

May Buddhists Hope?
A Christian Enquiry
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“All hope abandon, ye who enter in!” (Dante, *Inferno*, Canto 3)

The final and irretrievable loss of all grounds for hope could perhaps be described as the ultimate torment, underlying all the horrors Dante encounters on his journey through hell. This is sufficient indication that in reflecting on hope we are not talking about mere optimism or the ‘positive outlook on life’ purveyed by motivational psychology. We are dealing with an attitude that plumbs the depths of human subjectivity yet which at the same time is cosmic in scope. Moreover, hope, as a concept, is heavily dependent on Jewish and Christian antecedents, whereas it plays no part in Buddhist teaching. This is not to say that Buddhists do not have a kind of eschatology: from ancient India they inherit an abundance of heavens and hells, whose delights and torments are portrayed at least as vividly as their counterparts in the Abrahamic faiths. In Christianity, as we shall see, the scenarios of salvation and damnation and the final battle between good and evil have not so much Jewish as Iranian roots, which in turn go back to pre-Vedic India. Even for Christians, as many contemporary scholars and enquiring laypeople are finding, while the imagery of heaven and hell is at home in the symbolic language prevalent in Jesus’ time, it does not do justice to the full import of his teaching for believers today. In Buddhism, this seems to have been the case from the very beginning: though temples are often illustrated with graphic depictions of the torments of the damned, in the Indian scheme of things neither the bliss of paradise nor the suffering of hell is eternal; beings eventually move on from both to return to the endless cycle of cosmic existence-in-flux known as *samsāra*. The most coveted rebirth is as a human being, because only humans can achieve ultimate liberation from the law of *karma*, according to which the residue of deeds, including our hiddenmost intentions, inexorably determines our future destiny. It is from this, and the ignorance (*avijjā*) that conceals it from us, rather than from ‘hell’, that we are ‘saved’.

The difficulty in finding a Buddhist equivalent of hope goes even deeper. It can fairly be said that, for Buddhists, hope as presented in Christian scripture and doctrine must seem like a form of delusion, a longing for some future transformation of our human lot springing from desire (*taṇhā*, Sanskrit *trṣṇā*, lit. ‘thirst’). But by referring everything back to ‘me’, desire *ipso facto* confines us within the prison of the self (*ātman*, for Buddhists the primary illusion: that there is a substantial self-existing individual or *svabhāva*). For Humanist and Marxist critics, Christian hope has the wrong object: it is a distraction from living fully in the present and building a better future here on earth.¹ The Buddhist aim of extirpating all desire without remainder (*nirodha*), even the desire of final release from becoming, birth and death, seems to be more radical, tackling directly the question of loss and detachment.²

¹ See Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM, 1967), 26-32.

² The American Zen Buddhist David Loy has thematised this fundamental existential condition as ‘lack’, which we continually seek to mask by recurring to the unreality of a constructed ego and the blandishments of equally artificial social and cultural worlds, see David Loy, *Lack and Transcendence: The Problem of Death and Life in Psychotherapy, Existentialism, and Buddhism* (Amherst, Mass.: Humanity Books, 1999). Commenting on an earlier draft of this chapter, Loy said: “Hope is not a

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A story from the Pāli Canon graphically illustrates this dispassionate attitude to trauma and loss. The Buddha is approached by a distraught woman, Visākhā, whose beloved granddaughter has died. Enquiring about the cause of her grief, the Buddha is told of her loss. His response is to prompt Visākhā to reflect on the untold number of bereavements and other troubles that afflict the people of the area. The lesson he draws from this is: if people and things were not dear to us, we would not be sad when we lose them. “Only those are happy and free of care to whom nothing in the world is dear” (*Udāna* VIII, 8). This and many similar stories seem to offer the opposite of consolation: those suffering loss are told, in today’s terminology, to get over it, because loss is our common lot.

These preliminary considerations indicate that there are several clusters of themes we must investigate if we are to give a fair assessment of possible Buddhist equivalents of hope. For Christians, hope is the very medium of faith, the outworking of faith in the temporal dimension: “Hope is nothing else than the expectation of those things which faith has believed to have been truly promised by God”; conversely, “faith is the foundation upon which hope rests, hope nourishes and sustains faith”.³ The concept of a promise given in the past and fulfilled in a future yet to come suggests that an awareness of history is fundamental to the Christian conception of hope. Hope points to the outcome of an unfolding story of which we are part, and this in turn prompts us to think about time, for our relationship to time is a crucial component of ethical responsibility, and it is here that we may engage in a phenomenological analysis that Christianity can share with Buddhism. This gives us historicity, narrativity and temporality as three perspectives on hope which, together, might provide a basis for relating Christian to Buddhist eschatology.

1. Hope and Historicity

The awareness of history and its relevance for the shaping of institutions and ideas – what modern theology called ‘historicity’ (*Geschichtlichkeit*), meaning by this the situatedness of the human in time between memory and anticipation – is a relatively new development arising from the European Enlightenment. Historicity implies a reflexive awareness, a dimension of human subjectivity, a consciousness of being shaped by a determinate past and open to an as yet undetermined future. As a methodological tool, historicity gives scope for distancing and objectifying past events as ‘facts’ which at the same time isolates and identifies the observer’s standpoint as one among possible others. By the same token, it is a social construct, and this in turn implies that the sense of history and its significance is by no means the same or even present in every culture. The so-called ‘primal’ traditions of indigenous peoples deal with history through the oral transmission of elaborate stories

concept I ever heard from my Zen teachers, and I’m not sure how well it fits Buddhism, if it does” (email communication, 24/2/2011). Robert Magliola, on the other hand, who meditated for many years with monks and nuns in Taiwan and Thailand, found that for both groups “‘hope’ was very alive and extremely important” because of their inability to know “what bad karma they had ‘made’ in past lives”, which could bring about “a horrifying retribution for a serious misdeed in a previous life”; thus they would say, “I hope I have a good death” (email communication, 13/4/2011). I would like to thank Robert Magliola, David Loy and John O’Grady for a number of helpful comments on this chapter, though responsibility for the final version remains mine.

³ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. I, ed. John T. McNeill, tr. and ed. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 590.

about culture heroes, whose activities shaped the world and its inhabitants in a kind of continuous present, a time beyond time. This is taken to fall under the category ‘myth’ and is therefore denied any ‘historical’ value in the sense of verifiable fact, yet oral history is the foundation of all historical narrative, as can be seen in cultures to which literacy came late. The long evolution of the Hebrew Bible, with its multitude of genres and its sometimes contradictory accounts of what must have been in some sense historical events, illustrates this process, though it only became fully apparent after controversial attempts to introduce critical methods into biblical scholarship. The conviction that history has religious significance is a fundamental dimension of Christianity’s – and the West’s – Jewish heritage.

There is a widespread assumption that, if historicity is recoverable with regard to the Jewish traditions that flowed into Christianity, it is entirely absent in the Indic traditions which formed the matrix of Buddhism. This assumption has been criticised and modified,⁴ as has the equally simplistic notion that Greek and Hebrew conceptions of history are ‘cyclic’ and ‘linear’ respectively. Von Rad points out that Israel experienced time in a way quite different from ours. It was incapable of abstracting time as an absolute schema of past, present and future from particular events; indeed, Hebrew lacks a word for ‘time’ in the Western sense.⁵ The Greeks, too, though they pioneered the writing of history, knew nothing of historical time as we understand it. As with so many indigenous peoples, it was the great festivals that determined time, not the other way around. Yet as Israel began to realise that its present was preceded by complicated historical developments it began to think of time as stretching out from a known past to an anticipated future, ‘historicising’ the festivals in the process; historical time had now become truly irreversible.⁶

The insight embodied in historicity is that there is no such thing as ‘history’ in a pure state, only *interpreted* history, nowhere more so than when we are considering the religious significance of history:

Christianity is founded upon the history of Jesus, and this particular history establishes criteria according to which Christianity interprets history in the first place. This means: the fact that Christian faith is founded on the history of Jesus does not imply that it is *merely* historical, because in the history of Jesus the transhistorical and transtemporal dominion of God is announced. The legitimation of Jesus and indeed of faith is *not* historical in itself, but derives from an *interpretation* of history supported by faith.⁷

The tensions implicit in this statement were worked out in the nineteenth century ‘quest for the historical Jesus’ and the juxtaposition of a ‘Jesus of history’ to a ‘Christ of faith’.

⁴ See Arvind Sharma, *Hinduism and its Sense of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁵ See Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des alten Testaments, Band II. Die Theologie der prophetischen Überlieferungen Israels* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1980), 108-121, 108-109.

⁶ Von Rad, *Theologie*, 111-118.

⁷ Michael von Brück and Whalen Lai, *Buddhismus und Christentum. Geschichte, Konfrontation, Dialog* (München: Beck, 1997), 294, where they helpfully interrelate the faith community’s *verbum interpretationis* with the *verbum internum* of individual faith experience and the *verbum externum* of data about the historical Jesus.

If historical awareness situates memories and the records of events in interpretative frameworks and contexts of relevance constructed by the interpreter, it is not surprising that in contemporary Buddhism, too, as it enters more and more into the mainstream of historical scholarship and religious pluralism, the question of the relationship between the historical Buddha, the north Indian ruler's son Gautama Śākyamuni, and the transcendental Buddhas of the voluminous scriptures that arose long after his death comes to the fore. Just as Hinduism's re-awakening to its own past was inspired by India's encounter with the West's curiosity about origins and its scepticism of received accounts, Buddhists, in comparable circumstances, soon learned how to parry Christian propaganda with its own weapons. Relations between Buddhists and Christians in Sri Lanka (colonial Ceylon) were often rancorous and sometimes took the form of public debates and polemics.⁸ These were almost exclusively doctrinal; but on a more pragmatic level the Buddhists had no hesitation in adopting the methods used so effectively by Christian proselytisers, such as the printing of pamphlets, and in developing an apologetics which claimed that Buddhism from its earliest origins had been all that Christianity purports to be: historical, verifiable, rational and critical.⁹ In the process, Buddhists came to appreciate their own Indian heritage; the sacred sites of the Buddha's life, his enlightenment (*bodhi*) and his death (*parinirvāṇa*), mentioned so often in the canon, were restored and became places of pilgrimage. More ominously, the great chronicles of the island of Laṅkā, the *Dīpavaṃsa* and the *Mahāvāṃsa*, began to be seen, in the light of the nationalisms that sustained Western imperialism, as sources for a Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism and a consequent rewriting of history.¹⁰

In the West, too, the historical integrity of Buddhism is sometimes compromised. Senior Western Buddhists seem to be becoming increasingly alarmed by the tendency among Western converts to Buddhism, many of them highly educated, to abandon their critical faculties and enthusiastically embrace the quasi-mythical legitimations of their lineages proposed by their Asian spiritual masters. The American Buddhist scholar Rita Gross urges Buddhists to take their own teaching of impermanence (*anicca*) seriously and develop a non-sectarian history of Buddhism which does not cling to culturally determined peculiarities of their traditions.¹¹

There is, of course, a sense in which the Buddhist *dhamma* or teaching is fundamentally atemporal. The saṃsāric cycle of flux and rebirth is without beginning or end, as is the succession of *kalpas* or world-ages within which it continually manifests itself, each of which brings forth an Enlightened One (*buddho*) to point out the way to liberation from rebirth. Final liberation (*mokkha*, *mokṣa*) severs all bonds

⁸ See Elizabeth J. Harris, *Theravada Buddhism and the British Encounter: Religious, Missionary and Colonial Experience in Nineteenth Century Sri Lanka* (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁹ An example is the eminently reasonable exposition by K.N. Jayatilleke, *The Message of the Buddha*, edited posthumously by Ninian Smart (London: Allen & Unwin, 1975); a considerably more polemical, though sharply argued, approach is that of Jayatilleke's student Gunapala Dharmasiri, *A Buddhist Critique of the Christian Concept of God* (Colombo: Lake House, 1974).

¹⁰ See the insightful work of L.A. Jude Lal Fernando, *Dynamics of Essentialist Representations of Nationhood and the Politics of Interpretation: The Role of Religion in the Making and Unmaking of the Sri Lankan Nation-State* (PhD thesis, Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin, 2008).

¹¹ See Rita M. Gross, "The Crisis of Authority: Buddhist History for Buddhist Practitioners", *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 30 (2010), 59-72. See also Peter Harvey, "Between Controversy and Ecumenism: Intra-Buddhist Relationships", Perry Schmidt-Leukel, ed, *Buddhist Attitudes to Other Religions* (St Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 2008), 114-142.

with the karmic process in the reality-beyond-reality called Nirvāṇa, but this, being absolutely unconditioned and beyond the scope of language and conceptual thought, is strictly speaking ineffable; as the *Sutta-Nipāta* puts it with admirable simplicity: “When all conditions are removed / All ways of telling are removed” (SN 1076).

Historically, however, teachings developed over time. As successive Buddhist spiritual movements and schools of thought emerged in India and moved out to permeate virtually the whole of Asia, their adherents had no compunction in producing scriptures to legitimate their particular teachings, often attributing them to Gautama Śākyamuni as the historical Buddha, even though they arose centuries after his death. The Theravāda traditions of south and southeast Asia, notwithstanding the fact that their canon, composed in a Prakrit or local language called Pāli, was written down some five centuries after the Buddha’s death at about the same time as the New Testament, claimed to have preserved the original and authoritative teaching (*dhamma*) and monastic rule (*vinaya*). The schools which emerged in the first centuries CE, known as the *Mahāyāna* or ‘Great Vehicle’, therefore needed to make plausible that it was in fact their teachings which fully revealed the *Dharma*, now conceived as the utterly transcendent Buddha-nature itself. The key to this hermeneutical feat was the technique known as skilful or expedient means (*kauśalya-upāya*). According to this, Gautama had deliberately withheld certain advanced teachings because of the limited capacity of his original hearers (meaning contemporary adherents of what was deprecatingly dubbed the *Hīnayāna* or ‘Lesser Vehicle’), disclosing them only now to disciples and Bodhisattvas of superior spiritual attainments. This is patently evident in the *Lotus Sūtra* with its disparaging remarks about *arhats* or purportedly enlightened ones. It was thus something of a shock when Japanese scholars began to assert that the teachings of the Mahāyāna *sūtras* could not possibly stem from the historical Buddha, with the no less controversial rider that the teachings are true quite independently of who uttered them when or where: doctrinal truth has nothing to do with historical reality.¹²

Notwithstanding this all-pervasive ahistoricity and atemporality of Buddhist traditions, a complex but coherent narrative of the Buddha’s life was meticulously preserved, allowing us to reconstruct his deeds and words in their north Indian context with all the abundant detail of personalities and places provided by the Pāli and other Buddhist canons. Though it is generally agreed that it is no more possible to compose a biography of Gautama than it is to write a life of Jesus, the outlines of an ‘historical Buddha’ definitely emerge from the abundance of evidence handed down by oral tradition.¹³ Indeed, Gautama has been called the first identifiable personage in an Indian history otherwise consisting of unverifiable legend. It is already apparent that these questions are bound up with the continuity of tradition, the legitimation of authority and the possibility of authentic development in Buddhism, as are their counterparts in Christianity.

¹² See von Brück and Lai, *Buddhismus und Christentum*, 298-301.

¹³ See, for instance, Hans Wolfgang Schumann, *Der historische Buddha. Leben und Lehre des Gautama* (Kreuzlingen und München: Hugendubbel, 2004 rev. ed.); Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, *Der Buddha. Leben und Lehre* (Stuttgart-Berlin-Köln: Kohlhammer, 1990); Trevor Ling, *The Buddha: Buddhist Civilization in India and Ceylon* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976); and many others, right back to classics such as Hermann Oldenberg, *Buddha. Sein Leben, seine Lehre, seine Gemeinde* (Stuttgart und Berlin: Cotta, 1920).

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The problem of relating a timeless truth to particular historical persons and events is present, then, though in different terms, in both Buddhist and Christian traditions. The whole thrust of the concept of historicity, especially as it was appropriated by theology, is to show the immanence of the transcendent in the very sinews of historical existence. The significance of the Hebrew prophets consists not in foretelling the future but in recognising the hand of God in the events of history itself:

This relationship of correspondence of the prophets to world history is nothing less than the key to understanding them aright; for the new actions of God in history which they perceived were for them on a par with the old canonical historical norms; indeed, the prophets grew in the knowledge that this new historical activity would surpass and therefore more or less replace the old.¹⁴

This developed into the realisation that history was moving towards a fulfilment, a definitive end of world-time in which God's actions within history would culminate, though this would necessarily occur 'outside' history.¹⁵ In other words, they 'eschatologised' history, thus establishing the Jewish component in the framework for what later became apocalyptic, the visionary portrayal of the final catastrophe which coloured the mental world of Jesus and his contemporaries and is most vividly represented in the New Testament by the *Book of Revelation*. Central to this mentality was not only the Jewish idea of Israel as a kingdom under God's dominion but also the Iranian symbolism of the triumph of the 'Wise Lord', Ahura-Mazdā, portrayed by Zarathustra as a judgement at the end of time which would separate the evil from the good.¹⁶ This conception is thoroughly dualistic and as such, especially as it was developed in the *Books of Enoch*,¹⁷ it permeates Jewish thinking about the restoration of the kingdom of Israel and shapes the earliest Christian expectation of the imminent end of history. The 'kingdom of God' was already among them (Luke 17:21), and "there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:27), but its non-arrival as an apocalyptic event constrained the Christians to come to terms with historical existence under the political circumstances of the *Pax Romana*. God's promise to the patriarchs, renewed through the prophets, was fulfilled in the coming of the Messiah, but its final outcome was to be postponed until he came in glory.

The structure of Christian faith thus becomes one of promise and fulfilment, defined by hope:

Hence it is not our experiences which make faith and hope, but it is faith and hope that make experiences and bring the human spirit to an ever new and restless transcending of itself.¹⁸

¹⁴ Von Rad, *Theologie*, 122; see 120.

¹⁵ See von Rad, *Theologie*, 124-127.

¹⁶ See Rudolf Otto, *Reich Gottes und Menschensohn. Ein religionsgeschichtlicher Versuch* (München: Beck, 1940, 2nd rev. ed.). Otto derives the Iranian terminology from the Sanskrit: 'kingdom' or 'dominion' = *kṣatra*; 'lord' = *asura*, i.e. the Vedic god Varuṇa; 'king' = *rājā*, 7-20.

¹⁷ On this see Otto, *Reich Gottes*, 132-154, where he shows how Enoch draws on the Iranian notion of a wise judge and his good spirits in a final struggle against Ahriman and his evil spirits to portray the coming end, even identifying himself with the 'Son of Man', 155-170.

¹⁸ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 120.

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The promise revealed to Israel has already been fulfilled in the coming of Christ (*past*), yet it is still awaiting fulfilment in the final judgement at the end of time (*future*). The Christian life of the individual, and of the Church as a participant in world history, is lived out in the tension between these defining historical poles (*present*):

The parousia of Christ .. is conceived in the New Testament only in categories of expectation, so that it means not *praesentia Christi* but *adventus Christi*, and is not his eternal presence bringing time to a standstill, but his ‘coming’, as our Advent hymns say, opening the road to life in time, for the life of time is hope.¹⁹

The temporal structure of commemoration and expectation is reflected in many liturgical formulae (‘Christ *has* died, Christ *is* risen, Christ *will* come again’).

Buddhism knows a certain equivalent of this in its conception of the Bodhisattva, the Great Being on the threshold of final liberation in *nirvāṇa* after coursing through countless rebirths in the karmic realm of *saṃsāra*. This reveals what one author calls the “karmic depth”²⁰ of the Buddha narrative. It is perhaps more appropriate to characterise this as cosmic rather than historical as scenarios unfold such as those throughout the *Lotus Sūtra*, which portray the Buddha as the personification of the eternal Dharma, illuminating the furthest recesses of countless universes through endless aeons. But Buddhism also evolved structures of expectation. The final achievement of enlightenment, though it is never allowed to be the object of desire, is in a certain sense a hoped-for fulfilment, the culmination of not one but countless lifetimes of discipline and renunciation. The Buddha Śākyamuni of the present world-age is one in a succession whose names are known, as is that of the coming Buddha Maitreya (from *maitrī*, ‘loving-kindness’) after this aeon has passed away. A whole new tradition in Mahāyāna Buddhism, by far the most numerous in East Asia though it is less known in the West, developed out of the quasi-mythical account of the forty-eighth vow of the Bodhisattva Dharmākara, whereby he undertook not to attain final liberation in Nirvāṇa until he had saved all beings from ignorance and suffering, by virtue of which he became the transcendent Buddha Amitābha, ‘Bringer of Life’, or Amitāyus, ‘Bringer of Light’, in Japanese Amida. This surely entails nothing less than an expectation of salvation for all beings, couched in terms of rebirth in a Buddha-realm or Pure Land in which the liberated would enjoy the bliss of Nirvāṇa. Making a vow, like promising, is a paradigmatic performative speech act, whose utterance in good faith commits the promiser to carry out the course of action proposed. Given this deep structure, to which hope is the correlate, it may well be that there is a Buddhist equivalent to hope as the *Existential* or fundamental condition of existence for Christian life and eschatology. But in order to establish this we need to explore further dimensions of their respective attitudes of expectation.

2. Hope and Narrativity

¹⁹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 31.

²⁰ John S. Strong, *The Buddha: A Short Biography* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2001), 16-19. Strong provides not so much a biography as the structural framework around which the widely varying accounts of the Buddha’s life are constructed.

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In Buddhism and Christianity, as indeed in Judaism and Islam and many other religious traditions, there is an element of story-telling: one listens to a story and accepts it on faith. “But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed?”, exclaims St Paul: “And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?” (Rom 10:14) – who would recount the story of Jesus as it later came to be handed down, in markedly different forms, in the Gospels, and Jesus’ own parables as recorded therein. The Buddhist *sūtras* typically begin with an assertion which is meant to guarantee their authenticity by indicating their provenance from original witnesses, for example:

Thus have I heard: At one time the Blessed One was living among the Kurus, at Kammāsadamma, a market town of the Kuru people. There the Blessed One addressed the monks thus... (*Dīgha-Nikāya* 22)

In neither case does this imply verifying the historical accuracy of the story in the modern sense. While it has now become possible to do this to a limited extent, thanks to the techniques developed by modern scholarship, this is not the main point of responding to a story of religious salvation. The ‘historicity’ of such stories can have a different bearing on the ‘truth’ of what is contained in them. The Gospel of Luke opens with an account of a Roman census of Palestine (Luke 2:1-3); the Christian creed mentions the obscure provincial governor Pontius Pilate. It is crucially important to Christian faith *that* Jesus of Nazareth lived and died; the *meaning* of his life and death for us, however, is conveyed in the variations on the *story* of his birth, his teaching, his arrest and crucifixion and – beyond the boundaries of the historically verifiable – his resurrection and ascension to await his second coming at the end of time. The historicity of the Buddha-legend is much less accessible and does not have the same central importance as the Dharma he revealed, though much of what he said and did and his subsequent impact on the history of India and the world can be reconstructed. But the stories of Gautama and Jesus have their meaning and authority *in themselves*, as narratives, and it is the significance of this intrinsic ‘narrativity’ that we must now investigate.

The particular linguistic structuring of texts which links events occurring over time into a meaningful succession is known as ‘emplotment’. This concept of plot or *muthos* derives from Aristotle’s *mimēsis*, yielding not only the idea of narrative as a textually constructed world but also that of ‘narrated time’ as a structuring of the life-world of the reader.²¹ Emplotment, indeed, according to Paul Ricoeur, is the key to the relationship between time and narrative:

... my basic hypothesis is that between the activity of narrating a story and the temporal character of human experience there exists a correlation that is not merely accidental but that presents a transcultural form of necessity. To put it another way, *time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a*

²¹ See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol.1 (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), chapter 2. Ricoeur distinguishes *mimēsis* 1 (prefiguration), 2 (configuration) and 3 (refiguration). In the following I draw on my contribution to the forthcoming *Festschrift* for Francis X. D’Sa SJ, ed. Clemens Mendonca and Bernd Jochen Hilberath, “Time and Narrative in Buddhism and Christianity”.

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*narrative mode and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.*²²

Ricoeur explains this as a

refiguration of our temporal experience by this constructed time. *We are following therefore the destiny of a prefigured time that becomes a refigured time through the mediation of a configured time.*²³

These are the three dimensions of *mimēsis* that allow the meaning of stories to engage with the meaning of existence. The first, the prefiguration of meaning in the text, might be called a semantics of action, for as its inner entelechy is disclosed through the second dimension, emplotment, it becomes the symbolic mediation of action, and according to the ordering of its temporal elements it reveals goals and motives which raise questions about who is acting and why. “In passing from the paradigmatic order of action to the syntagmatic order of narrative, the terms of the semantics of action acquire integration and actuality”.²⁴ Narrative thus supplies symbolic resources for the practical field, making the private public and action ‘readable’.²⁵ Narrativity, even as fiction, has its own kind of reference: arising *in* being, it sheds light *on* being, and its reception demands a fusion of horizons, the text’s and the reader’s; if poetry redescribes the world, narrative resignifies the world.²⁶

Whereas Christianity was conceived entirely within the medium of the “history-like” Biblical stories,²⁷ combining story-telling (*Bericht*) with the praise of God (*Anrede*) and yielding genres such as law, prophecy, wisdom sayings and hymns,²⁸ Buddhism, from the very beginning, was couched in an already existing quasi-philosophical terminology, such as can be found in the *Upaniṣads*. This was the medium of intense debates among the Buddha’s contemporaries which call to mind the philosophical schools of ancient Greece. The Buddha, too, taught in parables and illustrative stories, but the main content of the *Sutta-Piṭaka* (‘The Basket of the *Sūtras*’, i.e. the collection of teaching discourses) is subtle psychological analysis of the human condition, empirically based and logically argued. Always presupposing the power of the Enlightened One’s personality and the authenticity of his testimony, and mindful of his constant teaching that deductions from ‘theories’ or ‘views’ (*diṭṭhī*) are irrelevant to the work of purification, it is nevertheless the force of these arguments that again and again precipitates the insight in which the liberation of his listeners fundamentally consists. In Jesus’ case, again allowing for his compelling personal presence, it is the paradoxes structurally encoded in his incomparable parables that ‘turn people’s minds around’ (*metanōia*). Instead, then, in Ricoeur’s apt phrase, of “extracting anemic generalities”²⁹ from the biblical stories as the starting point of a speculative theology, a narrative theology would work with the narrative structures of the stories themselves. This should be possible in the Buddhist context as well.

²² Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 52.

²³ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 54.

²⁴ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 56.

²⁵ See Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 56-58.

²⁶ See Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* 1, 78, 81.

²⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 244.

²⁸ Ricoeur, *Figuring*, 246.

²⁹ Ricoeur, *Figuring*, 237.

In Buddhism as in Christianity, the initial narratives embodying the significance of the life, teaching and legacy of Gautama and Jesus were amplified and reconfigured into powerful symbolic structures, which systematised the original revelations in forms which provided the basis of future doctrinal developments. This process gave Christians the creeds – which were called ‘Symbols’ in the early centuries – and the decrees of the great Christological councils. Buddhists, in the course of a long and involved evolution in controversy and dialogue with their Brahmin opponents over a thousand years, developed a doctrinal edifice which contemporary Buddhists are beginning to call ‘Buddhist theology’ in a conscious comparison with its Christian counterpart.³⁰ At its core stands the symbolic structure known as the *Trikāya* or ‘Three Bodies’ of the Buddha. In texts such as the *Lotus Sūtra*, which may have been composed as early as the second or third century CE³¹ and became immensely influential in Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, the Buddha is represented as a transcendent being illuminating the entire cosmos with the brilliance of his teaching (*dharma*) and the perfection of his nature (*dharmatā*).

The resulting systematisation of these developments distinguished a ‘manifestation’ or ‘transformation body’ (*nirmāṇa-kāya*) of the historical Buddha, which if the norms of Christian orthodoxy were applied would have to be called docetic; a ‘body of communal enjoyment’ (*saṃbhoga-kāya*), in which Buddhas appear in their full glory to delight the minds of Bodhisattvas and the eyes of the enlightened; and the formless ‘body of the transcendent Buddha-nature’ (*dharma-kāya*), a conception which seems reminiscent of Hindu rather than Buddhist thought but which plays an important role in East Asian Buddhism.³² This yields the following schema:

Buddhology	Christology
<i>Dharma-kāya</i> (eternal Buddha-nature)	Eternal Word
<i>Sam̄bhoga-kāya</i> (body of communal bliss)	Risen Christ
<i>Nirmāṇa-kāya</i> (earthly manifestation body)	Historical Jesus

We may take the term ‘body’ as a metaphor for something very like what ‘person’ represents in Trinitarian theology. The *Trikāya* doctrine, which may be traced back to the Yogācāra or ‘meditation consciousness’ school in the fourth century,³³ while not an exact equivalent of the Trinity, is yet an invitation to reflect with Buddhists on the levels of intelligibility involved in historical mediations of transcendence. In each

³⁰ Other variants are ‘Buddhology’ and ‘Dharmalogy’. See John Makransky, *Buddhahood Embodied* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1997); Roger Jackson and John Makransky, eds., *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), especially the introductory essay by José Cabezon; from the Christian side see Paul J. Griffiths, *On Being Buddha: Maximal Greatness and the Doctrine of Buddhahood in Classical India* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1994). In the following I draw on my contribution to Declan Marmion and Gesa Thiessen, eds., *Trinity and Salvation: Theological, Spiritual and Aesthetic Perspectives* (Oxford et al.: Peter Lang, 2009), “Creator Spirit: A Narrative Theology of the Trinity in Interreligious Relations”, 161-180, 170-177.

³¹ Though the original Sanskrit manuscripts have not been preserved, copies have been found going back to the fifth or sixth century; by this time there had been numerous Chinese translations. See Kōgen Mizuno, *Buddhist Sūtras: Origin, Development, Transmission* (Tokyo: Kosei, 1982).

³² For a succinct presentation, using slightly different translations from those employed here, see Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *Understanding Buddhism* (Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press, 2006), 108-112.

³³ See von Brück and Lai, *Buddhismus und Christentum*, 461-466.

tradition, the symbolic structure thus evolved becomes normative for the re-telling of the original story and is thus a touchstone of orthodoxy. The extent to which the narrative element in each of these reformulations correlates with what Christians call hope is less easily recognised. The key to unravelling this problem, I should like to propose, lies in the relationship of each tradition's core convictions to time, and to this we must now turn.

3. Hope and Temporality

For the Hebrews, as we have seen, a 'cultic' and a 'chronological' conception of time existed side by side: having learnt to grasp the present as the *outcome* of a past which *looks forward* to a future, they began to experience time as irreversible, rather than as the cyclical renewal of a sacral order, for:

This sacral understanding of the world is essentially ahistorical; or at least in it the very thing that Israel saw as constitutive for its faith, namely the uniqueness of God's saving deeds within history, had no place.³⁴

In considering the eschatological, then, which the prophets introduced into the Hebrew conception of history, we cannot avoid the problem of time, which for St Augustine was *distensio animi*, a temporal succession in the mind.³⁵ The uniqueness of each individual human life and the particularity of historical events are especially intense for Christians because they are bounded by time. *Hapax* – once only – is the *Leitmotif* of Christian existence (see Hebr 7:27, 9:12, 10:10). Both the responsibility accruing to each moral act and the uniqueness of the Christ event as the turning point of history, on this understanding, are intimately bound up with our situatedness in time. The entire structure of Christian faith is determined by its continuity with the story of creation, which implies that history and the cosmos itself had a *beginning* (protology); its reference to the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection as prefigured by the prophets in their interpretation of the history of Israel, in the belief that this is the *turning point* of history (soteriology); and the outcome towards which this historical and indeed cosmic drama is heading, which assumes that history and cosmos will have an *end* (eschatology). A corollary of this, and a difficulty for our present enterprise, is that without a beginning there is no story; and the fundamental Buddhist philosophy of interconnectedness or 'co-dependent origination' of all things emphatically rejects an absolute beginning of the world as it rejects an absolute end, for these would entail a first cause and a final goal outside the world.³⁶

Von Brück and Lai, questioning the assumption that there is an insuperable difference between Christian historicity and Buddhist timelessness, nevertheless propose that a structure of expectation is an integral part of the Buddhist logic of salvation.³⁷ Buddhists, as they rightly point out, manifest at least as much moral responsibility in

³⁴ Von Rad, *Theologie*, 120; see 117-118.

³⁵ Augustine's conception of time, together with Aristotle's account of emplotment, forms the starting point of Ricoeur's analysis, see *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, chapter 1.

³⁶ This question plays a crucial part in the fascinating discussions between scientists and the Dalai Lama recorded by Pier Luigi Luisi with Zara Houshmand, *Mind and Life: Discussions with the Dalai Lama on the Nature of Reality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

³⁷ See von Brück and Lai, *Buddhismus und Christentum*, 328. My schematisations in what follows are loosely based on theirs, 330-343.

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history and society as Christians, “inspired by faith (in what is past), hope (for the future) and love (in the present)”; indeed, “the reconstruction of the Buddhist sense of history includes a critique of the Christian tendency to absolutise historicity”.³⁸ The Hebrew scheme of things, which became paradigmatic for Christian faith, might be represented thus:

Patriarchs	→	Exodus	→	Messiah
<i>past</i>	→	<i>central event</i>	→	<i>future</i>

The Christian temporal structure deriving from this would be:

Prophets	→	Christ-event	→	Parousia
<i>past</i>	→	<i>central event</i>	→	<i>future</i>

There are major streams within Buddhism, however, which have a not dissimilar temporal structure. One is the Buddha-legend itself:

Previous Buddhas	→	Enlightenment	→	Maitreya
<i>past</i>	→	<i>central event</i>	→	<i>future</i>

Another, though quasi-mythical, shapes a dramatic narrative:

Bodhisattvas	→	Dharmākara’s vow	→	Pure Land
<i>past</i>	→	<i>central event</i>	→	<i>future</i>

In the Christian scheme, it is God, conceived as the Creator Spirit who intervenes in history, who is centrally involved in the unfolding soteriological process; in the Buddhist, the eternal Dharma is the transcendent dimension of persons and events whose existence in time is empty of independent subsistence. The emergence of a Buddha – Gautama in the quasi-historical reality of his ‘manifestation body’ (*nirmāṇa-kāya*), Amitābha in the quasi-mythical realm of his Pure Land – marks the end of an age of ignorance and the beginning of a time of promise.³⁹

At the root of the Buddhist insight that life consists of ‘unsatisfactoriness’ or ‘incompleteness’ (*dukkha*, often translated ‘suffering’) is ‘impermanence’ or ‘transitoriness’ (*anicca*), which is a temporal category. The fundamental doctrinal development of Mahāyāna Buddhism, though in continuity with its origins in the *Abhidhamma* or analytical tradition of what is now called the Theravāda, was that this existence governed by ignorance (*avijjā*) and delusion (*moha*) in the endless cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*) is one and the same as the liberated existence ‘beyond telling’ (*nibbāna*, *nirvāṇa*). In other words, non-duality (*a-dvaita*) is the touchstone of all authentically Buddhist existential analysis. This is apparent in the meditation tradition (*dhyāna*, Chin. *Ch’an*, Jap. *Zen*), which for its intellectual framework relied on the great Madhyamaka thinker Nāgārjuna (*ca.* 200 CE), who declared:

There is not the slightest difference
Between cyclic existence [*saṃsāra*] and *nirvāṇa*.

³⁸ Von Brück and Lai, *Buddhismus und Christentum*, 329.

³⁹ See von Brück and Lai, *Buddhismus und Christentum*, 337.

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There is not the slightest difference
Between nirvāṇa and cyclic existence. (MMK 25:19)⁴⁰

This non-dualism extends without compromise to the relationship of language to conceptual thought and of both to what is falsely taken to be a separate ‘reality’; concepts have meaning only in relation to each other.⁴¹ It goes without saying that any dualism between past and present or present and future is rigorously eliminated. According to the *Platform Sūtra*, thinking, rightly understood, is not-thinking, because any admission that thinking grasped anything distinct from itself would mean attachment to its object, and the eradication of attachment is the very essence of Buddhist liberation: “What is no-thought? The Dharma of no-thought means: even though you see all things, you do not attach to them ... being free and having achieved release is known as the practice of no-thought”; further, “No-thought is not to think even when involved in thought”.⁴² This is a striking way of expressing the fundamental insight that ‘emptiness’ (*śūnyatā*) is not a metaphysical *concept* designating some transcendent reality, but the culmination of the *practice* of non-attachment, the utter elimination of ‘clinging’ (*upādāna*). To achieve this is to awaken the ‘mind of enlightenment’ (*bodhicitta*), which has been described as “the manifestation, even the irruption, within us of something transcendental”, comparable perhaps to the Holy Spirit in Christian theology. This is not something merely individual, pertaining to a particular person; it is “supra-individual but not collective”, the realisation of emptiness and compassion as absolutes, though refracted through conditioned existence as the individual acts of compassion-in-emptiness which the enlightened can practise. A Bodhisattva is one of whom *bodhicitta* has taken complete possession; it is simply the undiluted manifestation of something we already are.⁴³ To achieve *bodhicitta* is to realise in oneself the Buddha-mind or Buddha-nature:

In our mind itself a Buddha exists.
Our own Buddha is the true Buddha.
If we do not have in ourselves the Buddha mind,
Then where are we to seek the Buddha?⁴⁴

It may be possible to set this in relation with Rahner’s conception of the ‘supernatural existential’, which corresponds to the indwelling love of the Trinity.⁴⁵

In order to illustrate this, we turn briefly to the Pure Land tradition of Amida Buddhism as exemplified in the thought of the great Japanese mystic and thinker

⁴⁰ *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna’s Mūla-Madhyamaka-Kārikā*, translation and commentary by Jay L. Garfield (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 75, also 331-333.

⁴¹ See Schmidt-Leukel, *Understanding Buddhism*, 119.

⁴² *Avatamsaka-Sūtra*, tr. Yampolsky, cit. Perry Schmidt-Leukel, „Den Löwen brüllen hören“. *Zur Hermeneutik eines christlichen Verständnisses der buddhistischen Heilsbotschaft* (Paderborn-München-Wien-Zürich: Schöningh, 1992), 587, 588. In what follows I can only refer briefly to Schmidt-Leukel’s superb exposition of the continuity at the core of all genuinely Buddhist traditions.

⁴³ Sangharakshita, *The Bodhisattva Ideal: Wisdom and Compassion in Buddhism* (Birmingham: Windhorse Publications, 1999), 31-38.

⁴⁴ *Avatamsaka-Sūtra*, tr. Yampolsky, cit. Schmidt-Leukel, “Den Löwen...”, 581.

⁴⁵ See J.D. May, “Sympathy and Empathy: The Compassionate Bodhisattva and the Love of Christ”, Jerald D. Gort, Henry Jansen, and Wessel Stoker, eds., *Crossroad Discourses between Christianity and Culture* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010), 395-411, 400-401.

Shinran Shōnin (1173-1262), pupil of Hōnen Shōnin (1133-1212) and founder of the *Jōdo-Shin* school. Far from being a mere populariser who made the difficult doctrines of Zen accessible to ordinary people in a watered-down form, Shinran was not only a rebel (he married a Buddhist nun) but a profound thinker for whom Amida represented the possibility of liberation for all beings through his primordial vow, the manifestation of his limitless love:

If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters, with sincere mind entrusting themselves, aspiring to be born in my land, and saying my Name perhaps even ten times, should not be born there, may I not attain the supreme enlightenment. Excluded are those who commit the five grave offenses and those who slander the right dharma.⁴⁶

For Shinran this was “the highest expression of the very core of Buddhist teaching”.⁴⁷ The formless Dharma-body can only perform its liberating function if it becomes manifest in the form of Amida; in him the complementary movements from formlessness to form and from form to formlessness intersect.⁴⁸ The response demanded by the great compassion (*mahā-karuṇā*) of Amida is *shinjin*, ‘faith’ or the trusting attitude of a pure heart, but this is not attained by our ‘own-power’ (*jiriki*), rather it is solely attributable to the ‘other-power’ (*tariki*) of Amida’s compassion, which at the same time is its object. Only through the exercise of *shinjin* can Nirvāṇa be realised.⁴⁹ It follows that *shinjin* means transcending all temporal categories, because birth into the Pure Land is integral to the practice of *shinjin* itself and is not bound to any point in time such as the hour of death or the end of the world.⁵⁰ Exactly as in Zen, then – though differently symbolised – there is no hint of dualism between the compassion of Amida and the mind of those liberated by his will to save all beings, between the Pure Land and the practice of those striving to attain it. Sharing Amida’s mind of compassion *is* liberation, right here in the midst of life in time: “*karuṇā* becomes manifest *as* Amitābha”.⁵¹ For Shinran, “the Pure Land is not something to attain, for we are already in the Pure Land; our practice does not help to take us there, but expresses gratitude”, a stance which overcomes the “duality of practice *leading to* awakening”.⁵²

This confronts us anew with the problem of understanding the temporal structure of Buddhist historicity as the context of hope in Buddhism. The Bodhisattva Dharmākara might be termed the ‘mythical pre-existence’ of the transcendent Buddha Amitābha; but Amitābha manifests in history not as Dharmākara, but as Gautama Śākyamuni. The ‘three bodies’ doctrine is meant to explain how this is possible: Śākyamuni is the *nirmāṇa-kāya* or bodily manifestation in space-time of the *sambhoga-kāya* or

⁴⁶ From *The Larger Sukhāvāṭīvyūha-sūtra* as cited by Shinran in his ‘Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls [*Songō shinzō meimon*]’, *The Collected Works of Shinran* Vol. 1, ed. Dennis Hirota *et al.* (Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997), 493.

⁴⁷ Schmidt-Leukel, “*Den Löwen...*”, 607.

⁴⁸ See Schmidt-Leukel, “*Den Löwen...*”, 611.

⁴⁹ See the brief presentation in Schmidt-Leukel, *Understanding Buddhism*, 149-152, and the much fuller development of the theme in *id.*, “*Den Löwen...*”, 605-632. See also the ground-breaking doctoral thesis of John O’Grady, *Beyond Immanence: A Buddhological Observing of Grace* (Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin, 2010).

⁵⁰ See Schmidt-Leukel, “*Den Löwen...*”, 627.

⁵¹ Von Brück and Lai, *Buddhismus und Christentum*, 344.

⁵² David Loy, email communication, 24.2.2011; the emphasis is mine.

Amitābha's body of bliss. This perspective amounts to an interpretation of the whole of history by establishing a temporal framework within which we may grasp its significance, in somewhat the same way as the world-transcending reality of the risen Christ provides the horizon for our interpretation of the historical Jesus. Amitābha is the fullness of what first became manifest in the Enlightenment of Gautama. This perspective becomes truly historical when we realise that Maitreya, the Buddha of the coming age, is expected to be not only an Enlightened One but a world-ruler who will make real the Dharma in world-history, a kind of Buddhist Messiah. His advent will change the course of history. One is inevitably reminded of the promised second coming of Christ to establish God's dominion over the whole of reality.⁵³

Enough has been said to indicate that it is perhaps not necessarily contradictory to say that a structure of hope devoid of all attachment and reference to self is present in, indeed central to, all Buddhism. What the Japanese called 'original enlightenment' (*hongaku*), the state of being enlightened which constitutes our True Self, our Original Face, our intrinsic Buddha-nature, but of which we remain ignorant, may seem to remove those who realise it from any involvement in historical or social processes, but the opposite is the case – and this is the whole point and power of non-dualism: precisely in Amida Buddhism, those who have attained their transcendent Buddha-nature 'return' (*gensō*) to the world of moral dilemmas and ethical commitments to live out the Great Compassion of the Bodhisattvas in the struggles of everyday existence, their own and others'. This is perhaps easier to recognise in practice than to account for in terms of doctrine, but it amounts to no less than the working out of the Dharma in historical existence in expectation of the coming of Maitreya to usher in a new age of enlightenment after the terminal decline of this era of evil and ignorance.⁵⁴ One way of conceptualising this is a variation on the 'two truths' (transcendental, *paramārtha-satya*, and conventional, *samvṛti-satya*), a fundamental doctrine of later Buddhism: the Dharma itself represents a 'vertical' dimension of existence which transcends historical vicissitudes; the other is the 'horizontal' dimension in which things can get better, delusion can be overcome and we can look towards the future.⁵⁵ The key Buddhist insight, from which Christians can profit, is that these two dimensions are non-dual, just as form and emptiness are in classical Madhyamaka. The question that remains is how hope in the horizontal dimension relates to the transcendence that characterises the vertical dimension.

The tenor of this essay has been that Christianity has much to learn from the rigour of Buddhist non-dualism as it applies to historical existence and the exercise of hope, particularly in its refusal to acquiesce in any dichotomy between good and evil, 'us' and 'them'.⁵⁶ A striking example of this is David Loy's reaction as an American Buddhist to the atrocities of 11 September 2001.⁵⁷ He pointed out that the standpoints

⁵³ See von Brück and Lai, *Buddhismus und Christentum*, 343-347.

⁵⁴ See von Brück and Lai, *Buddhismus und Christentum*, 342-347.

⁵⁵ I owe this clarification to an email communication from David Loy, 24.2.2010.

⁵⁶ Paul Knitter's gripping account of how painful he found it as a Christian committed to peace and justice to become "one with the death squads" he was opposing in Latin America can be found in his autobiographical and profoundly theological book *Without Buddha I Could Not be a Christian* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2009), chapter 7, esp. 173-174.

⁵⁷ See David Loy, *The Great Awakening: A Buddhist Social Theory* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003), chapter 5, "The Nonduality of Good and Evil: Buddhist Reflections on the New Holy War", 103-120. This chapter originated as an email circulated to friends immediately after 9/11, which led to some sharp rejoinders from those who found Loy's perspective unpalatable.

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of Osama bin Laden and President Bush were mirror opposites, in that they unhesitatingly attributed evil to the ‘other’. This absolves each from what Buddhists would call our shared ‘karmic responsibility’ for *all* evil, which in turn derives from the delusion that we are somehow separate from the world we are ‘in’, including other people. “Paradoxically, then, one of the main causes of evil in this world has been human attempts to eradicate evil”.⁵⁸

For Paul Knitter, after Buddhist discipline had purified his Christian faith, the ‘not yet’ of eschatology is *already* in the ‘already’ of historical existence. The ‘now’ and the future are non-dual; there is no future ‘out there’, only ‘being peace’ in the here and now. He concludes that we don’t need hope; it can even be an obstacle, distracting us from the immediate task. History, infused by the Spirit who connects all things, is part of the universal ‘interbeing’ (Thich Nhat Hanh) which transcends Christian conceptions of creation and salvation.⁵⁹ At the same time it must be said – and one finds Buddhists who admit this – that Buddhist transcendence, however immanent the teachings on non-duality declare it to be, can have, and historically has had, the effect of detaching the moral subject from responsibility in history and society; Buddhists themselves have pointed to the deplorable record of parts of the Saṅgha in Sri Lanka and certain Zen masters under Japanese imperialism. Though there is no equivalent of hope in Buddhist terminology, Buddhist transcendence does have a temporal dimension, which serves to keep alive, in much the same way as the virtue of hope does for Christian faith, the realisation that history could have a better outcome, that justice should be done, that compassion must be expressed in deeds. Though Buddhism is rightly associated with meditation (*dhyāna*), contemplation (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*prajñā*), at its very core, in all traditions, are loving-kindness and compassion (*metta-karuṇā*). If “faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor 13:13), then love, like faith, is to be exercised in hope: “For in this hope we were saved” (Rom 8:24). Is it too much to suggest that Buddhists, too, transcend selfish attachment and the delusions of ignorance in an attitude akin to hope?

⁵⁸ Loy, *Great Awakening*, 103.

⁵⁹ See Knitter, *Without Buddha*, 181-182, 187, 190-194.