

Richard H. Drummond, *Gautama the Buddha: An essay in religious understanding*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1974. 239 pages including appendices, bibliography, and index. Paperback \$3.95. Heinrich Dumoulin, *Christianity meets Buddhism*, transl. by John C. Maraldo. LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1974. 206 pages including notes and index. Hard cover \$7.95.

A tandem review suggests itself for these two books, even though they were written independently of each other, for both attempt to advance religious understanding, both deal with Buddhism from a Christian frame of reference, yet each moves in a different direction.

Heinrich Dumoulin, a Roman Catholic and a priest belonging to the Society of Jesus, has lived in Japan since 1935 and is Professor of Philosophy and History of Religion at Sophia University in Tokyo. Richard Drummond, a Protestant and a clergyman of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., spent fifteen years as a missionary in Japan and is presently Professor of Ecumenical Mission and History of Religions at Dubuque Theological Seminary in Iowa.

Dumoulin, though accepting in principle the position that the non-Christian religions make positive contributions to the salvation of mankind, is sharply critical of the "theology of religions" for the reason that it often confines itself to general considerations, failing to do justice to the specific and complex character of individual non-Christian religions. He also objects to the proposal of Karl Rahner that upright and devout non-Christians be regarded as "anonymous Christians"—a proposal he considers an unintentionally demeaning way of glossing over the essential "otherness" of the Christian's partner in dialogue.

The course Dumoulin charts can be considered as traversing two legs. On the first he stipulates that "dialogue" between Buddhism and Christianity (with particular reference to Japan) is already taking place, describes some of the forms it has taken, and specifies its goals, namely, mutual understanding and cooperation—not conversion or some kind of syncretistic unity.

On the second leg he introduces a number of themes important to both religions, themes that require in-depth probing in order to deepen mutual understanding and mutual recognition of values. The themes treated begin with what is "close to home" and become progressively abstract, for they start with "religious and existential experience," move through "Buddhist spirituality and mysticism," and conclude with "ultimate reality and the personal." The result is a well-integrated book containing many wise reflections and suggesting a number of issues to be examined in years ahead as members of both faiths engage one another in dialogue and move toward fuller understanding and (hopefully) cooperation.

The kind of understanding Dumoulin aims for is not theological understanding as such but mutual understanding. The means employed is a sympathetic analysis presupposing and seeking to lay bare the common human ground of all religions. If this "common human ground" remains more implicit than explicit, if greater weight is given to the matter of mutual understanding in the realm of concepts than to cooperation in daily life, this by no means detracts from the usefulness of the venture. On the contrary, this essentially open-ended book will be of value both to people of differing religious orientations and to those who pursue religious studies, to the former as a splendid example of how interreligious dialogue can be carried forward, to the latter as a mine of material concerning how people of one religious tradition relate to people of another—an often-neglected area of study.

The trajectory Drummond's inquiry follows can likewise be considered as having two parts. In the first he operates as a historian of religions. Here he first introduces the life and teachings of the Buddha in broad perspective, then devotes three short chapters to *Nirvāṇa*, *Dharma*, and the Non-Self. Despite occasional theological tidbits (some highly interesting), the first three-quarters of his book is largely a synthesis of standard materials.

In the second part Drummond changes hats, now operating as a Christian theologian. Only one-quarter of the book comes under this heading, but this is the seminal part. He traces in Catholic and Protestant history what he discerns as a growing tendency to affirm that God's salvific concern extends to men of all religions, then introduces biblical perspectives in support of the same view. The question next posed is whether and to what extent Gautama the Buddha may be said to manifest the presence and work of the triune God. The argument cannot be reproduced here, but its thrust is that the ethical and spiritual authenticity of the Buddha is to be understood theologically as a direct, if partial, result of the presence and work of God in the world. This assessment is then elaborated by arguments purporting to show that the Buddha and the biblical witness are at one in affirming the incapacity of the phenomenal world to meet the ultimate needs of man, that in context the *Dharma* has correspondences with the Christian belief in a "gracious Presence" and *Karma* with "the Law" in Pauline thought, that what Buddha called *Nirvāṇa* is more than formally similar to what Jesus called the kingdom of God—in sum, that when one takes Jesus the Christ as the standard of truth and value and seeks in this perspective to understand Gautama the Buddha, he can discern many features suggesting that Buddhism should be recognized by Christians as having positive meaning in salvation history.

Because Drummond's book falls into two essentially distinct parts, the question arises as to their interrelation. The author addresses himself to this question in an appendix. The gist of his argument is that while empirical-historical studies of religion are one thing and normative or theological interpretations another, both have their place in the attempt to understand religious phenomena. In this study, history of religions is an ancillary discipline at the service of theology. I myself see no reason to object to this disposition as long as it is remembered that the converse may also obtain.

As a contribution to the "theology of religions," Drummond's work represents, in my opinion, a definite advance. The great problem in this area is to proceed beyond generalities without falling prey to subjective vaporizing. Drummond has not only specified and defended his criteria but applied them to the teaching of the Buddha in a way I find original and edifying. One must admit, however, to a certain sense of disquiet arising from an apparent tendency to harmonize Christian and Buddhist concepts—to accommodate Buddhist to Christian views and ignore what Dumoulin insisted on as the distinctive and irreducible "otherness" of the other. Equally important, one wishes that a clear distinction had been made between "religious men" and "religious institutions," for while the affirmation of God's salvific concern for the former is well demonstrated, the question as to how non-Christian religious traditions and institutions should be evaluated in relation to salvation history is dealt with more by implication than explication.

Before the prospect of a multiplicity of theological interpretations of religion, each from a specific religious frame of reference, one might wish to ask if we are in fact limited to working out ever more sophisticated but essentially particularistic and competitive theologies. John Hick [*God and the universe of faiths* (London: Macmillan Press, 1973)] has recently proposed a

shift from a "Ptolemaic" orientation that sees other religions as circling the sun of Christianity, to a "Copernican" orientation that sees all religions as a universe of responses to one divine reality. Drummond seems to have something like this in view when he speaks, in tentative hints, of the prospect of "convergence." In this book, however, convergence remains an embryo. We are left, therefore, with a "multiverse" of religions and theologies. Reflecting on this situation, one might wish to ask which holds more promise of usefulness: the way of interreligious understanding propounded by Dumoulin or the way of theological understanding advocated by Drummond? This question each reader will doubtless prefer to answer for himself. Meanwhile, it can be noted that these two books, for all their apparent similarity, embody fundamentally different approaches to the question of religious understanding. Each has distinctive merits, and each is warmly recommended.

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