Paul F. Knitter, *Without Buddha, I Could Not Be a Christian*. Oneworld, Oxford, 2010, pp. 240 + xvii, ISBN 978-1-85168-673-5 (Pbk). Review doi: 10.1558/arsr.v24i1.108.

For many years, Paul Knitter has been one of the foremost scholars of the theology of religions, with his well-known focus on liberation and social justice, and, here, Knitter brings his lifetime of experience, first as a committed exclusivist, later as a Rahnerian inclusivist, and finally as a pluralist, to explain to his fellow Christians what they may possibly gain from serious, open, and engaged dialogue with the religious other; in this case, Buddhism. The work is partly autobiographical, indeed spiritual autobiography, partly exercise in comparative theology, and all informed by a lightness of touch and sensitivity from Knitter's pen that makes for an easy read. Indeed, the book is very much intended for the average educated Christian rather than students or fellow scholars, although all will learn, be engaged, and be stimulated by the contents.

The work comprises seven main chapters, each of which looks at different, though often highly interrelated, issues: Nirvana and God the Transcendent Other; Nirvana and God the Personal Other; Nirvana and God the Mysterious Other; Nirvana and Heaven; Jesus the Christ and Gautama the Buddha; Prayer and Meditation; Making Peace and Being Peace. In each of these Knitter follows a similar pattern, first, addressing some problems that he has, as a Christian, with an aspect of his faith or tradition, then turning to look at how Buddhists have asked, answered, avoided, or provided insight into the issues. Finally, he returns to see what resources these may offer Christianity.

As noted, this is a highly personal book, and so Knitter does not attempt to offer an overall reworking of Christianity, rather he is addressing how, in each case, he as a Christian has been helped by looking at Buddhism. This is done in the hope that it may be of use to others who have asked similar questions. As a method he uses a persistent theme of crossing over and returning as a way of exploring the issues, in what may best be called an exercise in Comparative Theology. That is to say, he explores via a deep reflection on, and immersion within, the practices and beliefs of another system, how a Christian may return to their own tradition with deeper insights and a clearer or more vivid faith. Knitter is constantly aware that what he is saying may be uncomfortable for some, or may even seem to be disloyal to the home tradition, and his own grappling and attempts to answer these questions with intellectual and personal honesty are clear on each page. Throughout, Knitter shows his adroit skill in weaving personal narrative, technical details of theology, and insights together. Indeed, many Christians will probably discover new insights into their own tradition.

Knitter shows a strong knowledge of Buddhism, although he acknowledges that his reading of that tradition is from a Christian standpoint, which may well answer inevitable critics who may ask why it is selective of certain traditions. While it will provide something of an introduction to Buddhism, its purpose is not to provide a clear account of the whole system, which will not be gained, although an idea of many key aspects will be gained. Despite the sensitivity he has towards the Buddhist tradition, and even given his stance, his presentation of it jars at times, as in, for instance, when he draws an analogy between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism as like, respectively, Catholic and Protestant Christianity. Given Knitter's target audience is not an academic one, and has, probably, no knowledge of Buddhism, his attempts to simplify are understandable, and are normally well done, but in a few cases, like this one, one wonders whether the analogy is at all useful or helpful.

Although criticisms may arise, overall, I think, not just for the educated Christian lay person, or minister, but for students new to the topic, and without a solid background in another tradition, there is plenty here to help introduce them to at least one approach to Comparative Theology. It will also illuminate a pluralist standpoint in the theology of religions, and perhaps help answer critics of pluralism and the typological framework who ask what future they have. While addressing such issues is certainly not Knitter's aim, and he does not use the term 'pluralist' to describe his position, he shows how what has been described as the radical openness his position permits can lead to fruitful and constructive theology. In so doing, he carefully asks questions about what this means for fidelity to the Christian tradition (wittily illuminated by comments from his students, such as the one who suggested he loved both Buddha and Jesus, but slept with Jesus), as well as discussing the issue of multiple religious identity. As well as providing an excellent resource for his target audience, I think Knitter has also served the academic community well with his insights and wisdom, which will provide reflection for those open or hostile to his standpoint, whether they be students or fellow scholars.

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