



## Himalaya, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies

Volume 18

Number 2 *Himalayan Research Bulletin; Special  
Topic; Development in Nepal: Issues and Approaches*

Article 17

1998

### Book review of 'The Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective on the Teachings of Jesus' by His Holiness the Dalai Lama,

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#### Recommended Citation

Reiser, William S.J. (1998) "Book review of 'The Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective on the Teachings of Jesus' by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, ," *Himalaya, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies*: Vol. 18: No. 2, Article 17.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol18/iss2/17>

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stateless. Samuel points out that, like Islamic societies, Tibet had a low population density, difficulties in communications, and heavy reliance on long distance trade. These factors inhibited the development of a strong centralized political authority (p. 360). Samuel criticizes previous "Lhasa-centric" analyses of Tibetan history and culture which have led to confusions about the nature of Tibetan states. His usage of the plural—"Tibetan societies"—emphasizes the fact that there was no unified, homogeneous Tibetan social formation, and he includes in his survey of Tibetan polities the peoples of Bhutan, Ladakh, Sikkim, and the border regions of India, Nepal, and China. Samuel argues that taking Lhasa as representative of Tibet as a whole has led to an exaggerated view of Tibetan society as isolated, static, centralized, and rigidly stratified.

Samuel seems to want to comment on every important issue in Tibetan studies. He presents his central thesis in the first two chapters, then returns directly to the argument only in Part Three, hundreds of pages later. There, Samuel analyzes the development of the Tibetan shamanic-clerical synthesis from its beginnings in Indian Buddhism to the "Gelugpa synthesis and shamanic reaction." For Samuel, the Gelugpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism, headed by successive incarnations of the Dalai Lama, represents the clerical extreme of Tibetan Buddhism, while the Rimed movement of the last several centuries was partially a reaction to Gelugpa institutionalism. Linking the philosophical to the political, he notes that the Rimed movement began in K'am, "politically a patchwork of small secular and monastic states with little or no centralized authority," while the more clerically oriented Gelugpa was most influential in central Tibet.

Samuel emphasizes that he does not wish to "reduce" the unique Tibetan religious synthesis to material determinations. Instead, he wants to "treat consciousness and material reality as co-equal components of the developmental process" (p. 372). He attempts to do so through the use of the concept of "cultural patterns" or "patterns in the use of the minds and bodies of human beings," but this is never really developed or tied to larger historical processes. It is surprising that Samuel makes no reference to Bourdieu, who has attempted precisely to tie cultural patterns, bodily dispositions, and sociological determinants through his delineation of the "habitus." Instead, Samuel provides several tables charting the development of indexed "cultural patterns." For example (p. 458), during Tibet's "Local Hegemonic Period" from about AD 841 to 1276, he presents "T7 folk Religion; T8 Old Tantric and terma complex; T9 Kadampa monks; T10 New Tantric complex" etc. It is not clear what this enumeration is supposed to accomplish in terms of clarity or explanation. He never directly ties political and social life to philosophical developments, rather demonstrates only their loose association in time and space. The focus is almost entirely on macro-level social processes, and thus it is precisely a materialist "reduction" that proves most persuasive. Samuel seems to realize this, admitting that the relationship between "transformations in consciousness and those in the perceived world have been dealt with only implicitly" (p. 566).

Although Samuel does not (nor could be expected to) achieve a fully realized vision of the connections between individual consciousness and the social world, for those interested in Tibetan societies, particularly a theory relating Tibetan Buddhism to Tibetan political-economy, there is presently no better source than Samuel's book. Those unconvinced by his argument will nonetheless find the work valuable as perhaps the most comprehensive, recent reference and summary of the history and sociology of Tibet.

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### **The Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective on the Teachings of Jesus**

His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Introduction and Christian Context by Laurence Freeman, OSB. Translated from the Tibetan and Annotated by Geshe Thupten Jimpa. Edited with a Preface by Robert Kiely. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1996.

This book represents the proceedings of the John Main Seminar which met in September 1994 at Middlesex University in London. The Dalai Lama has been presented with eight texts from the Christian scriptures (two from each of the four gospels) and invited to comment on them in light of Buddhist teaching and spiritual practice. For those unfamiliar with those texts, Laurence Freeman's contextualization of the gospel passages toward the end of the book provides helpful background. (Helpful too are the two brief glossaries of major Christian and Buddhist terms.) Those familiar with the Christian texts under discussion will be disappointed if they look to the Dalai Lama's comments for insights into those texts, or even for providing a considered Buddhist response to selected teachings of Jesus. The texts serve instead as jumping off points for an exposition of Buddhist teaching and practice which a Christian reader could find both illuminating and religiously stimulating.

After reading what the Dalai Lama had to say about on the Sermon on the Mount, for example, it is hard to find any basis in his comments for responses such as the following: "I speak for myself, and I think for all of us here, when I say that it was very moving for me as a Christian to hear you read the words of Jesus with such purity and deep understanding of their meaning" (p. 56), or "It is a Christian belief that when Scripture is read by someone with a good

heart, it comes to life for all of us again. For me, and I think for many of us here, hearing you read those words did that for us" (p. 57). Or again, the Dalai Lama hears in the text of Mk 3:31-35 ("Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" [Mk 3:35]) an affirmation on Jesus' part of the fundamental unity and equality of all human beings (p. 69). But he does not advert either to what doing the will of God concretely entails in the context of Mark's gospel, or to the implied criticism in this passage of Jesus' biological family.

Its excessive enthusiasm does not further the cause of ecumenical dialogue, neither does inaccurate presentation of one's own tradition. One of the Christian respondents noted: "But one of the missions of Jesus was to shift our way of relating to God from that of fear or mere doctrine to one of a relationship of love and intimacy" and "we are called to become one with the same consciousness that Christ had" (p. 78). The first point is wrong, if it means to suggest that devout Jews before and during Jesus' lifetime did not enjoy a relationship of intimacy with God; and the second point is deeply problematic, if it implies that one can somehow know the consciousness of the historical figure of Jesus.

The various responses to the Dalai Lama's remarks which followed during the question and answer period may indicate among the Christian participants for yet deeper engagement with their sacred texts on the Dalai Lama's part. Could he say more? The book teases the reader into wondering about the enormous possibilities within inter-religious dialogue, especially for those on the Christian side who share the contemplative sensibilities of their Buddhist counterparts. One would like to hear more from the Dalai Lama about his spiritual experience as he was drawn to pray in front of the image of Mary in the cave at Lourdes.

Finally, the fact needs to be continually underlined that while Buddhists meditate on and put into practice the Four Noble Truths without much preoccupation over the historical figure of the Buddha, Christians do not allow for the same detachment between the preaching and the person of Jesus. It would be a mistake to regard the figure of Jesus as an ascetic, a world-transcending contemplative, or a guide for deepening the interior life. Their respective stories reveal more contrasts than similarities, and the religious messages of their lives move in different directions.

In the end the book proves unsatisfying for two reasons, at least for this reviewer. First, the remarks of the Dalai Lama concerning the eight gospel passages are too impressionistic; they do not take into account current developments within Christian exegesis and scriptural study. The remarks miss the deep Christian engagement with history and the world. Second, dialogue is by its nature unfinished. When dialogue is fruitful, one always seeks more. Yet it sometimes appears that the desire for deep, lasting inter-religious conversation and the desire to learn about the religious other are markedly Christian than, say, a pressing concern among Buddhists. The Christian participants in the seminar appear to be more conversant with Buddhist teaching than the Dalai Lama is with theirs.

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### **Forthcoming Publications**

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#### **Life and Death on Mt. Everest: Sherpas and Himalayan Mountaineering**

Sherry B. Ortner, forthcoming fall 1999, Princeton University Press

Himalayan mountaineering has always involved the support of Sherpas, yet the Sherpas have always remained in the background. This book focuses on the relationship between the Western (and later other national) climbers and the Sherpas from the early 20th century to the present. Drawing on my various field trips since the 1960s, as well as the enormous literature of Himalayan mountaineering, I try to bring out the complex ways in which Sherpas and sahibs (the use of the term in this post-sahib era is justified in the book) have affected one another over time, transforming each other and the activity of mountaineering itself. Shifting on and off the mountains, and back and forth between the cultural backgrounds of both Sherpas and sahibs, the narrative braids together the perspectives of the two groups as they join and clash in these contexts of mortal risk.

Chapters address the Orientalism of the sahibs; the social and religious backgrounds of the Sherpas; various forms of Sherpa resistance on expeditions; the ways in which Sherpas cope with risk, accidents, and sudden death; the implications of the shared masculinity of Sherpas and sahibs; the impact of the counterculture on, and of the entry of women into the sport in the 1970s; the debates over whether the Sherpas have been "spoiled" by mountaineering; and the recent development of commercial climbing.

The book is meant as a contribution to newer forms of ethnographic writing; to debates over the impact of "modernization;" to theories of difference, power, "resistance," and social transformation; and finally to the question of the very future of ethnography in the wake of post-colonial and other critiques of anthropology.