

Sympathy and Empathy

The Compassionate Bodhisattva and the Love of Christ

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One of the many misconceptions which arose out of Europe's initial encounter with Buddhism was the contrast between Christianity, as a religion of love, mercy and active charity, and a Buddhism characterised by passivity, self-absorption and the futile attempt at self-salvation – if indeed it was regarded as a religion at all. Anyone who knows Buddhists, of course, is aware that they are at least as kind and outgoing as anyone else, and this seems to have been true from the very beginning (Ananda, the Buddha's 'beloved disciple', is said to have referred to the recently deceased Buddha as "he who was so kind", cited by Sangharakshita 1999: 21). Even a cursory acquaintance with Buddhism makes clear that at the very heart of its teachings is compassion (*karuna*), the most important fruit of the acquisition of wisdom (*prajña*) and the centrepiece of the Buddhist value system. This becomes particularly clear when we encounter the Great Compassion (*maha-karuna*) of the Great Being (*maha-sattva*), the Bodhisattva or living being destined for final enlightenment (see Nakamura 1987).

Yet doubts remain. There are subtle but profound differences between this Buddhist spiritual and ethical conception and its possible Christian counterparts. Benevolence (*metta*) and compassion do not figure at the pinnacle of the Buddhist scale of spiritual attainments; they are rather the starting point, and they can look suspiciously like means to an end, namely one's own spiritual perfection in the achievement of complete equanimity (*upekkha*). They are certainly not the same as Christian mercy and love. The whole frame of reference in which they appear is different, and one has the impression that they are differently motivated as well. In what follows I would thus like to explore the relationship between the boundless love at the centre of Christianity and the universal compassion which characterises Buddhism, proceeding to develop a phenomenology of sympathy and empathy as they appear in the two cultural and religious contexts.

Compassion and Love

Christ is the symbol of redemptive love, of suffering transmuted into sacrifice by being freely accepted as the price for the salvation of all humanity. The premise of this conception is fundamental, indeed 'original' sinfulness, a human state of misery brought about by wilful moral evil which can only be outweighed by the boundless love in the heart of Christ. At times this was construed, for example by St Anselm, as Christ 'paying the price' of the ultimate sacrifice to assuage God's wounded honour, which only he as the Divine Son could do on our behalf. Such a scenario is incomprehensible and even distressing to Buddhists, for whom the world and human nature simply are what they are and 'bad karma' is part of the mix. Our fundamental problem is not sin but the ignorance (*avijja*) that conceals from us the condition of our existence, namely transitoriness or impermanence (*anicca*) and the

inability to find lasting fulfilment and satisfaction (*dukkha*, often translated as 'suffering') because we are wedded to the illusion of an individual 'self' (Sanskrit *atman*, Pali *atta*) as the centre of our existence. Even Christians, however, are starting to have their doubts about the adequacy of the above version of redemption, preferring to place at the centre of their faith the original 'good' creation and the 'new' creation in Christ (see, for instance, Mackey 2006, who characterises much traditional Christian theology as being 'sin-driven'). There are other accounts of redemption, for example that of Duns Scotus, in which the Incarnation would have been part of the divine plan even if our first parents had not sinned. There is thus scope for exploring the central Christian belief in divine love in conversation with Buddhists without being hemmed in by medieval forensic or retributive constructions of redemption.

In the Hebrew Bible, God is described as showing 'mercy' or 'compassion' (*rahamim*, connoting the 'bowels' or 'heart', also the maternal womb or bosom, *raham*). God therefore pardons offences out of merciful love (*hesed*) and unfailing fidelity (*emet*). The prototypical cry of the Psalmist is thus the plea for mercy and forgiveness: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love; according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions" (Ps 51:1). This Jewish heritage helps to explain, though it by no means predetermines, the New Testament portrait of God as "Father of mercies" (2 Cor 1:3); Jesus' disciples are to be merciful "even as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36). Parables such as the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37) and the Prodigal Son (or perhaps more appropriately the Prodigal Father, as he is so generous with his love, Lk 15:11-32) beautifully expand on this theme, and in the final judgement scene it is those who have shown practical kindness, even unknowingly, who are admitted to Christ's kingdom (Mt 25:31-46).

In Buddhism the corresponding symbol is not the life of Siddhartha Gautama, whom modern scholars refer to as the 'earthly' or 'historical' Buddha and who for later Buddhists was the Buddha of the present world age (*kalpa*), one among innumerable others, but the figure of the Bodhisattva, the Great Being coursing towards full awakening or enlightenment (*bodhi*), which will bring about final release (*nirvana*) from the cycle of rebirth in conditioned existence (*samsara*). The *Lotus-Sutra* contains vivid portraits of numerous Bodhisattvas in the luxuriant imagery of Indian mythology, such as the Bodhisattva 'Never Despise', who persists in proclaiming to all he meets "You will all become Buddhas", earning insults and ridicule for his pains (Chapter XX); or the Bodhisattva 'Regarder of the Cries of the World' (*Avalokitesvara*, Chapter XXV), the universal saviour of all in distress, who is often portrayed with an eye in each of his many hands, symbolising his alertness to suffering and his readiness to help. In Japanese Buddhism he eventually assumes the female form of Kannon, she who grants children to the childless. On the threshold of Buddhahood the Bodhisattva paradoxically achieves final liberation (*nirvana*) by vowing to renounce it for the sake of saving all sentient beings from their ignorance and suffering. The Bodhisattva, though already enlightened and liberated from all passions, is so moved by the suffering in the world that he or she vows not to reap the reward of ultimate peace until it can also be attained by all beings.

The earthly Buddha of the present world age nevertheless entered definitively into *nirvana* (his *parinirvana*, as described at length in the *Maha-Parinirvana-Sutra*). Sangharakshita (1999: 88) is of the view that the Mahayanists

needed to explain that the Buddha's final release did not imply the selfishness of which they accused their rivals in the Hinayana or 'lesser vehicle'. This becomes the paradigm of the 'worthy' or 'perfected' one (*arhat*, Pali *arahant*) in Theravada Buddhism, whereas the Mahayana ideal is embodied in the altruistic Bodhisattva. The precise difference between a Bodhisattva – enlightened, yet one step short of definitive liberation – and the Buddha's earthly existence as a 'living liberated one' (*jivanmukti*) is not entirely clear, but no contradiction is intended: the Buddha reached enlightenment only after innumerable rebirths as a Bodhisattva, many of which are recounted in the *Jatakas* or 'birth stories'. This Bodhisattva career acquainted him with the full spectrum of animal and human suffering resulting from ignorance, which gives his exercise of compassion what one author has well called a "karmic depth" that is not only universal but cosmic in scope (Strong 2001). It was only after the rise of the Mahayana with its criticism of the Arhat as too narrow an ideal that the Bodhisattva became the predominant symbol of Buddhist perfection, though a symbol that was entirely traditional. The Arhat, in short, was seen to lack compassion (*karuna*; see Nakamura 1987: 266).

As a model of selfless love, the Bodhisattva ideal only makes sense when interpreted in its Indian context. Its Christian counterpart is just as firmly rooted in a Jewish context. The lawyer who prompts the parable of the Good Samaritan answers his own question, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?," by quoting Deuteronomy (6:5) and Leviticus (19:18): "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself" (Lk 10:25-26). Love of neighbour and love of God are thus inseparable, and this gives Christian compassion an ontological dimension. In a famous essay, Karl Rahner argued that the two loves form a unity, for human love can only come about as the explicit realisation of transcendental conditions of possibility, which even if they are not conceptually grasped constitute the 'horizon' within which love becomes a real possibility. Those in possession of the necessary concepts know this to be 'God', a God who *is* love. There is such a thing as 'love of God', and we may love our neighbour 'for God's sake', but what the New Testament reveals is that God has loved us *in order that* we might love one another (Jn 13:34); this is our way of returning God's love for us (1 Jn 4:7, 11). *Any* act of genuine love is performed, knowingly or not, as an outworking of the divine love which gives human existence its fundamental orientation towards self-transcendence (see Rahner 1965: 280-281). The very structure of human knowing and willing corresponds to this *caritas* (what the New Testament calls *agape*), the love of total self-dispossession and self-emptying (*kenosis*), which is the divine life itself, infused into the human soul by grace (Rahner 1965: 284-285, 290-291).

This Christian scheme of things – though it is Catholic rather than Protestant in its emphasis on the transformative power of grace and human nature's openness to receive it – has echoes in certain developments of contemporary philosophy. Here the self is not an isolated spiritual entity, as conceived by Descartes, but is mediated to its own awareness as an embodied self by the relationship to the other, as

proposed by the Jewish¹ philosopher Emmanuel Levinas in a challenge to traditional metaphysics (see Levinas 1979; 1981; 1990). Not 'Being', but the 'Good' which makes Being a 'Gift' is primary (see Marion 1991; Davies 2001: chapters 5, 6 and 7). This ethical rather than ontological conception of the self may be situated somewhere between the solipsism of Descartes and the negativity of Nietzsche, which in its radicality is reminiscent of the Buddhist teaching on 'not-self' (*anatta*): for Nietzsche there is no 'being' behind 'doing' (see Davies 2001: 116, 118). The Christian concept of person, embodied as an individual self yet at least subliminally aware of an horizon of transcendence which opens up inexhaustible possibilities of knowledge and love, is predicated upon the relationship to the other, as conceived by the Jewish thinker Martin Buber in his philosophy of 'I' and 'Thou.' The I-Thou relationship is the *Grundwort* or fundamental relationship, such that the 'I' of I-Thou is radically different from the 'I' of I-It (Buber 1995: 1). We shall return to this insight below.

In Mahayana Buddhism the 'self-regarding' Arhat is replaced by the 'other-regarding' Bodhisattva as the ultimate ideal, though not without a certain continuity with the ethic of living 'for the sake of others' clearly present throughout the Theravada Pali Canon (Sangharakshita 1999: 9-10). Sangharakshita (1999: 11-12) even suggests that it was the emphasis on *being* wise and compassionate rather than *saying* what was correct teaching that led to the split between Mahayana and Theravada in the first place. Even within the first century after the Buddha's lifetime there are indications that the Bodhisattva ideal was emerging to transcend the somewhat ossified conception of the Arhat, leading to the formation of the 'Bodhisattva vehicle' (*bodhisattva-yana*) in opposition to the traditional vehicle of the 'listeners' or 'disciples' (*sravaka-yana*) (Sangharakshita 1999: 25-26, 29; Nakamura 1987: 266-267).

The key to the distinctiveness of the developed Bodhisattva ideal, however, is the concept of *bodhicitta*, literally the 'enlightened mind' rather than merely the 'thought of enlightenment,' "the manifestation, even the irruption, within us of something transcendental," comparable perhaps to the Holy Spirit in Christian theology (Sangharakshita 1999: 31-33). 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 (*paramartha-bodhicitta*), though refracted through conditioned existence as the individual acts of compassion-in-emptiness which the enlightened can practise (*samvrtti-bodhicitta*). A Bodhisattva is one of whom *bodhicitta* has taken complete possession; it is simply the undiluted manifestation of something we already are (Sangharakshita 1999: 32-38). 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.

The Bodhisattva is thus revealed as a powerful symbol of a love that far transcends individual altruism. The enlightened mind and heart as the full expression of the will to enlightenment participates in a reality which makes compassion not only conceivable but able to be realised in the Bodhisattva's Great Vow (*maha-pranidhana*) to practise all the perfections (*paramitas*). We, however, can only approach this transcendent reality phenomenologically. How do Christian love

¹ Levinas himself did not wish to be regarded as a 'Jewish philosopher' if that meant that he made Jewish teachings normative for his thought, but rather as a thoroughly professional philosopher who drew on his Jewish heritage (see Atterton, Calarco, Friedman 2004: 16).

and Buddhist compassion manifest themselves against the backgrounds of their respective transcendental conditions of possibility?

Sympathy and Empathy

Johann Baptist Metz has proposed that compassion could become the new global programme of Christianity in the age of religious and cultural pluralism (Metz 2000). Traditional terms like *Mitleid* and *Empathie*, in Metz's view, are not sufficiently 'political' and 'social' to address this task, while Buddhism has even less to offer (Metz 2000: 13). At the core of this new programme is the Gospel value of responsiveness to (*Empfindlichkeit für*) the suffering of others, which is the key to Christianity's universalism (Metz 2000: 11). Just as I once proposed the unspoken but real 'consensus of the suffering' (May 1984: 224-234) and Aloysius Pieris spoke of the 'magisterium of the poor' (Pieris 2000: 208) as normative for religious authenticity, so Metz identifies an 'authority of the suffering' rooted in an inarticulate but profound spirituality or 'mysticism' which sees in the faces of the poor a command which has to be obeyed (Metz 2000: 15-16), quoting Hans Jonas: "Sieh hin – und du weißt" ("Just look – and you will know"). What he does not seem to appreciate, however, is that it is precisely this that holds out the possibility of some real equivalence between the all-embracing compassion (*karuna*) of the Bodhisattva and the totally self-giving love (*agape*) of God in Christ.

The Bodhisattva ideal and its realisation in *bodhicitta* is not just an afterthought or a gloss on an inward-looking process of mental purification. It is the mythical symbolisation of core Buddhist values which, as one author puts it, have "tamed wild peoples" (Thurman 1987: 90) and have an immediate and practical bearing on non-violent strategies to overcome violence, including the 'structural' violence of misguided 'development' and authoritarian rule (see May 2003: chapter 4). Christians tend to miss this implication because they are easily alienated by the mythological scenarios spun by the Indian imagination in order to express the absoluteness and universality of the Buddha-body of absolute truth (*Dharma-kaya*), the Buddha-nature of absolute emptiness (*sunyata*) in which the Bodhisattvas participate. Yet a genuine question remains: can the full realisation of the Buddhist ideal, so vividly imagined in the extravagant symbolism of the Bodhisattvas, have anything to do with history, the forum in which human destinies are decided by acts of moral choice constrained by material conditions?

Christianity, too, is shot through with mythological elements inherited from its original Jewish, Hellenistic and Middle Eastern contexts, and Jesus can perhaps best be understood theologically as 'symbol of God' (Haight 1999). Yet the central doctrine of Incarnation, especially when viewed in the light of its Jewish antecedents rather than its definitive Greek formulations, establishes a rootedness in history and an acknowledgement of the material world which are not so apparent in the Buddhist schema of the 'three bodies' (*trikaya*). According to this, even what contemporary Christians would call the 'earthly' or 'historical' Buddha only appears in a 'manifestation body' (*nirmana-kaya*) which is itself subordinate to the 'body of communal bliss' (*sambhoga-kaya*), the staple symbolic medium of the Mahayana *sutras*.

Though the Japanese Buddhist philosopher Masao Abe creatively appropriated the concept of *kenosis* as the mutual total self-emptying of the persons in the Trinitarian Godhead, making this the equivalent of a 'dynamic *sunyata*' (see Ives 1995), the term originally applies to the person of Jesus, who 'emptied himself' (*'eauton ekenosen*) and 'took on the form of a slave' (*morphen doulou laboron*); although he was 'in the form of God' (*en morphē theou*), he adopted the 'likeness' (*homoiomati*) and 'appearance' (*schemati*) of a man (Phil 2:6-7), language reminiscent of the Buddhist 'manifestation body' (*nirmana-kaya*). The Buddhist solution to the problem of finding an historical equivalent of transcendent love was to assume that there are two levels of the spiritual perfections (*paramita*) corresponding to the two levels of truth (*satya*), one absolutely transcendent (*paramārtha-satya*, *paramārtha-paramita*), the other relative and conditioned (*samvṛtti-satya*, *samvṛtti-paramita*). The same applies, as we have seen, to the Enlightenment mind (*bodhicitta*) of the Bodhisattva and the eternal Buddha-nature itself (*Dharma-kaya*, *Dharma-dhatu*). In one way, of course, as an attempt to express the inexpressible by symbolic means this is just as speculative and mythological as the Christian doctrine of Incarnation. In both cases, however, the solution is not theoretical but existential: it is the possession of *bodhicitta* that allows the Bodhisattva to realise that the 'empty' forms of phenomenal appearance are the medium in which the Great Compassion works itself out, according to the principle enunciated by the *Heart Sutra*: "Here, O Sariputra, form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form; emptiness does not differ from form, nor does form differ from emptiness; whatever is form, that is emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form" (Conze 1968: 74). In Christianity it is no less paradoxical that grace infuses the divine love into the most mundane human existence. Yet for the Buddhist practitioner and the Christian believer the compassion of the Bodhisattva and the grace of Christ are not merely notional, but real.

Particularly in the Mahayana, this complementarity of 'experience' and 'theory' would seem to be the outworking of the Enlightenment mind of the Bodhisattva in what Buddhists call 'the exchange of self and other' (see Thurman 1987: 77-90). The whole splendour of *bodhicitta* at the heart of the Bodhisattva ideal is the will that all beings be saved from the suffering caused by ignorance through the enlightenment that brings final liberation from the bonds of desire. All beings are imagined as one's 'mother', whose kindness, love and compassion must be remembered and repaid. The Bodhisattva meditates on the equality and sameness of oneself and all others *now*: everything about others is 'I'. As expressed in Thich Nhat Hanh's conception of 'interbeing', *bodhicitta*, far from being a flight into an emptiness somehow 'beyond' this world of suffering beings, implies identification with their sufferings, implemented not only in the realisation of transcendence but in 'political' practices of generous giving (*dana*), serving the needs of beings – including what Westerners human-centredly call 'the environment' – and observing the highest standards of truth and integrity (Hanh, 1987; Harris, 2008). Such a 'programme', to borrow Metz's term, envisages compassion as a fusion of affectivity, cognition, volition and ontology in bringing the other to the fore, a combination of the imaginative empathy needed to place oneself in the other's position and the affective sympathy that makes his, her or its suffering one's own. Interestingly, this corresponds to Davies's characterisation of Christian compassion (Davies 2001: chapter 11), in which he characterises *kenosis* thus (Davies 2001: 251):

... the mutual grounding of self and other, which is the foundation of consciousness, can be appropriated as the image of the triune God in us. It is in the epiphany of the personal other to ourselves that we discover the trinitarian character of our consciousness, in which self and other encounter each other through the mediation of a third, which is the mutually possessed life of consciousness itself.

Compassion, in other words, involves a considerable effort of both intellect and imagination.

These concepts have perhaps nowhere been more thoroughly explored than in German phenomenology, building especially on Max Scheler's analysis of the relationship between moral values and feelings, in particular the *Nachfühlen* that allows us to reproduce in our own sensibility what the other is experiencing, which provides the basis of *Mitgefühl*, empathy with the objectively grasped suffering of the other, and eventually of *Einsfühlung*, identifying oneself with the psychic reality of the other (see Stegmüller 1969: 106-110). The presupposition of this act of empathy which makes sympathy possible is not a primary self-awareness; rather, Scheler anticipates Levinas in maintaining that the reality of the other is given as immediately evident to an inner perception which precedes self-awareness of one's own *ego*; one thus perceives one's own self "as if I were another" ("als ob ich ein anderer wäre", Stegmüller 1969: 110). Within the framework of Husserl's phenomenology Edith Stein developed an even more differentiated analysis of empathy (Stein 1989). She, like Levinas, begins with the 'look' perceived in the face of the other, which leads the person of empathy from what is outwardly seen to the other's inner disposition, from objective intentionality to a subjective 'con-primordiality', the realisation that the other's primordial experience, while not my own primordiality, is equivalently primordial for him or her. *Einfühlung* (empathy), for Stein, entails that "'I' become, as near as 'I' can, one with the other by turning to the content of the event as if I was the subject" (Palmisano 2003: 28; see 26-36).²

Martin Buber, strongly influenced by the mystical 'enthusiasm' of the *Hasidim* or Holy Ones, emphasised the primacy of the relation to a Thou which calls forth a deeper and more personal response than the relation to an It, "so that one can imagine quite concretely what another is feeling, thinking and knowing", though this "does not abolish the basic distance between oneself and the other" (Atterton, Calarco, Friedman 2004: 3). Levinas, whose spiritual home lay rather in Talmudic piety and Rabbinical exegesis, though he was influenced by Buber, only gradually came to acknowledge the ethical character of Buber's thinking and its capacity for radical transcendence in the presence of an 'eternal Thou' (see Strasser 2004: 39, 44; Bernosconi 2004: 69, 81). For Levinas, the I-Thou relationship is asymmetrical because of the moral 'height' of the other over against the self in its "isolated subjectivity" (Atterton, Calarco, Friedman 2004: 6, 33). For him, the orientation to the other is dominated by separateness, but the asymmetry is overcome by the presence of a 'third' (*le tiers*), the infinity glimpsed in the face of the other and the awareness of

² I would like to thank my doctoral students Fr Joseph Palmisano SJ and Fr George Zavershinsky for the light they have shed for me on the thought of Edith Stein and Martin Buber, respectively.

multiple others, which opens the way to concepts of justice and society. Buber also developed conceptions of the 'Inborn Thou' and the 'Eternal Thou' as the 'third' which lifts the I-Thou relationship beyond itself.

One of Buber's foundational contributions to dialogical thought was to break through the "vision bias" inherited by Husserl from his teacher Brentano, which tended to reduce willing and feeling to knowing: the relation to the other is not limited to the cognitive, but engages the affectivity of the whole person in its embodiment, as explored by Merleau-Ponty.³ Curiously, Buber and Levinas accused each other of being Heideggerian! The German word *Sorge*, 'care', with its derivative *Fürsorge*, 'solicitude', plays a central part in Heidegger's existential ontology, where it is identified as an 'existential' or deep structure of our 'being in the world' (*Dasein*), equiprimordial with the *Angst* associated with being 'thrown' into such an existence (*Geworfenheit*) and at the same time 'always ahead of itself' (*sich vorweg sein*).⁴ "The expression 'care' means an existential and basic ontological phenomenon" (Heidegger 1996: 183; see Stegmüller 1969: 167-168). For Buber, Heidegger's abstract ontology lacks the critical distance from history made possible by genuine transcendence; for Levinas, Heidegger lacks the dimension of ethical intersubjectivity and shares with Buber the presupposition that being, not goodness, ultimately grounds the real. Buber, however, saw that dialogue was a better starting point for personalist philosophy than *Dasein*'s care and solicitude for existence (see Cohen 2004). The term *Sorge* nevertheless has connotations of both 'care' and 'concern' at a deep existential level and gives an added dimension to the confluence of empathy (*Mitgefühl*) and sympathy (*Mitleid*).

Searching theological lexika and encyclopaedias for entries on *Mitleid* (the German term for 'compassion'), the Tübingen moral theologian Dietmar Mieth found almost none. Such a simple and basic ethical attitude as *com-passio* is apparently not rated as highly as one might assume in Christian theology. Yet, as Mieth goes on to argue, an 'ethic of sympathy' (*Sympathieethik*) is an indispensable complement to Kant's rationally grounded categorical imperative. A *Mitleidsethik* certainly needs continual rational reflection as a means of controlling emotional impulses, but reason alone does not suffice as either a source or a motive for ethical action (Mieth 2000); indeed, in Levinas's view reason "is not only incapable of stopping the violence, but is shown in important respects to be in complicity with violence" (Atterton, Calarco, Friedman 2004: 21).

Buddhism is by no means a stranger to such conceptions. The Dalai Lama, firmly asserting the reality of Bodhisattvas informed by the mind of Enlightenment, shows how their existence is premised on the distinction-in-identity between conventional and ultimate truth, the coincidence of dependent arising (*paticcasamuppada*) and emptiness (*sunyata*); "Hence, the two truths are one entity" (Gyatso 1987: 220). He explains why, in the Buddhist conception of compassion, the really crucial attainment is not loving-kindness (*metta*) or even altruism (*mudita*) but

³ See Andrew Tallon, "Affection and the Transcendental Dialogical Personalism of Buber and Levinas" (Atterton, Calarco, Friedman 2004: 49-64, 54-55). Levinas was also reading contemporary personalist philosophers of 'presence' such as Gabriel Marcel.

⁴ *Dasein* is thus "being-ahead-of-itself-in-already-being-in-a-world" (Heidegger 1996: 179), "Sich-vorweg-schon-sein-als-sein-bei" (Stegmüller 1969: 168, n. 1).

the equanimity (*upekkha*) which makes no distinction between the wellbeing of one's dearest friend, a neutral person or one's worst enemy. Mindful of the kindness of other beings, one must "*recognize all beings as your dearest friend*" in the 'exchange of self and other' (Gyatso 1987: 222-224; emphasis in original). The fruit of wisdom as one-pointedness of mind is the simple ethical injunction 'Help, do not harm', in other words, a resolve to act (Gyatso 1987: 225-226), echoing Schopenhauer's dictum "Harm no-one, help all" ("*Schade niemandem, hilf allen*", cited by Mieth 2000: 23). This could signal a considerable convergence, not just between Buddhist and Christian ethics, but between the Buddhology and Christology from which they derive.

The fundamental importance of this convergence is perhaps best illustrated when we contemplate a world utterly devoid of the empathy that makes sympathy possible and prepares the ground for both love and compassion. The fascist and communist regimes of the twentieth century were examples of the attempt to purge society of such 'soft-hearted' virtues. It is hard to decide whether the fanatical anti-Semitism of Hitler's Third Reich, the utterly arbitrary suppression of all opposition, whether imagined or real, in Stalin's Russia, the unquestioning commitment of an entire people to the emperor cult in wartime Japan, or the ruthless sacrifice of tens of millions of lives in pursuit of military and economic power in Mao's China is the most shocking example of the attempted elimination of compassion as a principle of political ethics.

Such an attitude was in a certain sense anticipated in the anti-moral philosophy underlying the life and work of the notorious Marquis de Sade, who peopled his treatises and novels with characters who were spurred on to the extremities of lust by their quest for the 'perfect crime', conditioning themselves to love evil as they deliberately set about creating hell on earth. Others, almost at random, became the objects of their experiments in self-gratification through sexual cruelty. It is a testimony to the fundamental necessity of the values and virtues we have been discussing that this programme is ultimately self-contradictory, tending to consume its perpetrators in their own excesses, but the Marquis's determined effort to imagine it in all its perversity and even carry it out is evidence of the fragility of these virtues. Even the Nazis had shamefacedly concealed pangs of self-pity because of the emotional toll taken by the actual carrying out of their programme of extermination, whereas de Sade's aim was to eradicate even these (see Stobbe 2002: 76-84). When one has plumbed the depths of evil in this way and contemplated the consequences of the eradication of all fellow-feeling, one begins to appreciate that the Bodhisattva ideal and the evangelical love commandment, far from being abstract and idealistic, are the symbolic expressions of the rationally grounded and practically orientated attitudes which make social living and human fulfilment possible at all.

Conclusion: Towards a Global Ethos of Compassion

Clarification of these issues is a small contribution to establishing the possibility, envisaged by Hans Küng (Küng 1990), of the world's religions actively cooperating to bring about a shared ethos or moral consensus, deriving from their various narrative and philosophical frameworks, which would combine the best of their

inherited values and ground what has since come to be called a 'global ethic', 'the globalisation of ethics' or 'ethical globalisation'. Even in theory, however, this is not so easy to imagine as Küng and the framers of the *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic* at the 1993 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago appear to have supposed (see Küng and Kuschel 1993). In each case, in an ongoing process of comparative ethics and theology, it needs to be shown in painstaking detail just where the equivalences lie and how much weight is to be given to the obvious differences between the religious traditions. This is the task of what might be called a 'collaborative' interreligious theology.

In our case, and looking at our results from an explicitly Christian point of view, it behoves us to ask Buddhists whether we have really understood how compassion coheres with the quest for the liberating wisdom that comes from enlightenment, which can easily appear to be a-historical and a-political – and even a-moral when we learn that the elimination of all dualism, including that presupposed by the need to discriminate between good and evil actions, is the substance of the breakthrough to *satori* or the experience of liberation. We have shown that this does not do justice to the Bodhisattva ideal of universal compassion, and in any case there are varieties of Buddhism, such as those initiated by Shinran and Nichiren in Japan, which are 'prophetic' in character and stand out from the broad lines of tradition. For Christians, the attempt to understand Buddhist compassion throws new light on the concept of *agape* as the overflowing divine love which cannot be earned and is presupposed by all manifestations of human love.

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