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Buddhist Inclusivism: Attitudes towards Religious Others  
(review)

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the history of activists who more Americans should be aware of, among them Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, a Muslim nonviolent organizer who resisted the colonial British in India. Sivaraksa has personally established many ties with Christians, and one chapter characterizes Buddhism and Christianity as *kalyanamitta*, or virtuous friends. In the Pali sutras *kalyanamitta* are companions who help one practice the dharma by their encouragement and example. Sivaraksa partly bases his vision of this dharma friendship on the Christian theologian Robert Traer's notion of interreligious tolerance, which accepts "total commitment to a particular faith" yet seeks common understanding and, more specifically for Sivaraksa, sees a common commitment to social justice. Sivaraksa's bridge-building efforts are commendable, especially for someone who has witnessed the aggressive anti-Buddhist activities of Christian missionaries in Thailand.

Here as elsewhere, Sivaraksa's rhetoric always extends the olive branch. When he criticizes, he also opens his arms. One of the book's best chapters deals with reconciliation movements in Africa and Asia. Here is an arena in which the benefits of peacemaking are demonstrably paying off and in which the beliefs and practices of all faiths fruitfully coincide. But unlike some religions, Buddhism bases its philosophy of reconciliation on a particular belief in the in-born goodness of people: as Sivaraksa reminds us, "even the most flawed people have Buddha-nature, and reconciliation begins with the acknowledgement of common humanity and shared suffering" (p. 32). Buddhists are essentially optimists about the human condition and, from the core of their philosophical roots, hold out hope that even the most entrenched oppressors can become enlightened to their true nature—a transformation that must ultimately come from within.

There is much to praise about *Conflict, Culture, Change*, but it attempts to do too many things—offer brief analyses, demonstrate practical methods of resistance, and tell alternative histories. What the book laments is indeed lamentable—the near hegemony of Western multinationals and the lack of dialogue between cultures—but while its broad range of topics make it a useful introduction to Engaged Buddhism, it will not greatly contribute to the long-term cause.

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**BUDDHIST INCLUSIVISM: ATTITUDES TOWARDS RELIGIOUS OTHERS.** By *Kristin Beise Kiblinger*. Hants, England: Ashgate, 2005. 145 pp.

Kristen Beise Kiblinger, who teaches in the religion department at Thiel College, has written a provocative and imaginative book. It is provocative in that

she appears to be doing buddhology even though she resists calling it that. She says she doesn't want to take the voice of a buddhologist. She does not describe *what is* as a phenomenologist might or *what was* as an historian of religion might, or *what should be* as a buddhologist might. She describes *what might be*, as a—well, as a participant-philosopher might. She writes as an outsider taking the voice of an insider.

Kiblinger chooses as her topic the relationship of Buddhists to people of other religions. She begins by noting that Buddhists themselves have not explicitly addressed this topic in their religious philosophizing, at least not to the extent Christians have. But, she suggests, implicitly they behave as if they do have a favored response to this issue. Citing a wide variety of Buddhist sources across the Buddhist spectrum, she concludes that inclusivism is the most natural position for Buddhists to take vis-à-vis the other religions. She describes that position in some detail, all the while persisting in her refusal to be considered a spokesperson in the insider sense.

Kiblinger draws her examples from the way two historical figures related to people of non-Buddhist ideologies and from historical contacts Buddhism as a movement had with other religions or sects. The first historical figure is Siddhartha Gautama himself. The Buddha, Kiblinger notes, was not shy about identifying what made any religion (not just his dhamma) useful—the noble eightfold path. This path is the core of Gautama's dhamma, but it also appears in other religions in other forms. The Buddha put forth the presence of this content as the measure of a religion's usefulness (see the Mahaparinibbana Sutta). And of course the parable of the raft relativizes all religious teachings, making them true only to the extent that they enable humans to "cross the stream" of temporal existence, a common tenet of the inclusivist position in all its forms.

Asoka represents a second example of Buddhist inclusivism for Kiblinger. In the seventh and twelfth of his Rock Edicts, Asoka makes clear that all members of all religious traditions are welcome to practice in his kingdom, even though he thinks Buddhism is the best position. He makes clear that both exclusivism and intolerance of other religious ideas are not acceptable positions in his way of looking at the spiritual dimension of the world. Existentially, Asoka's life story is a model of a reformed "exclusivist" finally embracing the all-truth-no-matter-where-you-find-it-is-still-truth position.

Not just these giant figures model inclusivism. Buddhism as a movement has consistently, Kiblinger argues, behaved toward other movements as inclusivists would. She uses as a first example the Buddhist attitude toward Vedic sacrifice, the religious practice most liable to be cast aside by the new teaching of Gautama. We see in this example, Kiblinger says, "the technique of significant reinterpretation and new application rather than subordination" (p. 41). She also notes that a technique she calls "reinterpretation by ethicization" that does not throw out Vedic teaching altogether but claims at its root a teaching that was originally Buddhist.

Evidence for the inclusivist position can also be found in the way Mahayanists treated Theravadins, or Hinayanists as Kiblinger refers to them. Scholars of Bud-

dhism have for the most part recognized that the term “hinayana,” perhaps best translated as “lesser vehicle,” is a pejorative term given to Theravadins by the Mahayanists, the “great vehicle” folks. Kiblinger argues that even though Mahayanists consider their tradition superior (a common trait of all inclusivists, Buddhist or not), they do so with an openness to the value of the way Theravadins approach the problem of enlightenment. Their way may not be the best, but it is a way, and in some contexts it may be an effective way. Mahayanists are able to do this because of their understanding of *upaya* or skillful means. Any raft that somehow gets us across the stream is a valid raft—even though it is not the best raft.

Kiblinger even uses examples from Buddhism’s missionary endeavors as evidence of an inclusivist strategy. Whereas religions such as Christianity and Islam have typically demanded a total, comprehensive change of religion on the part of converts, Buddhism has usually been satisfied with a change of heart in a particular domain, sharing the rest with the indigenous religion, whether Shinto, Confucianism, shamanism, or Bon. She quotes Richard Gombrich, who said that Buddhists have an unusually narrow view of what constitutes religion—leaving a lot of room for partner religions. Other strategies common to this viewpoint are aligning, privatization, reclassification, assuming a common core, acknowledgment of noncomprehensive truth, teaming up versus secularism, claiming a multiple religious identity, and assigning new applications. Kiblinger gives examples of each.

Kiblinger acknowledges that inclusivism means many things for many people. Because the term has become part of the exclusivist-inclusivist-pluralist paradigm formulated by Alan Race and used by, among others, J. A. Denoia, Paul Knitter, John Hick, and Mark Heim, the term is usually applied to soteriology—salvation, enlightenment, *moksha*. Inclusivists in this Rahnerian sense accept that “while belonging to a home (my) religion is advantageous for salvation, belonging to an alien religion may sometimes suffice.” Two subgroups of this soteriological view of inclusivism are restrictivists, who don’t think everyone will achieve salvation—enlightenment or *moksha*—and universal inclusivists who do.

Kiblinger and others argue that this is too limited an understanding of inclusivism and, when it comes to interreligious interchanges, becomes impossibly judgmental of other religions. Instead, she argues that we should align ourselves with those who emphasize the term as it is applied to truth. Philosopher Paul Griffiths would be an example of a scholar who uses this understanding of inclusivism. Such a person might argue that inclusivism means to “self-consciously recognize a provisional, subordinate, or supplemental place within the home religious system for some element(s) from one or more alien traditions.”

Kiblinger goes on to argue for a specific variety of this inclusivism as truth position, a position she calls “alternative-ends inclusivism.” Instead of postulating that all religions are really aiming their adherents toward the same religious goal (the singular religious mountaintop), why not recognize that each religious system has a unique end toward which its adherents aim. This allows one to ac-

cept the validity of other religious paths even if one comes to the conclusion that the aim of another religious tradition is penultimate rather than ultimate. One can respect the validity of other ends, even if one reserves ultimacy for one's home religion's end. It also allows for finding and using valid truths and practices in other religious traditions, even though one does not always accept the ends toward which they are targeted in those traditions.

Kiblinger ends the book by raising critical questions about two so-called Buddhist inclusivists, Thich Nhat Hanh and Masao Abe, and one Buddhist who does not think other religions can provide the Buddhist with much help, Gunapala Dharmasiri. Thich Nhat Hanh's inclusivism suffers because of his common core thinking. By essentializing joy, peace, understanding, and love as the core, the aim of all valid religions, inclusivists such as Nhat Hanh trivialize the religious systems they are intending to acknowledge. Although inclusion is the goal, too many people are left on the outside of such thinking—all those, for example, who do not accept that there is a common core to all religions and all those who don't understand that all religions have a single goal. Masao Abe also suffers from common core and single-end thinking, Kiblinger argues, but changes the core to an ineffable experience of ultimacy, thereby privileging Buddhism in a way that fails to include the ineffable aspects of other religions in its inclusivism. He also differs from Nhat Hanh in that the common core he envisages is not present today, but is a hoped-for future.

Not all Buddhists are inclusivistic in their thinking toward other religions; the contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhist apologist Gunapala Dharmasiri is a case in point. As Kiblinger notes, Dharmasiri "responds to Christianity and the Christian other not by looking for what the Buddhist might learn from Christian notions of God, as the inclusivist would, but instead by explaining why Buddhists should reject Christian theism and why Christian belief in God can hinder progress toward Buddhist goals."

This is a very good book. The question of how Buddhists relate to people of other religions is a good one, and the author gives both Buddhists and non-Buddhists much to think about in arguing for alternative-ends inclusivism as the position of choice. Perhaps even as intriguing as Kiblinger's discussion of Buddhist inclusivism, however, is the methodology she uses: more than phenomenologist, definitely not theologian, yet not quite buddhologist. I have chosen to call this methodology participant philosophizing, because Kiblinger doesn't stop with her conclusion that Buddhists are implicit inclusivists, she goes on to argue that inclusiveness as a position is plural, that there are good, better, and best forms of inclusivism, and she then chooses one of those positions as the best for Buddhists, given their worldview and history of interactions with non-Buddhists. Kiblinger doesn't just argue for inclusivism and the model of interreligious interchange for Buddhists, she models it in her scholarly methodology.

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