

Buddha, Shiva, and Muhammad: Theistic Faith in Other Religions?

Winfried Corduan

Winfried Corduan is Professor of Philosophy at Taylor University, Upland, Indiana. He is the author of several books, including *Handmaid to Theology*, *Mysticism: An Evangelical Option?* and *No Doubt About It*, and is a regular contributor to scholarly journals. His most recent book is *Neighboring Faiths*, a volume on world religions.

What is the destiny of the unevangelized? Clark H. Pinnock has argued that a person who has not had the opportunity to hear the gospel and so has not exercised explicit conscious faith in Christ may yet partake of the effect of Christ's atonement for salvation.¹ Pinnock supports his case with a number of arguments,² only a minor one of which is the presence of true and noble beliefs found in non-Christian religions.

In this paper I will respond to some of Pinnock's references to non-Christian religions. In these references Pinnock attempts to show that there are some aspects of some religions which offer a potential for fruitful faith in God. I will show that Pinnock distorts the content of these religions in order to provide more common ground than there really is. In the process, however, it becomes apparent that Pinnock does not really need these cases because his subjective understanding of salvific faith overrides the objective content anyway.

Pinnock appeals to four specific areas of rapprochement with biblical theism: the teachings of the Buddha, particularly with regard to *nirvana*; the Jodo Shin-Shu school of Buddhism and the free grace of Amida Buddha; the Shaivite school of Bhakti Hinduism with its emphasis on an all-pervasive divine love; and the teachings of Muhammad in reaffirming monotheism.³ None of these four cases is as helpful as Pinnock would like them to be.

I approach Pinnock's work, and my response to his views on salvation in other

religions, with a few presuppositions. I believe that goodness can be found in other religions, and that God has given witness to His existence outside of Scripture. However, neither of these have the weight with which Pinnock invests them. I present these presuppositions because I want the reader to understand these underlying basic beliefs through which I interact with Pinnock's work.

Presupposition A: Goodness in other Religions

We need not question whether there can be good and true beliefs in other religions. Of course there are. Many religions present helpful insights into some aspect of life or command important virtues. Even though it is false that all religions have the same essential moral teaching, it is true that many religions have moral teaching of high standards. To show a specific religion is false, you do not have to show that every single proposition within it is false, only that its core beliefs are false, or that its set of beliefs as a whole is false.

Presupposition B: Natural Theology

Romans 1 teaches that God has left himself a witness in creation so that there is enough evidence to recognize his existence, power, and deity. It is possible to know him and thereby to be responsible to him. In addition to the fact that this belief is taught in Scripture, it has also received support through anthropological studies, thereby making a clear case for

an original theism.⁴ The following points can be demonstrated:

1. Historically, the origin of religion lies with the self-revealing God.
2. A relatively pure theism has been perpetuated among some of the least developed peoples of the world, e.g. Asian and African pygmoids, certain Native American tribes, and Australian aborigines.
3. A remnant of theism can be detected in the history of most of the complex religions of the world, e.g. Dyaus Pitar in the history of Indic religion, Allah in the Arabian peninsula, and Shangdi in China.
4. God, as evidenced in these contexts, has roughly the properties associated with biblical theism. Within the particular descriptive limitations of a culture he is considered to be personal, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, transcendent, immanent, creator, and moral authority.

In the ensuing discussion, I am going to bracket the crucial theological question of whether devotion to God on the basis of natural theology has the potential to save a person. Instead, I will limit myself to the more factual issue: to what extent is there a legitimate tie-in of Pinnock's four cases to this original theism and, by extension, to biblical theism?

Sakyamuni and Nirvana

Pinnock's interaction with Buddhism is highly subjectivized,⁵ relying to a large extent on the positive feelings that we might get about the Buddha or Buddhism. "But how does one come away after encountering Buddhism," he asks,

"and deny that it is in touch with God in its way?"⁶ Surely, even though this question sounds rhetorical, it has a very clear answer: by listening to what Buddhism actually teaches. Pinnock rightly objects to John Hick's method of forcing Christian beliefs into a straight-jacket of religious monism,⁷ but it would be just as wrong for Pinnock to reinterpret Buddhism to fit a theistic pattern that the Buddhist himself would reject. Pinnock, of course, recognizes that "Buddhism is not Christianity,"⁸ but still attempts to make the Buddha's teachings more amenable to Christianity than is reasonable. Let me take several of Pinnock's statements summarizing Buddhism and show how a more accurate analysis of these concepts leads us in a different direction.

"[Buddha] taught people that a man's proper relationship to the created world is not to give it ultimate value or devotion, because much human suffering derives from that."⁹

Allow me to refer to the historical Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) by the title which Buddhist themselves prefer to distinguish him in his earthly life from his spiritual existence or from the many other Buddhas, namely *Sakyamuni* ("the sage of the Sakya tribe"). Sakyamuni's teaching was far more radical than Pinnock's summary indicates. He located the root of all human suffering (*dukha*) in the very fact of our existence and our attachment (*tanha*) to the phenomenal world *per se*. There is no "created world" in the sense in which a god created something to exist, only the deception that is engendered by our considering our life-world to be real. True reality is emptiness (*sunyata*); we ourselves are non-self (*anatman*). The world, all beings within the world, even the very gods who assisted Sakyamuni towards enlight-

enment, are products of an illusionary causal nexus. Until a person internalizes this awareness, he or she will continue to be stuck in a cycle of reincarnations—and suffer. Thus what Sakyamuni taught was far more than wise council not to lay up our treasures on earth, but the very denial of a created order.

“He also spoke of a power he called the dharma, which seems to be a gracious and good power, and which promotes redemption and salvation.”¹⁰

Dharma, literally “the way,” is a concept that occurs in all Indic religions. It is primarily not a power, though it engenders power. Because it is not a power, it also does not promote redemption or salvation by itself. Rather, the *dharma* is a method of living according to correct spiritual insights. In early Buddhism, the *dharma* specifically refers to the way of the monks, and is embodied in the noble eightfold path: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right meditation, and right concentration. The practical outworking of right actions is summarized in the ten precepts. A monk is forbidden to harm any living being, steal, have sex, lie, take intoxicating drinks, eat after noon, attend entertainment, decorate him- or herself, sleep in a comfortable bed, or touch gold or silver. Following this path will lead a person to be released from the cycle of reincarnations and find his or her place in the emptiness of *sunyata*. At this point, the person has attained the state of *nirvana*.

“There is in nirvana a quasi-personal aspect, a sense of possible friendship and intimacy with the good and the lovely, and there is the blessing of spiritual insight suggestive of revelation.”¹¹

Sakyamuni consistently refused to describe the state of *nirvana*. Literally the word means “blowing out,” as in extinguishing a candle. What has been blown out is usually the following: a person’s mistaken sense of individual identity, the describable phenomenal world, the cycle of reincarnations, and the suffering that goes along with existence. Sakyamuni insisted, however, that *nirvana* is not purely negative; it is something to anticipate joyfully. In later developments after Sakyamuni, *nirvana* took on a greater meaning as the distillation of absolute compassion and thus began more closely to resemble a pantheistic monism. But it still did not turn into a personal deity. Furthermore, it was said from Sakyamuni’s time on that the person who achieves *nirvana* has an immediate intuition of its nature, though it is an awareness beyond all words and concepts. This knowledge, however, can hardly be construed as self-revelation from a deity.¹²

“Granted, being anti-metaphysical in reaction to Hinduism, the Buddha did not teach personal theism with force or clarity.”¹³

Assuming that the words “personal theism” have any meaning, this statement is true simply because Sakyamuni did not teach theism at all. *Nirvana* is not a personal deity. The Indian gods occupy a paradoxical place in the myth of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha. They assured his calling to a religious life by providing the four visions (old age, sickness, death, and religious devotion) which propelled Gautama to monkhood. The earth mother gave witness to his enlightenment, and Brahma encouraged the new Buddha to preach the *dharma*. However, in the core teaching of Sakyamuni’s insights, the gods play no helpful role. In

fact, as long as a person keeps looking to a deity for help, he or she is going to remain trapped in the vicious cycle of suffering. Traditional Buddhism is not theistic.

In sum, it would appear that Pinnock, motivated by a desire to find bridges to Buddhism, has reinterpreted Sakyamuni's teachings beyond what was intended.

Jodo Shin-Shu

Pinnock asks, "Why turn up our noses at...the insights into grace in the Japanese Shin-Shu Amida or other positive changes in Buddhism?"¹⁴ Let us focus on Amida in Jodo Shin-Shu, the most popular Japanese school of Pure Land Buddhism. And let us agree that to reject something as false is not necessarily to turn up our noses; the latter would be disdainful, while the former could be prudent.

Pure Land Buddhism is one of the many branches of Buddhism that are usually classified together as *Mahayana*, the "greater raft." Mahayana Buddhism diverges from the older schools of Buddhism and the teachings of Sakyamuni himself in a number of respects;¹⁵ one of the most important differences is the accretion of numerous Buddhas and Bodhisattvas—beings who are in a state immediately prior to becoming Buddhas. In most Pure Land schools, the central Buddha is not Sakyamuni, the historical founder of Buddhism, but Amitabha, known in Japan as Amida Buddha.

Amida has his own story. In remote history he was a king who heard the teaching of another Buddha while on earth. Under this influence he vowed that some day he would provide for the salvation of all humankind, and countless incarnations later he was able to achieve enlightenment. To this point the story is similar

to that of Sakyamuni, but now an important difference emerges. Whereas Sakyamuni received enlightenment on earth and departed from the earthly sphere of influence upon death, Amida took the final step of enlightenment in heaven¹⁶ where he continues to dwell as a celestial being.

Amida is one of four such Buddhas (*Dhyani* Buddhas), each of whom has received one of the cardinal directions as his domain. Amida is associated with the West. Having attained Buddhahood he was now able to complete his vow. He created a "paradise" or "pure land" into which anyone can be reincarnated as long as they have faith in him.

Jodo Shin-Shu distinguishes itself by its emphasis on the grace of Amida. Shinran, its founder, taught that all that was necessary for a person to attain the pure land after death was to call on Amida Buddha once. All pure land schools (as well as other schools of Buddhism), chant the phrase *Namu Amida Butsu* (or *Nembutsu*), "I bow down (to worship) the Buddha Amida." In this particular school the single utterance of the statement is enough to guarantee paradise.

Amida's western paradise is a place of beauty and serenity. Everyone is born into it as a male, and everyone who abides there can take the final step into *nirvana* without hindrance. Let me now respond to some questions concerning this teaching.

Does Jodo Shin-Shu teach salvation "by grace through faith"?

Yes, of course it does. Amida's pure land is graciously bestowed on anyone who simply has faith in him. Christian apologists do not gain anything by needlessly parsing away those two concepts. One wishes that more Christian thinkers

would have as straightforward an understanding of grace and faith as Shinran did! But difficulties arise from the meaning of salvation and of the being who grants it.

Is Amida a god?

Here the answer is clearly “no.” Amida was a man named Dharmakara who was able to transform himself into a *Dhyani* Buddha by his own devotion and discipline. Although as a celestial Buddha he now receives devotion similar to the worship of a god, he is not a god, but superior to the gods in his knowledge and power. In fact, the gods can also be granted bliss in the pure land thanks to Amida. More importantly, neither by historical origin nor by description can one say that Amida is the God of theism; he is a different sort of being who has merely taken the functionally equivalent place of God in this religion.

Is rebirth in the pure land the equivalent of salvation?

The answer to this question is ambivalent. Within Jodo Shin-Shu it is precisely what salvation is all about; even though being in paradise is not yet the attainment of *nirvana*, for practical purposes the two are equated. However, it should hardly need to be pointed out that escaping the cycle of reincarnation and its attending suffering is distinct in all respects from the Christian understanding of salvation as reconciliation with God based on the propitiation of Christ. One can classify the two together under some large umbrella, such as both provide a way of release from the human predicament, but fill out the meaning and all similarity vanishes.

Obviously, what attracts Pinnock is the subjective side of the Pure Land school. I certainly would not wish to dismiss the

potential for finding a bridge to communicate the gospel in these ideas, but the content of the Christian gospel is the redeemer who has made atonement, not the subjective faith of the Christian.

Having made reference to Jodo Shin-Shu and some other religions, Pinnock contends that “religions do not present only the way of human self-justification. At times they also announce the grace and love of God.”¹⁷ Jodo Shin-Shu may present the love and compassion of Amida, but not of God—as long as the word “God” refers to the infinite personal creator described in theism.

Shiva and Bhakti Hinduism

The aforementioned quotation from Pinnock actually begins with, “Why turn up our noses at the *bhakti* tradition in Hinduism...?”¹⁸ In another place he writes,

The theistic Saiva Siddhanta literature of Hinduism, to take another example, celebrates a personal God of love. It expresses the belief that all God’s actions in the world are intended to express love for his creatures and to lead them into loving union with himself.¹⁹

Saiva Siddhanta is a school of devotion to Shiva; its adherents consider Shiva to be the highest form of God.

Pinnock is to be commended here for recognizing the theistic nature of much of Hinduism. Too many evangelicals today try to understand all of Hinduism as pantheistic, which many of its schools are not. Again though, similarities to original theism are more apparent than real and vanish entirely when the surrounding context is taken into account.

Historically Shiva’s beginnings are not in the God of original theism. His first appearance in the Vedas, the first scrip-

tures of Hinduism, is as the fierce mountain god Rudra. Under the praise name Shiva (“the auspicious one”) he took on greater significance, but maintained his capricious character long into the history of Hinduism. Then in the bhakti revolt towards the end of the first millennium A. D. in southern India, he became the first bhakti deity to receive wide acclaim. Subsequent developments elevated Vishnu as well, but Shiva continues to be the most popular bhakti god today.

Bhakti Hinduism has roots going back to the much earlier Bhagavad Gita. In the Gita, Krishna, who is an incarnation (*avatar*) of the god Vishnu, instructs the archer Arjuna to trust in him alone, and he will provide for Arjuna’s salvation (*moksha*). Similarly, the various schools of bhakti Hinduism identify certain gods as supreme, and the adherents devote themselves primarily (though not necessarily exclusively) to their chosen deity. The most popular bhakti god is Shiva, followed by Vishnu and his avatars (such as Krishna and Rama), with a sizeable following also going to the less clearly defined goddess.

We need to be aware of two important points concerning bhakti:

1. Although there is a certain notion of grace and faith within these schools, for the most part in their original contexts, these words have a fairly weak meaning at best. Usually bhakti practices focus on acts of devotion which are necessary to partake of the deity’s mercy, and so in most bhakti schools we are really looking at synergism at best, salvation by works at worst. The Shaivite school (the school of Shiva bhakti)

is particularly prone to emphasizing works of devotion as essential for a true relationship to Shiva.

2. Only in certain bhakti schools centered on Rama is there a genuine conception of grace. Here the god truly does not require any contributory works by the human being; all acts by the man or woman are simply deeds of gratitude. Nevertheless, as with Jodo Shin-Shu, the context of grace and faith certainly negates any resemblance to their biblical counterparts. As Rudolf Otto pointed out,²⁰ the deity’s supposed work of releasing a person from the cycle of incarnation incurred by karma is pervasively different from the Christian notion of redemption from sin through Christ’s atonement.

To return to Shiva, reference to him as a “god of love” is valid as far as it goes, but it misses some of the most salient aspects of Shiva’s character, particularly the eroticism. Shiva’s most common representation in temples is as a *lingam*, a phallus. Frequently he is shown together with the goddess in the *lingam-yoni* configuration. These depictions are not obscene by usual standards, but they do call attention to a side of the deity that is clearly incompatible with original theism, which centers around a self-revealing God. In fact, it appears to resemble more closely some of the concepts of Canaanite fertility religions (which Pinnock has no trouble dismissing),²¹ though it only rarely produces sexual practices in Tamil, India, its most important region.²² But even aside from the erotic side of Shiva, his attributes are still largely removed from original theism.

He is capricious, wantonly destructive, and demanding. Shaivite bhakti is known for its austere practices that sometimes verge on self-immolation. Yes, Shiva is referred to as a “god of love,” but it is the love of passion only. Once again, we are further removed from original theism than a superficial summary might lead us to suspect.

Muhammad and Allah

Pinnock asks, “Who can deny the striking similarities between the prophet Muhammad and the Old Testament prophets? Would not admitting this have momentous consequences for our witness to Islam?”²³

Here we can make a greater number of positive comments than with regard to the previous three examples.

1. Allah, the God of ancient Arabia whose worship was revived by Muhammad, is historically the God of original theism.
2. Muhammad courageously led a profound movement to restore Arabian religion to these theistic foundations.
3. In the teachings of Muhammad, Allah shares most of the traits of not only original theism, but biblical theism as well.

Still, despite the common origin, there are also some crucial differences between Muhammad’s understanding of God and the biblical one, which we can point out without impugning the goodness and love of Allah, as evangelical apologists sometimes do. After all, five times a day Muslims begin their prayers with “In the name of Allah, the most gracious, the most merciful.”

One important distinction lies in the obvious point that the Qur’an denies the deity of Christ. Since the outright contradiction of this doctrine is placed into the mouth of Allah himself in the Qur’an,²⁴ Islam cannot just be unfulfilled pre-Christian religion.

But one of the most fundamental incongruities between God as depicted in Islam and in biblical theism lies in Allah’s capacity to overlook sin. In contrast to the biblical teaching, epitomized by 1 John 1:5, “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all,” Allah is free to pardon sin at his discretion without any provision, such as an atonement. His holiness is not violated by human sin. Consequently there is no need for an atonement; in fact, the Qur’an censures the very notion of a substitutionary death.²⁵

This is why even recognizing the theistic truth within Islam does not really constitute a boon for evangelism to Islamic countries. The statement of Pinnock’s which I quoted at the beginning of this section commits two errors. First, he makes it appear as though evangelists to Islam have not appreciated the truths within this religion. At least since the time of Samuel Zwemer early in this century this is not the case. Second, he does not take cognizance of the fact that, nevertheless, Muslims have shown themselves exceptionally unreceptive to the gospel. It would appear that the very similarity has made it more difficult for Muslims to understand the crucial need for faith in Christ.

Assessment

I have tried to show that Pinnock’s short references to some non-Christian religions are far too positive. In three of the four cases the differences are much greater than Pinnock lets on, and even in

the fourth case the relatively smaller differences are still momentous. In all cases, including the original theism which has been preserved in Islam, the actual content of the beliefs is not just incomplete compared to biblical theism, but incompatible with it. Pinnock's rejoicing at these teachings is at least premature.

What makes this discussion so poignant is the fluid use that Pinnock attempts to make of his interpretations. He follows up the statements in question with a theology of general revelation and prevenient grace, according to which there may be a remnant of true self-revelation of God in these religions. Despite the factual concerns raised above, this inference could be acceptable if he were to find better examples than the first three or if he would not gloss over the differences to Allah in Islam. After all, there is general revelation, and we can demonstrate the reality of an original theism. But there is nothing in the objective beliefs of these religions to lead us to expect salvific efficacy within them.

Surprisingly, Pinnock agrees with this last statement. Having exaggerated the positive contributions of the religions in question, he is also able to see deficiencies in them. For example, "The dharma of Buddhism may be an effective way of overcoming egoism and attaining inner peace and compassion, but it does not intend to lead people into a personal relationship with God. ...Salvation in this sense is something Jesus and not the Buddha opens for humanity. Jesus is the way to the father."²⁶ Or, "[Islam] as a system is not a reliable vehicle of salvation. On the contrary, it enslaves millions by its emphasis on works righteousness."²⁷

So how can Pinnock be so positive on the one hand and then turn right around

and be so negative? The key to understanding him on this point is that the conceptual and objective hindrances to the gospel in these religions are important to Pinnock, but not crucial. In between the two quotations excerpted above, he asserts,

This does not mean Buddhism has nothing to offer, or that Buddhists cannot move in Christ's direction *from where they presently are*. The same can be said of Islam. There is truth aplenty in it on which the sincere soul can feed. God can call people to himself *from within Islam*.²⁸ (emphasis mine)

Thus Pinnock's position boils down to this: despite objective hindrances to salvation within a religion, it is still possible to come to saving faith within that religion.

It is not just that a Buddhist could come across New Testament truth while living in a Buddhist context, renounce Buddhism, and obtain salvation outside of his former Buddhist allegiance. There would be nothing different from an exclusivist position in this interpretation. Pinnock's point can be stated in this way: Even though Buddhism as a whole is contrary to the truths of salvation, an individual Buddhist can continue to practice Buddhism and receive salvation from the God he never knew while remaining a Buddhist.

Here we see the real ambivalence in Pinnock's treatment of non-Christian religions. He recognizes some serious flaws in those religions that the Bible opposes, e.g. the Canaanite fertility cults. Still, while trying to be aware of the deficiencies in contemporary religions, he attempts to find positive contributions within them. And even recognizing the fundamental opposition to God's revelation in non-Christian religions does not prevent Pinnock from believing that a person can

come to God without shedding the false concepts.

Pinnock's solution to this apparent paradox is to make a distinction between subjective and objective religion. In his approach, "objective" religion refers to what is actually true and real, while "subjective" religion denotes how the human being relates to his or her religious beliefs, specifically faith and devotion. He claims that "objective religion does matter, and it must be confronted on truth issues, even though subjective religion is more important to God."²⁹ And thus we come to the theological issue that goes beyond the intent of this paper. Pinnock wishes to defend the notion that the sincere seeker after God, no matter how entrapped in deficient beliefs, can still experience God's grace and mercy.³⁰ But if this is so, one wonders why Pinnock even attempts the forays into non-Christian belief systems since he had to distort them to serve his purposes anyway. Even though he counsels discernment on objective belief systems and even protests that they are important, they do not appear to hold any lasting importance since they can be overridden by subjective attitudes in many conspicuous cases.

Rather than following Pinnock's Procrustean analysis, we can draw the following conclusions concerning other religions. First, the religions clearly derived from original theism contain elements that can be seen as preparatory for the gospel. But they also contain beliefs inimical to the gospel, and so the gospel cannot merely be the fulfillment of such religions.

Second, despite the availability of general revelation, actual non-Christian religions include beliefs inconsistent with biblical and theistic truth. Romans 1 teaches a general awareness of God, but

it teaches just as strongly the human denial of God and the substitution of idols for the true God. I cannot think of one teaching of a major non-Christian religion that, given its own formulation rather than one imposed on it, is actually competent to open a person to the grace of God within its own framework.

The stumbling block of the cross cannot be avoided with an objective examination of world religions; more likely it is exacerbated by it, for the cross does not find common ground with Sakyamuni, Amida, Shiva, or Muhammad.

ENDNOTES

¹ Clark H. Pinnock, "Toward an Evangelical Theology of Religions," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33/3 (June 1990) 359-368; *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992). Similar cases have been made by John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) and J. N. D. Anderson, *Christianity and World Religions: The Challenge of Pluralism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984). A critique of this view has been issued by Ronald H. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

² The heart of Pinnock's contention is that God rewards those who sincerely seek and serve Him regardless of how much cognitive content they have of Him. Pinnock, *Wideness*, 149-80.

³ Nash has already commented that "I believe that the parallels and analogies Pinnock offers do not really establish anything." Nash, *Is Jesus*, 114.

⁴ Wilhelm Schmidt, *Der Ursprung der Gottesidee* (zwölf Bände; Münster: Albrecht, 1926-1955). Also, the shorter

one-volume work by Schmidt, *The Origin and Growth of Religion: Facts and Theories*, trans. H. J. Rose (London: Methuen, 1931) and Schmidt, *Primitive Revelation*, trans. Joseph J. Baierl (St. Louis: Herder, 1939). Further, Don Richardson, *Peace Child* (Glendale, CA: G/L Publications, 1974) and *Eternity in Their Hearts* (Glendale, CA: G/L Publications, 1981).

⁵ Pinnock, *Wideness*, 100.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 69-74.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² A twentieth-century Buddhist teacher writes (using the Pali words for *nirvana* and *dharma*), "*Nibbana* of the Buddhists is neither a mere nothingness nor a state of annihilation, but exactly what it is no words can adequately express. It is a *dhamma* which is uncreated and unformed, hence it is boundless, to be sought after, happy, because it is free from all suffering, free from birth, death and so on. *Nibbana* is not situated in any place, nor is it a sort of heaven where a transcendental ego resides, it is *a state which is dependent upon ourselves.*" Ashin Thittila, *Essential Themes of Buddhist Lectures*, 2nd ed. (Bangkok, Thailand: James Patrick Stewart Ross, 2532 Buddhist Calendar) 166 (emphasis mine). As a Burmese Theravada monk, Thittila represents the original teachings of Sakyamuni more closely than the later Mahayana schools do.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Pinnock, "Toward an Evangelical,"

366.

¹⁵ Some Mahayana schools, e.g. Nichiren Shoshu, do claim Sakyamuni for their teachings. Nichiren, for example, relied on the Lotus Sutra which, though not from Sakyamuni himself, claims to have been written by him.

¹⁶ Buddhist cosmology contains many heavens. The traditional abode of Buddhas is Tushido heaven, where Sakyamuni himself was supposed to have ascended during his lifetime in order to preach the *dharma* to his mother, Mahamaya. Sakyamuni descended after this, and departed for *nirvana* permanently a while later.

¹⁷ Pinnock, *Wideness*, 101.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Pinnock, *Wideness*, 100.

²⁰ Rudolf Otto, *India's Religion of Grace and Christianity Compared and Contrasted* (New York: Macmillan, 1930).

²¹ Pinnock, *Wideness*, 88.

²² There are forms of Hinduism called *Shaktism* or *Tantrism* which do indeed promote sexual actions as a part of its ritual. In these forms spiritual power is supposed to be found through emulation of Shiva and the goddess (his *shakti*), usually represented as Kali or Durga in these contexts.

²³ Pinnock, *Wideness*, 100.

²⁴ Qur'an 5:116-120

²⁵ Qur'an 4:157.

²⁶ Pinnock, *Wideness*, 110.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid, 112.

³⁰ Ibid, 158; "Toward an Evangelical," 365.