to religious pluralism will return to reform and reshape Christian identity in the twenty-first century. If that is the case, then while our theologies of religions may be distinct, the paths upon which Perry Schmidt-Leukel and I tread are at least parallel. Whether they are convergent ultimately remains to be seen. But if for now his yeoman’s labor of documenting the diversity of Buddhist responses to pluralism provides empirical perspective for my theological hypothesis, perhaps the Spirit featured in pneumatologies of religions—even mine²³—can also (continue to) inspire his own efforts.

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23. See YONG (2003, chapters 4–5) for other pneumatological theologies of religions.

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