
ON THE FRONTIER OF THE BUDDHISTCHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

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Fonte: Sophia

The author traces his journey into the frontier of the Buddhist-Christian dialogue from his youth, through his studies and practice of Buddhism, to his conversion to Christianity, and finally into the Focolare Movement and the Church's dialogue with Buddhism. As an example of being in the frontier of the dialogue in the Buddhist world, he presents his experiences and reflections during his early dialogues in Japan. In that context, he notes how many of the Buddhist figures with whom he dialogued found similarities between their views and those of Chiara Lubich and the Focolare Movement. His dialogues in Japan opened the door to intellectual and spiritual encounters with some of the great Buddhist thinkers of the twentieth century. The article then describes how he moved from doing dialogue as an individual in the frontier with Buddhism to being part of the ongoing dialogues of the Focolare, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue. He gives examples from these dialogical experiences of similarities between certain Buddhist viewpoints and the unpublished mystical writings of Chiara Lubich that are commonly called "Paradise '49". In doing so, he describes the relationship that developed between himself and Masao Abe, and then Abe's relationship with the Focolare and Pope John Paul II. He also describes the positive reaction of the Dalai Lama upon hearing the views of Chiara Lubich.

Early Journey to the Frontier of Dialogue

I had attended an independent Protestant church as a small child but my family stopped attending after a few years, so I was not baptized nor did I learn much about Christianity. It was not until the university that I began to develop an interest in the question of the existence of God. At the same time, I became interested in Buddhism and one of my professors, Ray Jordan, taught me Zen meditation. So, as I practiced Zen meditation, I also began a quest for a personal God, something that is not found in Buddhism.

One night while sitting in meditation, the thought came to me to pray to God which I had not done since I was a small child. Not knowing how to pray, I simply asked God whether there is more to this life than what I experienced—which at that time was filled with struggle. A deep peace descended over me. This experience opened a door for me, or moved me in a new direction toward the source of this peace that I understood to be God. It also happened at a time when I had to decide where to go for graduate work in philosophy. The choice came down to the University of Hawaii where I could study Buddhist philosophy, or another university where I could only study Western philosophy. One night, I was sitting in meditation at a place by the ocean. I had the strong and clear impression that God was asking me to go to the University of Hawaii and study Buddhism, and he would bring me back and use me for his "own purpose". So, my wife and I and our new-born son went to Hawaii.