A Practical Theological Exploration of Christian Evangelism in Relation to Contemporary Christian-Buddhist Dialogue in the USA

This dissertation, informed and shaped by Christian-Buddhist encounter and dialogue in the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century, seeks to contribute to a reconstruction of the theology and practice of Christian evangelism as a form of contemplative spiritual guidance. By examining qualitative data from a study of the interreligious experiences of Christian-Buddhist practitioners and spiritual seekers, and by placing that data in conversation with several current theologies of evangelism, this project in practical theology explores how the theology and practice of evangelism can be enhanced by a deeper responsiveness to religious pluralism in general, and Christian-Buddhist engagement in particular. The dissertation recommends a practical theology of evangelism in correlation with Christian-Buddhist dialogue; engagement in interreligious dialogue as a virtuous Christian practice; recovery and renewal of contemplative spirituality as a source of evangelism; and transformation of evangelism as contemplative spiritual guidance. By providing empirical data from in-depth interviews and participant observation, and by analyzing texts from the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, this study advances current theological debate while seeking to move beyond the standard threefold typology used by theologians to construct a theology of inter-religious engagement: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. The dissertation concludes that exclusivists too often disregard the lived experiences of interreligious practitioners and fail to address important practical theological questions that surface in the relations between interreligious dialogue and Christian evangelism. Conversely, emerging proposals to adopt a pluralist approach toward other religions and to construe evangelism as merely “interreligious dialogue” is inadequate to the invitational aims of evangelistic practice. The analysis of selected theological texts reveals creative tension between interreligious dialogue and evangelizing mission. While such tension causes confusion and suspicion from inside and outside of the church, it is also indicative of the possibility of mutual enrichment and transformation through a reflexive relationship. Qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with ten Christian-Buddhist practitioners and spiritual seekers, along with participant observation at a Christian-Buddhist retreat center reveals a profound spiritual hunger for experiencing God, who is both transcendent and immanent, and the inadequacy of propositional presentations of the Gospel in a postmodern and religiously plural context.
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At that time, he was Abbot of Hyeon Jeong Sah Temple in the So Baek Sahn Mountain range, South Korea, the first Westerner to be appointed abbot of a traditional Korean Son (Zen in Japanese) temple. He was born Paul Muenzen in 1964 to a family of devout Catholics in New Jersey, U.S.A. Having actively engaged in his early life at a Roman Catholic church, he had hoped to become a priest. But he gradually became skeptical and critical of the â€œdoctrinastic and no longer plausibleâ€œ old Christian teaching he received in private Catholic schools. He attended Yale University, where his passionate search for the truth that he could not find in the institutional churches led him to enroll in Harvard Divinity School. It was at this old university, founded by the Puritans of New England in 1636 to educate Christian clergy, where young Paul encountered the Korean Buddhist monk Seung Sahn1 on a December day in 1989. He recalls: 1 Zen Master Seung Sahn is the 78th Patriarch in his line of transmission in the Chogyor order of Korean Buddhism. In 1972, he came to the United States and started the Providence Zen Center, the first center in what is now the Kwan Um School. He and his students have founded over a hundred temples, centers, and groups around the world. Raised in a Protestant family in Korea, he is the author of The Whole World is a Single Flower, which includes Christian kong-ans. In the Providence Zen Center, his American disciple has co-directed â€œChristian-Buddhist retreatsâ€œ with Father Kevin Hunt OSCO in the belief that Christians and Buddhist can use very similar techniques of contemplative prayer and meditation to help make their spiritual teachings a living part of their daily existence. These retreats emphasize sitting and walking silent meditation, with both Christian and Zen chanting and include talks and discussion. For an academic treatment on Seung Sahn, see Steven Heine and Dale Stuart Wright, Zen Masters (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), chapter 10. 1 The teaching of the monk was not sophisticated or complex at all, but that was very simple as well as profound. He did not give an academic-style lecture or sermon. Indeed, he did not trying to explain about the Buddhist philosophy. Rather he just gave a question like this: Descartes said, â€œI think, therefore I am. Therefore this I comes from thinking. Where does thinking come from? Who are you? When you were born, where did you come from? When you die, where do you go?â€œ The audience members, along with many professors, could not find any adequate answer. He said, â€œI will give you a hint. Understanding cannot help you. Even though you read all the books in the Harvard library ten times, you cannot understand your true self.â€œ I replied, â€œI donâ€™t know.â€œ What answer he [Seung Sahn] gave me too is not a direct answer. Instead, he gave a direction, â€œKeep your Donâ€™t Know mind and just practice, practice, practice.â€œ Having taken this direction seriously, Paul â€œhas chosenâ€œ to be a Buddhist monk to seek truth and has enthusiastically practiced Zen both in America and Korea. Did he give up his Christian faith? His answer is: â€œNow, I am not an official Christian. But the more I am walking the Buddhist spiritual path; the more I am appreciating and understanding the true meaning of Gospel of Jesus. I would like to dare to say I am following Jesusâ€™ way through a Buddhist Way.â€œ Finally he was ordained in 1992 in Southern China, received Bikkhu precepts at the Diamond Altar of Tong Do Sah Temple in Korea, and has been practicing in various remote mountain places, including three intensive 100-day solo retreats and some fifteen three-month intensive group meditation retreats. His autobiography, titled Man Haeng: From Harvard to Hwa Gye Sah Temple was published in Korea in 1999 and became a bestseller.3 Up until now, 2.3 This is originated from my informal dialogue with Hyon Gak Sunim on April 2000 in Seoul, Korea. There is also DVD about him. See Korea Foundation, Cloud Path: Journey of a Wandering Monk (Seoul: Korea Foundation, 2006), he has been very actively involved in "evangelizing" Korean Son (Zen) Buddhism in Korea and abroad as well as participating in Christian-Buddhist dialogue. As Buddhism came to America, it did not land in a vacuum or blank space. The Judeo-Christian roots of American culture are alive in Americansâ€™ lives. For many, the roots of faith are rather hidden, perhaps due to deep dissatisfaction with institutionalized religion. Within this religious vein, Paulâ€™s story witnesses a new religious phenomenon: choosing the Buddhist way as an alternative or complementary spiritual path to Christianity is increasingly common in America,4 known as one of the most religiously plural Western societies. Today, one can see Buddhist meditation centers spreading and various workshops taking place in a number of sites, attracting not a few Americans to â€œnot dogmatic but practicalâ€œ ways of spirituality. The â€œBuddhistsâ€œ that missionaries went to convert are now at home converting Christians, challenging Christianityâ€™s exclusive claims and provoking serious theological reflection on Christiansâ€™ attitude toward other religions. How do churches and theologians evaluate and respond to Paulâ€™s story and his spiritual journey? For the task of evangelism for the Christian Church, is Buddhist practice a threatening competitor or a new source of continuing transformation of Christian practice? 4 In the modern history of America, a Christianâ€™s conversion to Buddhism is not a new phenomenon. For example, Dwight Goddard (1861-1939), an American missionary who went to Asia, was converted to Buddhism in China. Se Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History. Edited by Thomas A. Tweed and Stephen Prothero (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 193. For an evangelical treatment on Buddhism, see Harold A Netland and Keith E. Yandell, Buddhism: A Christian Exploration and Appraisal (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2009), 4. Statement of the Problem The purpose of this project is to address theological questions that surface in the relation between interreligious dialogue and Christian evangelism by investigating contemporary religious encounters between Buddhism and Christianity in the United States. Its primary question is how the practices of evangelization today in the multi-religious world are informed and re-shaped by taking seriously the issue of religious pluralism in general, and Buddhist-Christian dialogue in particular. According to Robert Wuthnow's recent sociological research, many American Christians are living in contradiction in that they are â€œpluralists collectively but absolutists in our private lives.â€œ He argues that Christian theologians have not adequately wrestled with the questions of particularity and the truth of Christian faith in the context of pluralism.6 Furthermore, Harvey Cox contends that both Euro-American theologians and the â€œmainlineâ€œ churches have failed to grasp the most urgent theological issue of the globalized world: â€œhow Christianity can root itself in cultures steeped in Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, and indigenous religious symbols and still remain Christian.â€œ On the other hand, newly emerging proposals7 to adopt a pluralist paradigm 5 Robert Wuthnow, America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 287. 6 7 ibid., 312. Harvey Cox, â€œThinking Globally About Christianity.â€œ In The Oxford Handbook of Global Religions, ed., Mark Juergensmeyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 246. 5 toward other religions and to construe evangelism as â€œinterreligious dialogueâ€œ have posed significant challenges to the traditional understanding of Christian evangelism as â€œproclamation.â€œ Living in a post-modern and post-Christendom age and challenged by religious pluralism, it would be to the great benefit of American Christians to be informed by a thorough analysis of our contemporary religious context. Likewise, a call should be made for religiously responsible guidance toward authentic engagement with religious others not only relevant to our contemporary interreligious experience, but also faithful to the evangelistic mission of the church. Thus, the focus of this study is the theology of evangelism in relation to interreligious dialogue with the ultimate question of how this engagement revisions and
contextualizes the theology, aims, and practice of evangelism. By describing and analyzing this specific Christian-Buddhist dialogue in terms of the lived experiences of ordinary people, this project intends to identify and address practical theological issues that emerge from it. In doing so, I seek to explore alternate models of evangelism in the context of Christian-Buddhist engagement. 8 Kenneth Cracknell, *Dialogue is evangelism, evangelism is dialogue* in Fullness of Life for All: Challenges for Mission in Early 21st Century, eds., Daniel, M. L., Charles Edward van Engen, and H. M. Vroom. Currents of encounter, v. 22 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003); Luiz Carlos Susin, Andrés Torres Ureña, and J. Ma. Vigil, eds., Pluralist Theology: The Emerging Paradigm (London: SCM Press, 2007); Paul F. Knitter, Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996). 9 Paul Mojzes and Leonard Swidler eds., Christian Mission And Interreligious Dialogue (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990); Harold A. Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith & Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001). 10 For the purpose of this dissertation, I choose Buddhism for the following reasons. Like Christianity, Buddhism is recognized as one of the world’s first transcultural religions as it has moved throughout Asia and the rest of the world. 11 Robert Buswell Jr., a renowned Western scholar on East Asian Zen Buddhism, presents Buddhism as one of the greatest missionary movements as well as the three major world religions, along with Christianity and Islam. 12 In the contemporary United States, Buddhism is attracting popular interests in books, films, and markets reshaping the American religious landscape. 14 While a number of Americans have converted to Buddhism, 15 a national survey in 2003 showed that one American 10 See Gananath Obeyesekere, Thinking Globally About Buddhism and Thomas A. Tweed, *Buddhist Communities Abroad,* in The Oxford Handbook of Global Religions, eds., Mark Juergensmeyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 69-82; 161-172; Linda Learman ed., Buddhist Missionaries in the Era of Globalization (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 11 Robert Buswell Jr., ed., Encyclopedia of Buddhism (New York: Macmillan Reference, 2004), vol. 1, vii. Likewise, Peter Harvey introduces Buddhism as one of the three great missionary religions of the world with its own distinctive way of evangelism. Two other missionary religions, according to him, are Christianity and Islam. See Peter Harvey, *Buddhism* (London and New York: Continuum, 2001), 3. 12 Buddhist-theme movies such as Kundun, Seven Years in Tibet, Little Buddha, The Golden Child, The Razorâ€™s Edge, and The Cup have shown in major U.S. theatres grossing more than 135 million dollars from U.S. box offices. http://www.adherents.com/movies/buddhist_box.html 13 Whole markets devoted to meditation cushions and Buddhist art has emerged. See Douglas Paulett, *Americans Need Something to Sit On or Zen Meditation Materials and Buddhist Diversity in North America,* Journal of Global Buddhism, vol. 1, 2000, 61-81. 14 Diana L. Eck, A New Religious America: How A Christian-Country Has Become the World’s Most Religious Diverse Nation (N.Y.: HarperCollins, 2001); Stephen Prothero ed., A Nation of Religions: The Politics of Pluralism in Multireligious America (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006). 15 A few statistics on American Buddhists are available, but they vary considerably. In 1997, Time magazine suggested there were â€œsome 100,000â€ American Buddhist converts. In the same year, Martin Baumann suggested that there were 3 or 4 million Buddhist in the United States, the most in any Western country. Also, it will 7 in seven claims to have had a fair amount of contact with Buddhists and that one American in eight believes Buddhist teachings or practices have had an important influence on his or her religion or spirituality. 16 American Buddhism is claimed as an emerging field of academic study 17 and is being taken as a missiological and theological subject in relation to Christian evangelism. 18 Significance of the Study This research project will contribute to the task of reconstructing the theology and practice of Christian evangelism in relation to the phenomenon of Christian-Buddhist encounter need to be noted that the â€œNightstand Buddhists,â€ coined by Thomas Tweed, do not show up in any statistics on the American Buddhist population. Thomas Tweed, â€œNightstand Buddhists and Other Creatures: Sympathizers, Adherents, and the Study of Religion,â€ in American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship, eds., Duncan Williams and Christopher Queen (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1999), 74; David Van Biema, â€œAmerica’s Fascination with Buddhism,â€ Time (Oct. 13, 1997), 75; Martin Baumann, â€œThe Dharma Has Come West: A Survey of Recent Studies and Sources,â€ Journal of Buddhist Ethics [online] 4 (1997), http://jbe.la.psu.edu/ Quoted in Richard Hughes Seager, Buddhism in America (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 11. More recently at around 4 million is placed as the total number of Buddhists in the United States, including immigrants and their descendants and native-born converts. Julie Poppen, â€œMonument to Buddhism,â€ Rocky Mountain News, August 17, 2001, 7A Quoted in Robert Wuthnow, America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 47. 16 Robert Wuthnow and Wendy Cadge, â€œBuddhists and Buddhism in the United States: The Scope of Influence,â€ Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 2004, 43: 361-78. 17 Charles S. Prebish, Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Richard H. Seager, Buddhism in America (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Duncan R. Williams and Christopher Queen, eds., American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship (Surrey, U.K.: Curzon Press, 1999). 18 Terry Muck, â€œMissiological Issues in the Encounter with Emerging Buddhism,â€ Missiology, 28, no. 1 (Ja 2000): 35-46; Stan Guthrie, "America becoming fertile mission field for Buddhism," Christianity Today Vol. 38. No. 13 (1994), 72-73. 19 James C. Stephens, â€œLooking at Buddhism: America as a Key to World Evangelization,â€ International Journal of Frontier Missions, 10 no 3, 1993, 105-115. 20 Mark S. Heim, â€œThe Trinity and Buddhism: A Perspectives on Christian Mission and Buddhist Mission,â€ in News of Borderless Riches: Interrogating, Comparing, and Reconstructing Mission in a Global Era, eds., Max L. Stackhouse and Lalsangkima Pachuau (Delhi: Cambridge Press, 2007), 249-263. 8 by providing empirical data of interreligious experiences related to that phenomenon and facilitating a correlational dialogue between this data and the theology of evangelism. In this process of reflection, I also will note implications for two related disciplines: the theology of religions and the study of spirituality and I will engage the literatures of those disciplines so as to amplify my discussion of the theology and practice of Christian evangelism. In contemporary theological discourse, the impact of interreligious engagement on Christian evangelism has emerged as an important and controversial issue. One of the central questions is: Should we replace mission as it has been practiced up till now by a dialogue with the other religions? Is it legitimate for Christians to evangelize in dialogue or not? Some Christians feel that evangelism is the antithesis of dialogue, whereas others contend that evangelism is a valid part of the dialogue process. Two opposing currents can be distinguished in 19 Two recent introduction books are: Paul F. Knitter, Introducing Theologies of Religions (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002) and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003). 20 For understanding the academic study of spirituality, see Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality, eds., Elizabeth A. Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005). 21 This question was implicitly anticipated by Paul Tillich and Karl Rahner from theological perspectives. Then it was explicitly probed by Willem Visserâ€™t Hooft, the first general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), in 1974 for the ecumenical agenda. See W.A. Visserâ€™t Hooft, Has Ecumenical Movement a Future? (Belfast, Christian Journals Limited, 1974), 30. 30 Quoted in S. Wesley Ariarajah, â€œThe impact of interreligious dialogue on the ecumenical movement,â€ Ecumenical Review 49.2(1997): 212-22. See Paul Tillich, Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1963); Karl Rahner, â€œChristianity and the Non-Christian Religions,â€ Theological Investigations, trans. Karl Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 115-134. 9 contemporary Christianity and these lead to a sharp polarization among
have begun to criticize this terminology as over-simplifying and to miss the special and particular nuances of any one position. Presumably, these categories are determined primarily by soteriology and secondarily by revelation. But within each of these categories we find a variety of theologies of religions. Among Western theologians, Schubert Ogden, 38 Ian Markham, 39 and Michael Barnes 40 have criticized this typology’s limitations and restrictiveness and have suggested alternative 36 Alan Race, Christianity and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions (Marykohn, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1982), 139. 37 For example, the â€œexclusiveismâ€œ of Karl Barth is very different from the â€œexclusiveismâ€œ of some of the evangelical thinkers whose thinking may rightly be called â€œrestrictivism.â€ Furthermore, among the pluralists themselves, there is a variety of pluralisms. For example, Mark Heim discusses the peculiarity of the pluralistic theologies of John Hick, W.C. Smith, and Paul Knitter and proposes his theology, which he names â€œorientational pluralism.â€œ See Mark Heim, Salavations: Truth and Difference in Religion (Marykohn, New York: Orbis Books, 1995) and The Depths of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001). 38 Schubert Ogden, Is There One True Religion or Are There Many? (Dallas: SMU Press, 1992), 39 Ian Markham, â€œCreating Options: Shattering the â€œExclusiveist, Inclusive and Pluralismâ€œ Paradigmâ€œ New Blackfriars vol. 74, issue 867, (January 1993):33-41. 40 Michael Barnes, Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism: Religions in Conversation (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989). 14 models. Kenneth Surin argues that this typology is ideologically produced by Western-liberalpluralists to dominate non-Western religious others. 41 Very recently, Terry Muck points out that this standard paradigm is a Western model and suggests that we need to get â€œbeyond the paradigmâ€œ.42 In Introducing Theologies of Religions, Paul Knitter attempts to revise the threefold typology with four models of Christianâ€™s attitudes toward other religions: the replacement model, the fulfillment model, the mutuality model, and the acceptance model.43 But Asian reviewers critically comment that this book ignores non-Western, non-Christian sources. 44 Without considering specific experiences of interreligious encounter in concrete contexts, universalizing theological discourse on it reaches an impassâ€œ by being couched in categories that do not fit the context. 46 In exploring the relevance of interreligious dialogue for evangelistic 47 Kenneth Surin, â€œPolitics of Speechâ€œ: Religious Pluralism in the Age of the McDonaldâ€™s Hamburger. â€œ In Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered, ed., Gavin Dâ€™Costa (Marykohn, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), 192-212. 42 Terry C. Muck, â€œTheology of Religions after Knitter and Hick: Beyond the Paradigmâ€œ Interpretation 61, no. 1 (Ja. 2007): 7-22. 43 Paul Knitter, Introducing Theologies of Religions (Marykohn, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 44 Peter C. Phan, Review of Introducing Theologies of Religions by Paul Knitter, Horizons 30, no. 1 (Spr 2003):113-117.; K. P. Aleaz, Review of Introducing Theologies of Religions by Paul Knitter, Asia Journal of Religion 17, no. 2 (October 2003): 442-459. 45 As an example of Korean context, in 1992 the Korean Methodist church excommunicated two professors of the Methodist Seminary, Byun Sun-Hwan and Hong Jung-Soo. Prof. Byun was dismissed from the presidency of his school and also deprived of his professorship â€œmainly because of his sympathetic understanding toward other religions, particularly toward Buddhism.â€œ Oh Kangnam, â€œBuddhahood and Metanoia: The Buddhist-Christian Dialogue in Korea,â€œ Journal of Dharma (Bangalore) Vol. 20, no. 2 (April-June 1995): 229. 46 Aloysius Pieris, â€œInterreligious Dialogue and Theology of Religions: An Asian Paradigm,â€œ Horizons 20 (Spr 1993): 106-114.; Moonjang Lee, â€œExperience of Religious Plurality in Korea: Its Theological Implications,â€œ International Review of Mission. 88 (O 1999): 399-413.; Moonjang Lee, Review of Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility by Paul Knitter, Studies in World Christianity. Vol. 5 (1, 1999): 93-95. 15 practice from the perspective of a practical theology of religions, this dissertation will not ask soteriological questions such as whether “adherents of other religions can be saved.” Rather, this project will ask questions such as “what can Christians learn from Buddhist practices and experiences in the task of evangelism?” By doing so, the study aims at to formulate a practical theology of evangelism informed by the lived experiences of Christian-Buddhist dialogue and faithful to the Christian tradition with its mission to proclaim the Gospel. Method of Investigation This project is a practical theological exercise. I see all Christian theology as fundamentally practical in that its subject matter is the life and praxis of the church as it engages the world. I take practical theology as the theological guide by which the Christian community engages the world and determines the practices of Christian life in a critical and transforming dialogue between the Christian tradition and contemporary experience. Tillichâ€™s method of correlation personifies the fundamental approach of practical theology. The method of correlation discerned the questions from human existence and provided a theological response from the Christian message. As such, theology is a function that serves the needs of the church. It is supposed to present the â€œtruthâ€œ of the Christian faith as well as show how these truths are relevant for each era in human history.47 Practical theology is the criticalreflexive process by which the church and the truth of the Christian faith are transformed, 47 Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology vol. 1 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 1. 16 becoming relevant to specific religious, historical and social contexts. Practical theology also has a non-theological side, i.e., it may benefit from conversation with the social sciences. Tillich says the theologian must utilize current knowledge from the psychological and sociological arena, and have an understanding of the current socio-political and cultural situation of humanity.48 Practical theology, therefore, becomes a bridge between the Christian message and the human situation. David Tray, Blessed Rage for Order (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996). 43. 17 human existence and provides the necessary religious symbols for answers, Tray allows the culture to interact and affect (critique and revise) Christian theology, Don Browning goes even further than Tray and redefines Christian theology as essentially practical.50 Theology is â€œcritical reflection on the churchâ€™s dialogue with Christian sources and other communities of experience and interpretation with the aim of guiding its action toward social and individual transformation.â€œ51 Contrary to the â€œtheory to praxis model,â€œ which begins with theoretical concepts and seeks to apply those concepts to life situations, Browning proposes a â€œpresent theory-laden practice to a retrieval of normative theory-laden practice to the creation of more critically held theory-laden practices.â€œ52 All theological norms, even scripture, were developed in reflection on practices and actions in which the church was already involved. Our experiences and actions give rise to our reflections and subsequent theories. Therefore, theory does not precede practice. Rather, practices produce theories. Interreligious dialogue is a practical theological concern because it is a contemporary human experience and a context in which Christians and Christian churches are engaged. I also see religious practices as a means for interreligious engagement.53 A personâ€™s experiences shape 50 Don Browning, A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 7. 51 52 53 Ibid., 16. Ibid., 7. John Berthrong, â€œAn exploration of the study of religious practices as an avenue for interreligious engagement and its implications for Practical Theology,â€œ paper presented at The Association of Practical Theology, 18 and affect that personâ€™s understanding of God and world. One derives beliefs about God and
persons of other religious traditions less from propositional-conceptual thinking, and more from encounters with God and persons of other religious traditions. Practical theology reminds Christians of this fact, and in using interreligious encounters and experiences as a source for the theology of evangelism, it expressly affirms that peopleâ€™s experiences influence shape our theological beliefs as much as their theological beliefs influence shape their practices.54 Recognizing this dialectical and reciprocal relationship between theology and experience, I take the lived experience of interreligious dialogue as an important source in the construction of a practical theology of evangelism as Gerald Hall articulated his method of missionary practical theology: “Christian commitment to liberating praxis needs to be equally attentive to the power of the gospelâ€”the voice of prophecyâ€”and the reality of the human situationâ€”the voice of dialogue. The relationship between the two voicesâ€”prophecy and dialogueâ€”is dialectical: that is, they need to be understood together and in reference to each other as two poles of the theological task.”55 November 20, 2004 forum entitled â€œHorizons in Practical Theology: Religious Practices as a Context for Interreligious Engagement.â€ 54 See Margaret Miles, Practicing Christianity: Critical Perspectives for an Embodied Spirituality (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006) and Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, eds., Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002). 55 Gerard Hall, “Prophetic Dialogue: A Foundational Category for Practical Theology,” in International Journal of Practical Theology, vol. 14, (2010): 34. 19 Sources of the Study This project consists of two main sources of information. The first lies within a qualitative interview process and participant observation built on previous research begun in the Church and Theology in Contemporary World course, 2001-2002, at Boston University codirected by Dr. Peter Berger and Dr. Claire Wolfteich. The second body of main sources includes theological statements and ecclesial documents on interreligious dialogue and evangelism by the ecumenical and ecclesial offices. As for the Catholic church, I will examine a selection of key documents from and since the Second Vatican Council: Nostra Aetate [Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions] [1965]; Lumen Gentium [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church] [1964]; Ad Gentes [Decree on the Churchesâ€™ Missionary Activity] [1967]; The Attitude of the Church toward Followers of Other Religions [1984 declaration of the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions]; Redemptoris Missio: On the Permanent Validity of the Churchâ€™s Missionary Mandate [1990]; Dialogue and Proclamation (1991).56 As for the World Council of Churches, the following documents will be analyzed: The Chiang Mai Statement: Dialogue in Community [1977]; Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies [1979]; Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation [1982] 56 While I am aware of other more recent statements by and controversies regarding Pope Benedict on the subject of interreligious dialogue such as Dominus Jesus (2001), I will not cover these recent developments in the Roman Catholic world for the purpose of limiting the scope of the dissertation. 20 â€œWitness among People of Other Living Faiths,â€ San Antonio Report (1989); Religious Plurality: Theological Perspectives and Affirmations (Baar Statement, 1990) For a wider appreciation of various confessional approaches to the interreligious encounter, Grounds for Understanding: Ecumenical Resources for responses to Religious Pluralism, edited by S. Mark Heim will be referenced.57 The references for scholarly work on the Buddhist-Christian dialogue and theologies of interreligious encounter are found mainly in two sources: Buddhist-Christian Studies, a quarterly journal published by the Society of Buddhist-Christian Studies in the U.S.A., from 1981 to 2010 and Faith Meets Faith Series, published by Orbis Books. Theological work on the question of Christian evangelism and the practice of interreligious dialogue in the American context58 of religious pluralism will be particularly focused on in this study.59 57 Mark S. Heim, Grounds for Understanding: Ecumenical Resources for Responses to Religious Pluralism (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998). 58 Because my study will focus on the U.S., I will not include resources found on the outside of the country such as Tao Fung Shan Center in Hong Kong. 59 Because my primary materials for theological analysis will come from the ecumenical and Catholic circles of American Christianity, I will not be addressing all aspects of World Christianity. According to Christian Smithâ€™s research, evangelicals are the most active religious group to participate in evangelistic work in the U.S. But due to the limit of scope of this dissertation, I will not engage in theological discussions with the evangelical circles in-depth. Cf. Christian Smith, American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); For evangelical approaches to religious pluralism, see John Gordon Stackhouse, ed., No Other Gods Before Me?: Evangelicals and the Challenge of World Religions (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2001).; Stephen D. C. Corts, Particularism as An Evangelical Responses to Religious Plurality (Ph. D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991). 21 Location of the Researcher At the outset, I need to situate myself as an researcher outside the context of the United States, as I am an Asian Christian with my particular religious and ecclesial background. I was born and raised in South Korea, a multi-religious society steeped in about one thousand years of Buddhism, over six hundred years of Confucianism, and over two hundred years of Christianity. Currently, about 25 % of the population of South Korea identifies as Christian and about 30% as Buddhist. In South Korea, both Buddhaâ€™s birthday and Christmas are celebrated as national holidays. There is also religious competition, conflict, and even violence between the two religions. But what mostly concerns me is that within the same Christian groups there are divisions between conservatives and liberals, evangelicals and ecumenicals, regarding the issue of Christiansâ€™ attitudes toward other religions. Many conservative evangelical circles look at non-Christian religions as demons and treat the people of other religions merely as objects of evangelism, trying to convert them to Christianity. Against this dominant stream and criticizing evangelicals as exclusivists, some liberal and ecumenical circles advocate a dialogical approach toward other religions. For this reason, the conservative evangelical side of Christian churches have condemned ecumenicals as syncretists and pluralist. This cycle is antagonistic, hostile, and painful. When I was at seminary, the Korean Methodist Church excommunicated two professors of the Methodist seminary, depriving them of their professorship, mainly because of their sympathetic attitude toward other religions, particularly Buddhism. Some ultra-conservative Christian leaders have even condemned the Roman Catholic Church as heretical because of its 22 dialogue with other religions and refused to join the World Council of Churches because they perceived the WCCâ€™s position as religiously pluralist.60 This climate has led Korean Christians to choose either exclusivism or pluralism, evangelism or dialogue. I believe that this is a false dichotomy; these categories are not mutually exclusive, but can and should be integrated. From my own Korean experience of religious pluralism, this research was motivated by my hunch that Christian evangelism needs to be informed and shaped by a religiously plural context and interreligious engagement while seeking an alternate model of evangelism beyond the dichotomy between conservative exclusivism and liberal pluralism. By doing so, I hope to contribute to the reconstruction of the theology and practice of Christian evangelism and interreligious engagement from an Asian perspective. 60 These conservative denominations are currently against the Korean Churchesâ€™ hosting of the 10th Assembly of the WCC which will take place in Busan, South Korea, in 2013. CHAPTER TWO REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE The Religious Situation in the U.S.A. New Religious Landscape: Christian Country vs. Multi-religious Society Recently scholars of American Religion have changed their old ‘Protestant paradigm’ into what Stephen Prothero calls ‘a new pluralist paradigm’ that perceives the United States of America as “a nation of religions whose skyline is punctuated not only by church spires but also by onion domes and minarets.”61 Until the mid-twentieth century, it would be safe to say that there was no objection to the historical claim that America was a nation of Christians in general, Protestant in particular.2 In 1955, the Jewish sociologist Will Herberg asserted in his book Protestant, Catholic, Jew that Protestants must reconcile themselves to the fact that this is no 1 Stephen R. Prothero ed., A Nation of Religions: The Politics of Pluralism in Multireligious America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). 4. For the
the result of a variety of factors working together to loosen the dominance of Protestant institutions over the larger culture while at the same
time two seemingly opposite views on the present religious situation of America. She writes: “the transformation to a post-Protestant culture is
a new multi-religious situation. Most scholars are in agreement that the new pluralist paradigm of American religions was prompted by the
Immigration Act of 1965, which eliminated the quotas linking immigration to national origins. Immigrants from all over the world have come to
the United States along with their religions, including Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus. By living and practicing their faiths in their new
American homes, immigrants are unprecedentedly and drastically changing the religious landscape of the United States. 65 A clearer portrait
of the new reality of religious plurality in the United States has been offered by a\’the Pluralism Project\’ at Harvard University directed by Professor Diana L. Eck. Based on this demographic research project, Eck and her research associates have provided an introduction to the new
religious landscape of America, a\’A New Religious Landscape,\’ describes approximately 400 religious organizations from
eighteen different locations across the United States. The second chapter, a\’Many Religions,\’ presents the history and
ecology of fifteen world religions in the American context. The third chapter, a\’Encountering Religious Diversity,\’ discusses the recurring
issues of a\’America\’s identity in relation to its religious plurality. Finally, Eck contends in A New Religious America, published in 2001,
that recent immigration from Asia has transformed the United States from a\’Christian country\’ into a\’the World\’s most religiously
diverse nation on earth.\’ 66 As part of her research into the contemporary religious composition of America, in the process of discovering
how new that landscape is, Eck quantifies her findings of a multireligious America as follows: a\’there are more Muslim Americans than
Episcopalian, more Muslims than members of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., and as many Muslims as there are Jews\’ is, about six
million. We are astonished to learn that Los Angeles is the most complex Buddhist city in the world, with a Buddhist population spanning the
whole range of the Asian Buddhist world. 66 It was first published by Columbia University Press in 1997; a second edition was released in 2002.
In 2008, a third edition was released by the Pluralism Project. The primary content of the third edition remains unchanged from its
Buddhists. Nationwide, this whole spectrum of Buddhists may number about four million. 68 Consequently, Americans are now composed of
adherents of world religions interacting each day at school, at work, and even at home in interfaith marriages, as Paul D. Niumrich points
out in his new book, The Faith Next Door: American Christians and Their New Religious Neighbors. 69 Calling this a “Main Street
phenomenon,\’ Eck demonstrates that a\’the new multireligious reality only is not only found in the metropolitan cities of America but also in
the a\’heartland of America such as Salt Lake City, the Bible Belt of Dallas, the suburbs of Cleveland, and so on.70 However, Eck argues that many Americans are not well-informed about the country\’s dramatic transformation into a multireligious society. In contrast to
Eck\’s claim, Philip Jenkins argues that a\’can\’t adapt Professor Eck\’s title, what we are rather seeing is How Mass Immigration
Ensured that a Christian Country Has Become an Even more Christian Country, a\’ because the vast majority of immigrants from Latin
American countries are either Catholic or Pentecostals, and significant numbers of Asian immigrants are 68 Eck, Ibid., 2-3. Regarding
American Buddhism, see also Andrew Lam, a\’Buddhism Roots Deep in America,\’ article in New America Media posted Oct 18, 2009; James
William Coleman, The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition (New York: Oxford University Press,
2001); Richard Hughes Seager, Buddhism in America (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K.
Tanaka eds., The Faces of Buddhism in America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Charles S. Prebish, Luminous Passage:
The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Duncan Ryuken Williams and Christopher S.
27 converting to Christianity in the United States.71 Based on ethnographic research, R. Stephen Warner, a sociologist of religion, points out
that two-thirds of post-1965 immigrants are Christian and this fact is obscured in Diana Eck\’s A New Religious America. 72 A New Religious America.73 According to him, in the past four decades, the US Christian community has lost members by conversion to Islam (especially African Americans) and to
Buddhism (especially European Americans) but has gained by the conversion to Christianity of others (especially Chinese). 74 In the final analysis,
he maintains that the new immigration is making the United States more religious than it ever was. 75 Calling this a “Christian America debate,\’
Stephen Prothero, a scholar of American Religion, convincingly criticizes these two opposing views in that a\’the Christian nation camp overlooks the vitality of non-Christian religions in the United States, while the multireligious camp turns a blind eye to the
cultural power exercised by the Christian majority. 76 Amanda Porterfield, former president of the American Society of Church History,
Janet Saltzman Chafetz and Helen Rose Fuchs Ebba, Religion and the New Immigrants: Continuities and Adaptations in Immigrant
Congregations (Walnut Creek, CA [a.u.]: AltaMira Press, 2000) and Karen I. Leonard, Immigrant Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America (Lanham, MD [etc.]: AltaMira Press, 2006) 73 See Warner, Ibid., Footnote 5, 249. 74 Ibid., 244. 75 Stephen Prothero, American
Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), 5-6. 28 explanation in connecting these
two seemingly opposite views on the present religious situation of America. She writes: a\’the transformation to a post-Protestant culture is
the result of a variety of factors working together to loosen the dominance of Protestant institutions over the larger culture while at the same
time allowing beliefs and activities rooted in Protestant tradition to interact more freely than ever before with beliefs and attitudes from other traditions. 21 Having embraced the different emphases of both camps and considered the Protestant tradition’s transformation in a new religiously pluralistic situation, I suggest seeing the United States as both a Christian country and a multireligious society, rather than what Prothero calls a nation of religions or what Porterfield names post-Protestant America. 22 The Challenge of New Religious Pluralism What will this new religious diversity mean for contemporary Americans’ religious life in general, and the Christian practice of evangelism in particular? Before proceeding with this section, I need to distinguish between diversity or pluralism and multidimensionality. Although these words are used interchangeably in some cases, it is important to note that religious pluralism is more value-imbedded than religious diversity, which is simply a descriptive term. 77 Amanda Porterfield, The Transformation of American Religion: The Story of a Late-Twentieth-Century Awakening (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 6. 77 Peter Byrne defines pluralism as â€œone intellectual response to that fact of religious diversity, from the perspective of the philosophy of religion. See his book, Prolegomena to Religious Pluralism: Reference and Realism in Religion (Basingstoke [England]: Macmillan Press, 1995), 1. 79 Interpreting the current American situation of religious plurality as the loss of Protestant hegemony, Stanley Hauerwas criticizes liberal Protestants for wrongly using the term pluralism as an â€œideology to â€œgive themselves the illusion they are still in control of, or at least have responsibility for, the future of America. â€œ Thomas F. Banchoff summarizes Hauerwas’ critique of the pluralistic landscape of the US, â€œChristian nation of religion,â€ and the New Religious Pluralism. ed. Thomas F. Banchoff, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 284-285. In this essay, Hauerwas presents John Howard Yoder’s approach to the interfaith dialogue as an adequate model of Christian response to the challenge of religious pluralism. First, the term religion often connotes a narrow form of privatized belief that arose within the modern constitutional state. It tends to abstract faith from community, to support other institutions in their programs and activities, to marginalize traditions less centered on beliefs and more on social practices. Second, the term pluralism has problematic normative associations. For Hauerwas the theologian, it evokes the idea that religions are so many paths to the same truth. For many other observers, it suggests an affirmation of U.S.-style interest group politics over the corporatist or statist alternatives more prevalent in other democracies. 81 Looking at new religious pluralism as a product of modernism and globalization, Peter Berger describes the globalized situation of world religions as follows: Hasidic movements with headquarters in Brooklyn, New York, are sending missionaries to Israel and to Jewish communities in Eastern Europe. The so-called Jesus Movie, a film produced by an American evangelical organization and synchronized in well over a hundred languages, is being screened by aggressive missionaries in villages throughout India, despite the outrage of pious Brahmins and the opposition of the Indian government. But Hinduism is returning the compliment. Devotees dance and chant in praise of Krishna in major American and European cities. Hindu missionary organizations (ranging from the sedate Vedanta Society to the exuberant Sai Baba movement) are busily evangelizing wherever they can. Similarly, Buddhist groups with headquarters in Japan, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia are attracting sizable numbers of converts in Western countries. 82 Religious pluralism, according to Berger, has not only institutional implications but also a cognitive one. Among religious institutions, religious pluralism has established a kind of community of religions, an â€œinternational law of religious plurality,â€ and the New Religious Pluralism is â€œthe interaction among religious groups in society and politics. â€œ 82 83 Ibid., 20. Peter Berger, â€œPluralism, Protestantization, and the Voluntary Principle,â€ in Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism, 21.