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## Christian Development

 in a Buddhist CountryGlen E. MILLER

## Introduction

There are more than two hundred International Non-Government Organizations (INGOs) with approximately two thousand expatriates currently living and working in Cambodia. Through varied approaches these organizations and people strive to make life better for Cambodians after the devastation of the Pol Pot holocaust. An understanding of the local culture is essential for the development efforts of these INGOs.

Understanding the Cambodian culture requires a grasp of Buddhism and the role of religion in this society. Prince Sihanouk, pointing out the importance of Buddhism in Cambodia, said in 1970, "Cambodia may be compared to a cart supported by two wheels, one of which is the state and the other Buddhism. The former symbolizes power and the latter religious morality. These two wheels must turn at the same speed in order for the cart, i.e. Cambodia, to advance smoothly on the path to peace and progress."

[^0]
## Christian Development Efforts in Underdeveloped Countries

At a recent Mennonite Central Committee staff retreat, I asked MCC Cambodia volunteers to compare how they were perceived by the Cambodians with how they would like to be perceived. The most common answer of how they were perceived was as a person of prestige and power, or one with expert technical expertise. In contrast, many volunteers wished to be perceived as serving to represent Christ, or as a compassionate Christian. There is an obvious wide gulf between power, prestige, and expertise, and how we wish to be perceived as Christians.

MCC volunteers and other Western development agency workers generally come from rich and technologically advanced countries. They see themselves as enlightened, with systems backed by "facts." They pride themselves in their ability to think objectively, and move in linear fashion from planning to fulfillment of goals. Obstacles to reaching desired goals are viewed as challenges to overcome with the combination of proper motivation and the right information. At the same time, Western Christian development workers see themselves as compassionate followers of Jesus.

To the Westerner, "development" means modernization, scientific education, rational thought patterns, and movement from the subjective to the objective-from superstition to truth. The goal is selfsufficiency, self-determination, and independence-freeing people from fatalism and blind traditionalism that inhibit progress. In order to liberate them, and because we are the financial source, we are inclined to feel that we have the right to set the rules and determine the outcomes.

To people in a developing country, the INGOs appears to have superior technology and unlimited funds. With this money and technology come tremendous prestige and power. In this situation, the local national may acquiesce and allow the Westerner to define the problem, prescribe the solution, and implement the remedy. The outcomes as defined by the Western donor may be designed to propel the developing country toward a society that resembles the donor country. Training offered to empower persons in the developing country may be ideal to prepare them for the goals of Western society, but may create unrealistic and unsustainable expectations. In this situation, no matter how compassionate or sympathetic the change agents are, they will tend to be viewed as
"benefactors" or patrons. This sets up a relationship of benefactorbeneficiary, giver-receiver, superior-inferior, or master-slave. In this situation, the recipient will be moved toward dependency. As this happens innate creativity and resourcefulness will be reduced or lost.

In addition to the West-East problems, simple communication problems are significant. Even though the Westerner and person in the developing country may speak the same language fluently. there is great potential for lack of understanding. Consider the following examples from the Cambodian context.
"Community" in idealized Western thought creates an image of a group of people living together harmoniously with peace and justice in caring relationships. However, in post-Pol Pot Cambodia, "community" has the connotation of a group of people living together without regard for human interaction, but formed for the benefit of the state and its purposes. In this context, "community" instills feelings of coercion and repression.
"Peace" in traditionally Christian societies is usually thought of in societal terms, and connotes the lack of conflict among people. On the other hand, when Buddhists speak of peace they are referring to inner peace and absence of desire.

> Peace in this tradition means eradication of desire, which is the root of suffering. It has a countenance quite different from biblical shalom. which incorporates social well-being and justice.?
"God" to Western Christians is commonly thought of as an omniscient, omnipotent, transcendent being, as creator and sustainer of life. To Buddhists "god" means a superhuman being with good or evil connotation, but lacking the "omni" qualities of the Christian God. A group of Catholic catechists opened a dialogue with Buddhist monks with the question, "Is it correct to say that Buddha is God?" Without any hesitation the monks replied, "Oh no, Buddha is greater than any god." They explained that it is the dharma (teaching) that brings

[^1]liberation, and Buddha gave the dharma. Gods are lesser beings in their thought and have no such power. ${ }^{3}$

The problems with Western development as defined above are consciously overstated to make the point that good intentions and sincerity are not enough to avoid the pitfalls of development. Most Western development agencies understand this and are doing excellent development work that is making a difference in the lives of people being served.

## Buddhist Values and Development

Price Sihanouk pointed out the importance of Buddhism in Cambodian society. It follows that an understanding of Buddhism is essential to working effectively in Cambodia. How does the Buddhist worldview affect development? What values do Buddhists hold dear related to development'? How do Buddhist values resonate with Christian values?

Development workers who approach these questions must be open to dialogue in openness, with respect, and willing to encompass a different worldview. We should expect to change even as we seek to bring changes - to be open to enter into a process of mutual transformation. For the development worker, this involves repeated cycles of in-depth encounters, withdrawal, reflection, and integration, with the possibility of change.

There are several traditional Buddhist values that can contribute significantly to the framework of development.

## The Middle Way

Sakyamuni, the original Buddha, left his life as a rich prince and the pursuit of pleasure at age 27 to seek liberation. For several years he practiced severe asceticism. Afterward he articulated the "Eight-

[^2]Fold Path" that leads to right living. This path defines the journey to liberation as a middle way between licentiousness and asceticism.

For many Buddhists, this teaching concerning a Middle Path is taken as a given and already proven fact.... They accept it as taught and then lead their own lives trying to avoid both hedonistic and ascetic imbalance, trying to keep the expectations about things, including themselves, realistic, modest, and free of self-delusion. ${ }^{+}$

The concepts embodied in the Middle Way and the attendant lifestyle could be part of a vision statement of development agencies. The middle way of development neither idealizes poverty nor promotes consumerism. This approach will use technology appropriately. Tom Dooley, the medical doctor-developer in Laos in the early 1960's, said he had no desire to brings Laotians to the same generation of modernity, but only to get them into the same century. "There is more danger to the well-being of recipients in consumerism than remaining in the poverty of rice farmers." ${ }^{5}$

## Interconnectedness

Buddhists see a connection between all animate and inanimate things on earth and in the universe. Thus all that we do has implications for everything else, and positively or negatively affects our well-being in the universe.

> Buddhism embraces a view of reality ... in which all parts of the universe, living and non-living, are understood as being inter-related and inter-dependent. In other words, nothing exists by itself but only in relation to other things on Earth and in the universe. ${ }^{6}$

[^3]Pallis, writing from a Buddhist perspective, suggests a way of achieving interconnectedness through his interpretation of the Christian story of the origin of evil-the Garden of Eden. ${ }^{7}$ The Tree of Life stands in Paradise, a place without disharmony or fear. Adam and Eve participate fully but passively in this setting. The serpent, through Eve, tempts Adam to taste a new experience.

This new experience values things for their own sakes, as if they were entirely separate entities. Adam and Eve, having tasted of the fruit of the Tree of Life, become aware of all that divides them from one another and from every other thing around them. Because of their new perception of separateness, they are aware of their nakedness and try to hide their shame by covering themselves. This artificial selfhood has become the prototype of all human disguise.

The Tree of Life became the Tree of Good and Evil, bowed down with its good and bad fruit, containing the seeds of becoming good or evil. There was now the possibility of good or evil.

It is noteworthy that Paradise contained a serpent. The serpent was necessary in the garden, because Paradise without a serpent would be God. The serpent was necessary in order to introduce imperfection. All created things have a degree of perfection-but that perfection is relative. It is that which lies outside limits of perfection that causes suffering and change. A basic premise of Buddhism is that suffering is the result of participating in life outside the center, which is perfection.

In Buddhism, the idea of creation is absent. Buddhists insist on "non-selfhood"-that all things point away from the ideas of a fixed self and separation from all other beings. In the absence of a creation there is no beginning. But there is an end in Buddhist thought. The end is the integration into the center, the enlightenment, "where the wheel of rebirth is not turning," and one is released from further suffering.

Having accepted that evil is part of the created world, how can we humans get back to Paradise-to the Tree of Life? Pallis postulates that we do that by retracing our ancestor's steps in reverse order. Adam was lured from the center to the periphery. We need to return from the

[^4]periphery to the center-from separateness to interconnectedness. We have been raised on the knowledge of the Tree of Good and Evil. Through this tree we must rediscover the Tree of Life. Enlightenment is the key to reintegration into the center. To reintegrate into the center, we need the Light of Enlightenment. Having achieved reintegration, one transcends the dualities of good and evil, and both are accepted as part of the creation. Then the sting of the serpent will be ineffective.

Whether or not we accept Pallis' theology and the way to interconnectedness, development workers would do well to keep in mind the concept that the changes we facilitate have implications for the local community and ultimately the universe. Villagers may be more aware of this concept than we think. I recall visiting a village in India, isolated by four rivers without bridges, and without radios or newspapers. The people of this village knew about the international conference on ecology that had taken place three weeks before in South America.

## Suffering

Relief from suffering is at the heart of Buddhist thought. Release from suffering represents liberation. The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism form a system of thought to identify and relieve suffering. It is based on a medical model.

- Recognize the symptom (suffering)
- Diagnose the ailment causing the suffering (give it a name)
- Analyze the cause of the suffering
- Apply the remedy to alleviate the suffering

Suffering is extant in the world. We can run away from it; we can build walls to try to shut it out; or we can simply deny its existence. But a person interested in development must first look squarely at suffering and acknowledge its existence. This requires more than a cursory glance. One must have a feel for suffering, while recognizing that those who have never experienced it will have difficulty empathizing with those who have.

Having felt the presence of suffering, we must give it a name. Nameless suffering is easy to ignore. Naming suffering brings it into the realm of conscious thought, making it difficult to ignore.

The next step is to diagnose the cause of the suffering, whether physical, such as hunger; psychological, as in low self-esteem; or spiritual, as in loneliness and separation. As in the medical model, accurately naming and diagnosing the cause of suffering is critical to finding the proper remedy.

The remedy must follow the medical dictum, "First of all, do no harm." The goals and methods of the remedy must correspond to the nature of the need. The remedy after a natural or manmade disaster is immediate supply of the basic requirements of food, shelter, and clothing. These goals clearly differ from those of long-term development. In development, long-term perspectives are needed. Short-term quick fix remedies may create dependencies that cause more suffering over time.

Suffering to Buddhists is being out of step with the divine principle. The divine principle is everywhere present in the world, but people do not tune into it. Suffering results. Our human efforts to create good or shunt aside evil create a selfhood that in itself causes suffering.

Suffering in all forms is then accepted as a measure of the world's apparent remoteness from the divine principle. The principle is absolutely omnipresent in the world, but the world is relatively absent from the principle, this apparent contradiction between 'essence' and 'accidents' is paid for in suffering. ${ }^{8}$

So the process never stops and
our many attempts to abolish given evils will necessarily remain a treatment of symptoms, leaving the deepest causes of unhealth untouched because intellectual discernment, the essential diagnosis, is wanting. ${ }^{9}$

Recognize suffering, name it, devise a remedy, and apply it. These are the Four Noble Truths. Christian development programs could apply the Four Noble Truths to their benefit. This discipline can be applied to individuals, to groups, to villages, or to nations.
${ }^{8}$ Ibid., 46.
${ }^{9}$ Ibid., 48.

## The Buddhist-Animist Worldview

In his attempt to explain why bad things happen, the animist attributes the frightening, the weird, or the eerie to gods, spirits, or spirits of ancestors. Rural Buddhists appropriate animism to help them explain the misfortunes that befall them. ${ }^{10}$ The animist feels that his problems are entirely due to separate and hostile external forces. He can try to avoid these forces, propitiate them by sacrifices, or manipulate them by means of magic, if he has the power to do so.

By contrast, in Buddhist thought evil is seen as working within the person. Evil is the attempt to subvert the individual in his quest for Enlightenment. Evil is overcome by the inner discipline of meditation. Buddha said, "Meditate and do not be slothful, lest afterwards you experience remorse." Evil is overcome by one's own effort. One of Buddha's dying statements was, "Monks, be diligent to work out your own salvation."

To avoid sickness, or to gain riches or power, the animist must manipulate the external world by keeping out of the way of the evil spirits or demons, by offering appropriate sacrifices to keep them happy, or by invoking a higher power. The worldview of the animist contrasts with that of the Buddhist who ascribes evil to the inner working of a person, and focuses on the inner disposition. Imagine the struggle of the village animist who wants to become a Buddhist monk. He must put off his pattern of thinking that evil comes from outside himself, and focus instead on the inner struggle toward perfection.

Dr. Ravi Jayakaran employs "ten seed method" to probe the worldview of villagers. ${ }^{\text {" }}$ Using it, he asked village elders to assess to what extent they thought their lives were controlled by self, by others, or by fate. They rated these parameters for the village as a whole, and for the rich and for the poor. These were the results.

[^5]| Group | Self | Others | Fate |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Village as whole | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| The rich | 8 | 0 | 2 |
| The poor | 2 | 6 | 2 |

He further explored the meaning of fate with the elders:

| Buddha | $20 \%$ |
| :--- | :--- |
| Spirits | $20 \%$ |
| Sprits of ancestors | $30 \%$ |
| Merit from previous lives | $30 \%$ |

He then asked the meaning of spirits, and the elders rated the spirits as follows:

$$
\text { Good spirits } \quad 70 \%
$$

Evil spirits 20\%
Spirits that can be either 10\%

Spirits and gods are seen to play significant roles in the daily life of villagers. This is the mixture of Buddhism and animism that characterizes most rural villagers in South Asia.

It is sometimes said of the Buddhism of South Asia that it is nothing more than a thin veneer covering deep animism rooted strongly in the belief of demons, and that animism is the genuine religion of these lands. ${ }^{12}$

## Christian Development in Buddhist-Animist Countries

How do we go about the work of development? What do we do that is helpful and appropriate? How do we bring about desired change without destroying local initiative, creativity, and resourcefulness? What actually needs changing? How do we work cooperatively with people with a Buddhist or Buddhist-animist worldview?

[^6]Kraus, writing from a Christian viewpoint, suggests five things that need changing in developing countries. ${ }^{13}$ The following five transformations are adapted from his work:

- Transform patterns of violence and greedy self-seeking to community mutuality
- Transform fatalism that stifles hope to appropriate proactivity
- Transform oppressive hierarchical social structures to provide a chance for all people, including the socially disadvantaged
- Transform ill-serving ideas of the cause of sickness and natural disasters to systems that are proven to work, whether traditional or modern
- Introduce appropriate technology

Buddhist social activists have also articulated what changes are desirable to develop societies. Buddhist social action is directed toward minimizing suffering, and emphasizes compassion, equanimity, tolerance, self-reliance, and individual responsibility. To accomplish these goals it is necessary to:

- Help people to overcome ego-centeredness that allows subordination or exploitation, promote high self-esteem, and avoid creating situations of superiority-inferiority
- Offer each person a freedom limited only by the freedom and dignity of others, in order to develop self-reliant responsibility
- Have concern first and foremost with the material and social conditions for personal growth. The Dalai Lama said, "Man takes precedence over progress."
- Support for a middle range of technology that provides adequate range of material goods while maintaining harmony with the environment. ${ }^{14}$

[^7]On the basis of a first reading, there may appear to be little resemblance between the goals of development for Christian and Buddhist organizations. However, rearranging these two lists shows significant congruence.

| Christian Goals | Buddhist Goals |
| :---: | :---: |
| 1. Transform patterns of violence and greedy self-seeking into mutuality in community. | 1. Offer each person a freedom that is limited only by the freedom and dignity of others, in order to develop self-reliant responsibility. |
| 2. Transform the fatalism that stifles hope into appropriate pro-activity. | 2. Exercise concern first and foremost with the material and social conditions for personal growth. |
| 3. Transform oppressive hierachical social structure to provide a chance for all people including the socially disadvantaged. | 3. Help people overcome egocenteredness that allows subordination or exploitation, promote high self-esteem, and avoid creating situations of superiority-inferiority. |
| 4. Transform ill-serving ideas of the cause of sickness and natural disasters into systems that are proven to work, whether traditional or modern. |  |
| 5. Inprove the quality of life through the introduction of appropriate technology. | 5. Support a middle range of technology that provides adequate supply of material goods while maintaining harmony with the environment. |

The first goal for both Christians and Buddhists states that in our self-seeking we should remain always mindful of the needs of others. In the second goal, both Christians and Buddhists refer to the potential for human growth, and support conditions that promote human potential. The third goal of both abhors the structures and systems that create oppression and exploitation. Kraus' fourth goal has no counterpart in
this representation of Buddhist thought. The last goal promotes the proper application of middle-range technology, without idealizing either poverty or consumerism.

An important difference in approach seems apparent. Christian goals suggest that change is initiated by an agency from outside the culture. In contrast, the Buddhist approach is based on individual effort and inner work. As individuals are transformed, the community will be transformed.

## Buddhist View of Christianity

While working in a Buddhist country we need to understand how Buddhists understand Christianity. Buddhism is an atheistic religion, ${ }^{15}$ in contrast to theistic the religions of Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. Buddhists consider a self-existent and self-caused deity as false. This "principled atheism" is fundamental to how Buddhists view Christians.

- Buddhists believe that if a doctrine is useful to someone it may be appropriate for them. But ultimately Buddhists believe that in order to attain enlightenment and nirvana, the idea of theism must be discarded. In this view, it is permissible for a Christian to believe in a personal God if they find it useful, but ultimately this belief will need to be abandoned to attain enlightenment.
- Buddhists are interested in the Christian concept of selfless love because compassion is central to their concept of ethics. However, the Buddhist concept of selfless love has no basis in transcendence or in Christ.
- "Pseudo-religion" or "religion-surrogate" in Buddhist thought is a religion or system of thought that does not lead to the development of a good moral life and to taking responsibilities for one's own actions. In the Buddhist view,
${ }^{15 \times 4}$ Gods are nothing to do with religion." Stated by a monk to Richard F. Gombrich, and cited in Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988).

Christianity with its emphasis on a good moral life does not fall within this definition.

- "Unsatisfactory religion" is one that fosters the good moral life and taking responsibility for one's actions, but has beliefs that are opposed to Buddhism such as belief in God or denial of rebirth. Most of Christianity falls into this category. ${ }^{16}$
The Buddha described the path to fellowship with people of other religions as one of "cultivating selflessness, compassion, freedom from malice, purity of mind. and self-mastery of purpose. ${ }^{17}$


## Proposed Theology in a Buddhist-Animist Country

In attempting to provide a framework for a working theology, I suggest two cautions. In response to Buddhism, we must not be tentative about the transcendent. We must with confidence affirm our experience with the transcendent God. We affirm the God we know as Creator, as Ultimate Reality, the Source of Truth and Unconditional Love, and the Model of Trustworthiness. Our ultimate truth and reality do not come from scientific or rational thought but from God.

Second, we must not overreact to the relativism of the postmodern age by becoming absolutist, with the attitude that we have a corner on the truth. In our interaction with Buddhists, we need to remain open to transformation ourselves.

I am suggesting that there is a balance between the unshakable belief in a transcendent God and the absolutist position of the strict fundamentalist who has the answers to life's questions for all time and all places. This means that not everything is negotiable-that I have a base from which I relate to the world. It also means that I am open to new truth and understanding. It means that life is a process with a motto something like this: "At this time I know what I believe, but what I believe will change as I receive new light and truth."

[^8]What might a theology that is effective and explainable to Buddhist-animists look like? There are several possibilities. I am attracted to using as the starting point the idea that all people are created in the image of God.

God the Creator fashioned humans in God's own image. This fact imparts dignity and potential to all humans. Bearing God's image implies spirituality and ability to contemplate. It also connotes an interconnectedness and unity among all humans. With this view, we approach people without regard to their origin or ethnicity, but with respect and expectancy--respect because they are the carriers of God's image, and expectancy because of their undeveloped potential given by God at the time of their creation.

Through his incarnation, Jesus refurbished the image of God for humankind. Jesus revealed God as Truth, Compassion, and Trustworthiness. Jesus' prayer was that the Kingdom of God would come to earth as it is in heaven. Where the attributes of God (Truth, Compassion, Trustworthiness) are found in good measure, there is found God's Kingdom. In this community people live harmoniously in trust and openness with each other. In this community, justice and compassion prevail, the lame are made to walk, the blind are given sight, prisoners are freed, and the oppressed are raised up.

In Cambodia, the Kingdom will be evident when the rice lasts for twelve months instead of seven, when those who lost legs from landmines are helped to walk again, when people living under the oppression of poverty are freed from subsistence living, when a poor person can get a loan without paying usurious interest, when truth is so common it is assumed, when people live together in peace and harmony based on mutual trust and expressions of compassion between neighbors, and when people work together to actualize the unrealized God-given potential in every human being. Then the people who walked in darkness will see the light.

The Light is the light of God. Jesus brought that light into the world. We are bearers of that light, the light of Jesus. We seek to bring light in areas of darkness. In doing that it is possibly more important how we do that than what we do. As a bearer of the light, we reflect the
demeanor and attitude of Jesus. This is best summed up in the stance of an empowered servant.

Jesus addressed this issue when

> [a] dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. But he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become the youngest, and the leader like one who serves.... I am among you as one who serves."

Jesus came as a servant. We serve to introduce people to the Kingdom of God under the authority of Christ. We do this in faith that the Spirit of Christ will present God through us in our actions and words. We are serving as the representatives of Christ, with the knowledge that God's Spirit is at work to establish the rule of God. The power at work is the power of the Spirit and not our own power. Our role is to plant seeds. Some will bear fruit. We are not responsible to grow the seeds. God does that. We are to plant the seeds.

Our attitude in service is one of gratitude for God's unmerited grace. Our motivation to serve is thus not to assuage guilt or to gain merit, but in thankfulness to God for unmerited favor. Joy is a normal consequence of thankfulness. Thus we find joy in serving.

Indian Nobel prizewinner Rebindranath Tahore wrote:
I slept and dreamed that life was pleasure,
I woke and found that life was service,
I served and discovered that service was pleasure.

## Is MCC Different From a Secular INGO?

The question of the difference between "Christian" and "secular" INGOs is a recurring discussion in Christian INGO circles. There are many INGOs with well-intentioned staff, deeply concerned for the welfare of those they try to serve, and sincerely wanting to make things better for the poor and marginalized. MCC volunteers struggle with

[^9]this question, while believing that it is not enough to be a good technician. So we search for ways to incorporate our spirituality into our daily lives as we live and work with people of another culture or worldview.

As we work in a Buddhists-animist culture, we need some guideposts to help point us to ways of working that incorporate the spiritual in our work and yet respect the local culture. The following statements are an attempt to set such as framework.

- Assume that the Buddhist-animist has an active spiritual life that significantly shapes his or her worldview
- Become a student of the spirituality of the people and culture
- Assume that full communication has not occurred until the spiritual dimension is considered
- Assume that the spiritual dimension must be part of the development process
- Look for "sacramental moments" ${ }^{19}$
- Use the sacramental moment to incorporate the spiritual dimension in a way that makes sense to both Buddhistanimists and Christians
- Find ways to let people know that your frame of reference is the teachings of Jesus
- Avoid arguments; relax and allow the Spirit of God to do its work
- Expect to be transformed in this process
- In these interchanges, approach out of an in-depth relationship rather than confrontationally
Sacramental moments are those times in everyday life when one's worldview or deeply held beliefs are brought into play. This is a time when one's basic assumptions are tested. As development workers leave their home culture, we bring to the new culture a spirituality and worldview within which we form relationships, make choices, and set priorities. This happens whether or not we are aware of it. We need to assume that the Buddhist-animist has a frame of reference that serves

[^10]him or her in the same way. As we begin to recognize the importance of our own worldview, we will understand the need to recognize the spirituality of those among whom we live.

In our everyday work as Christian development workers, we need to become more aware of where God is at work. As we do that we will also become more sensitive to those places where the spirituality of the Buddhist-animist frames the questions and solutions to the development problems. These are the sacramental moments that give opportunity to communicate our own spirituality. We communicate our deeplyheld beliefs and we seek to understand similar deep beliefs of the Bud-dhist-animist. We do this with respect and gentleness rather than hammering the "truth" of the gospel at the other person. ${ }^{20}$

The story in Attachment $I$, here summarized, illustrates this idea. A well drilling team was deciding where to drill a well. They took soil samples and consulted their charts using the latest technology to make their decision. However, the villagers know that it is the shaman that understands these things and makes such decisions. For them this was a sacramental moment-a time when their beliefs and faith are critical to the choices made. The technicians' soil testing and consulting charts was the stranger's way of doing magic and coming to the decision. Steward says:

> The villagers were wrong to see site selection as magic; they were right to see it as a sacramental moment. They may be superstitious, but they haven't forgotten that the supernatural surrounds and indwells our activities all the time. ${ }^{11}$ (Steward, Attachment I)

[^11]By seizing the sacramental moments, we avoid secularizing the event and give recognition to the supernatural. This need not be done in an offensive, coercive manner. One simply starts with the problemfinding the best place to drill the well-and gives recognition to the Creator God who made a world of order and allows us to understand some of the secrets of nature.

## Conclusion

There are problems inherent in the Westerner coming to "develop" an underdeveloped country. Good intentions alone will not avoid the pitfalls. Sensitivity, humility and in-depth encounter with the people of the new culture are required. In this encounter, the newcomer will need to come to an understanding of the worldview and spirituality of the people. Spirituality is an essential part of this understanding. To ignore our own spirituality and that of the people being served is to have a less than whole picture, and any development program will tend to be superficial and transient in effect. Most "secular" development agencies recognize the importance of including the social milieu worldview in their approach.

However, many Christian development workers take seriously the teachings of Christ on the nature of God and on human relationships as the basis for their spirituality. These development workers recognize the spiritual dimension of the interaction between developer and recipient. We start where she lives and with her worldview. This will include her explanation of evil and why bad things happen. We converse and enter deeply into trying to understand her worldview.

We do this as learner-teachers, with humility, respect, and the confidence that we have a message that has the potential to create a better life for the recipients. The approach and stance of the Christian development worker is best characterized by that of a servant-leader. Recipient people will look to us expectantly as experts in a given field. This expectancy will create opportunities to relate and communicate our own spirituality.

The Christian development worker seeks to transform those beliefs and attitudes that disempower and enslave the recipient person. For example, teaching that gastroenteritis is caused by bacteria opens
the door to teaching the value of sanitation in its prevention. A debilitating factor in their worldview will have been transformed. Development with lasting effect will result when there is transformation that includes a change in beliefs and values. People thus transformed will have values that support healthy living in community. We have repeatedly seen development programs without this transformation die a quick death shortly after the initiating agency leaves the scene.

The goals of development for both Christians and Buddhists have many similarities. This can become the basis for development in a Buddhist country and can become the foundation on which a development program is built.

There are many deeply-held Buddhist values that can contribute positively to any development program. In this process, as the development worker seeks to bring change, he or she must also expect to change. This will be a natural process of give and take. In this daily interaction, the development worker will look for the sacramental moments when the deeply held beliefs and worldview are called into question. This is an opportunity for mutual transformation and should be grasped.

It is essential to have an undergirding theology that grounds what we do and how we do it. A useful theological framework is the idea that all humankind is created in God's own image. This common image inheres in people of all cultures and skin color. With this as a basis, all persons deserve respect. There will be a tendency to look for the commonalties among people rather than the differences. It will be assumed of all people that they have undeveloped God-given potential.

The goal for the Christian development worker is to plant the Kingdom of God-to bring into human existence the attributes of God lived out in human relationships. This work is done in non-coercive ways, with humility, good humor, and love that does not require a return. Christian development workers take on the "mind of Christ" working as representatives of Christ. We plant seeds with kindness, imitating the truth. compassion, and trustworthiness of God. God will take care of the rest.

## Attachment I

Adapted from Biblical Holism, John Steward, pages 65-66.
The well-digging specialist gathers a sample of soil for analysis. A set of government charts is studied. The driller talks over the chart with his team in a language incomprehensible to the villagers. The rig is moved into position. What is happening?

To us, trained and socialized in the West, modern science is at work. Data is being gathered to help select the drilling site for the next well. This is merely technical activity. Nothing superratura! here.

To the villager, there may be an entirely different interpretation. The earth is being consulted through the use of the arcane (hidden, understood by only a few), secret knowledge everyone knows the shamans and witch doctors have. A magic ritual is underway.

Who is right? If we are too quick, too smug in our Western framework of understanding the world, we say, "We are, of course. The villagers are just being superstitious."

A moment longer, a more respectful reflection, might lead us to a more important insight-one that helps us as much as it helps the villager. Our technical knowledge is in fact a reflection of the activity and character of God. Creative, investigative minds-created by a creative, rational, order-making God-discovered the technical knowledge being used to choose well sites.

If we had eyes to see, we would realize that choosing a well site is another sacramental moment. A time to recognize the impact of the work of God in history. A time to stop and give thanks for his gift to us in how best to use his creation.

The villagers were wrong to see the site selection as magic; they were right to see it as a sacramental moment. They may be superstitious, but they haven't forgotten that the supernatural surrounds and indwells our activities all the time.

But this story has another side--a more disturbing darker one. If many of the operational elements of well digging are potentially sacramental moments, then what message do we send to our village friends when we fail to act as if this were true? When we treat the site selection as a simple matter of technical skill, we are doing one of two
things, both of them bad. If we are insensitive to how the village folk may interpret the activity, and make no explanation, we are reinforcing their pre-scientific worldview. Christian technical folk appear to be doing magic.

If we are wise enough to understand how they might interpret site selection, but provide the wrong explanation (the activity is merely a technical activity having nothing to do with magic or the supernatural), we are secularizing their worldview. In fact, we are passing on our own cultural blind spot.

Whether we overlook their interpretation to explain the activity as science, the message is a secular one: God and the supernatural are not present here.



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    "The "ten-seed method" is a non-threatening means for villagers to assign relative value to multiple choices.

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[^8]:    ${ }^{16}$ Paul J. Griffiths, ed., Christianity through Non-Christian Eyes (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1992), 146.
    ${ }^{17}$ Ibid.

[^9]:    ${ }^{18}$ Luke 22:25-27 NRSV.

[^10]:    ${ }^{19}$ John Steward, Biblical Holism: Where God, People \& Deeds Connect, An Interactive Workshop (Burwood, Victoria: World Vision Australia, 1994), 125.

[^11]:    ${ }^{20}$ Drs. Nanthachai and Ubonwan, a Christian Thai married couple and former Buddhist monk and nun, wrote their doctoral theses on meekness as a virtue in interfaith dialogue. This approach is based on the Thai worldview and cultural ways of relating. They are devoting their efforts to reeducating Christian missionaries to Thailand. In their view, a direct confrontational approach to communicating the gospel may only drive people further away. Alternatively, a gentle, meek, relational approach starting from the common ground of a desire for ethical and right living, will gradually draw the person toward the Kingdom of God.
    ${ }^{2}$ Steward, Biblical Holism.

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[^16]:    ${ }^{8}$ Ibid.. 46.
    ${ }^{9}$ Ibid., 48.

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