

Introduction: On the Title

1. Meditation

What follows is a series of “meditations.” The Hebrew word for “meditate” (הגה, *hagah*) means to sigh or murmur, implying a slow whispering of God’s words to oneself; in Christianity, this involves directing one’s heart to look to God, perhaps while musing on a word or verse from the Bible. As you meditate, the Holy Spirit comes and guides your spirit, communing with you in love. The following meditations were born of a similar spirit, in the belief that the aforementioned Holy Spirit, the spirit of Jesus, comes “not to abolish, but to fulfill,” and can bring words from other faiths to life as well, filling them up with his love.

Christian meditation is often contrasted with Eastern (i.e. Buddhist, Hindu, etc.) forms of meditation in that it seeks to fill the mind rather than empty it, or that it put the mind in an active (as opposed to a passive) state. One might hear a preacher say, “Buddhist meditation seeks to empty the mind, but Christian meditation seeks to fill it.ⁱⁱ” Or again, “Easter meditation is passive, but Christian meditation is active.” This way of thinking is embedded with a slight misunderstanding, however. At least in the case of Zen, the dichotomies of full/empty or active/passive do not quite capture the difference between Christian and Buddhist meditation. I’d like to take a closer look at the nuances of Zen and Christian meditation, beginning with the supposed full/empty dichotomy.

It is especially important to note the *sense* in which the mind becomes either “empty” or “full.” In Zen, we might say that one becomes empty of “busy” thoughts; the goal, however, is not “no thinking at all” or a full stopping of mental activity. In some Zazen practices, one begins by counting one’s breath. As you notice your thoughts bringing your attention away from your breath, you simply bring it back to your breath again, and repeat. The concrete effect that you may experience is that your mind gradually becomes trained in a certain mode of thinking; when you start to worry or think busy, unproductive thoughts, you learn, rather than following those thoughts and increasing your distress, to simply let them go and return to a less frazzled way of thinking. Your mind becomes “empty” of its unproductive busyness, but it is at the same time being filled with a more natural way of thinking, something that Chinese Zen master Mazu Daoyi might call “Ordinary mindⁱⁱⁱ” (平常心). This mode of being is something that flows into your ordinary life as well; in a sense, “meditation” is not limited only to the time you spend sitting in meditation.

Christian meditation is similar. A Christian’s aim is to “pray without ceasing^{iv}” – to be in constant communion with God. This includes a habitual practice of God’s presence – talking to him constantly, taking his attitude towards things, etc. Practically speaking, someone who is mature in their walk with God will have learned to trust God. Instead of giving in to worrisome “busy” thoughts, they “cast all their anxiety on God,” from whom

comes “the peace that surpasses all understanding.v” There is a very practical “emptying” going on here – we are emptying ourselves of all of our self-centered, self-originated, self-only ways of thinking, and exchanging them for God’s ways, God’s perspectives – a self-in-communion-with-God way of thinking and being, in which we do not consciously calculate or judge our actions, but are instead directed by an intuition, the love of God, the peace of Jesus Christ that goes beyond any human understanding. We become “empty” of self-ish worries, and “full” of Christ-ish peace.

Returning to Zen, Shunryu Suzuki, in his posthumous work *Zen Mind, Beginner Mind*, speaks of “small I” and “big I.vi” The “small I,” or small self, is the self alone by itself, the self that makes judgments but lacks a solid ground of life within from which to make them. This mode of being represents the self that is troubled with “busy thoughts.” The big self is the self that knows itself as one small part of an infinite universe, the self that exists in relation to all that exists, that acts from a more centered place – the self that is not caught up in being self-conscious. These seem to loosely correspond, at least in function, to the Christian’s “worried self,” or self separated from God, and the self bathed in “the peace that passes all understanding,” i.e. the self that is no longer making decisions on its own, but is restored to communion with God, the creator of the universe and all that exists.

In short, the difference here is none other than the Christian God.

As Bonhoeffer notes in *Christ the Center*, it is “not *how*, but *who*.^{vii}” The methods, the mechanics, the functions of meditation are not so entirely different. It is not a matter of emptying and filling; both seek to become empty of “small self” and full of “big self.” With Zen, small self is the unawakened self, the deluded self, the self wrapped up in itself; with Christianity, it is self-without-God, the self dead in sin, alone in the world. With Zen, big self is the awakened self, un-separate from the cosmos, restored, as it were, in relation to all of life, which it springs from and returns to; with Christianity, big self is the self that has found love, restored in a relationship with the living God, its creator and end. The small self becomes empty so that the big self can “bubble up,” blossoming like a flower in the empty space, the fertile soil left behind by the small self. The difference between Zen and Christian meditation (which I have used loosely to also mean prayer in the case of Christianity) is not so much that one empties^{viii} the mind and the other fills it; the difference is whether or not God is there. Not how, but who.

The same applies to the active/passive dichotomy. In both Zen and Christian meditation, the “small self” must become passive. In Zen, the small self, while not violently thrust aside, learns to quiet down and sink into the ocean of “big self,” as if the small self were a wave, once tossed about by the wind, then gradually settling down back into the ocean of great calm. Again, it may also be described as the Dalai Lama once described it – snow on top of

a mountain, which simply sits in the sun, and in sitting, finds the snow gradually melted, revealing the true mountain underneath^{ix} (these explanations, however, are not really Zen. Zen generally doesn't attempt to explain things anyway, and teaches "sudden" enlightenment rather than gradual, and the Dalai Lama belongs to an altogether different school of Buddhist thought. Still, they're helpful explanations). The more "small self" tries to act of its own initiative, the louder, bigger, and more troubled it becomes. The more it becomes passive and lets go, the more it begins to give way to "big self," to the ocean. This does not imply inactivity, however. "Big self" acts in a different way – its actions are intuitive and natural, full-bodied, rising from below, as if from the gut, up into the heart, and out through the hands, the feet, and the mouth, rather than being mere output from a somewhat disembodied head. The passivity of the small self makes room for the natural activity of the big self, which for some reason refuses to assert itself until the small self has *actively* decided to become passive, to give way, to trust.

The Christian's work is likewise dependent on trust. The small self, the self full of self-will, the sinner, the old Adam, the self-without-God, must first become passive. Think of it as the "good soil," the fertile ground described by Jesus in the parable of the sower and the seeds^x: the self becomes empty, ready to receive the Word of God, namely, Jesus. The small self directs its attention to God, letting the words of the Bible mingle with

the Holy Spirit who lives inside, giving life to the soul. As the small self takes time to rest, to commune with Jesus, it comes to be re-created. The old Adam the self-without-God, the sinner, in the presence of Jesus, dies with Jesus, as he died on the cross. The small self, loved in spite of itself, decides to join Jesus and die. Dying, it finds itself re-created by Jesus, the new Adam, and becomes more itself than it has ever been before. How else can I describe it? It is as if, so long as we are alive, the dead self is in constant process of dying, while the reborn self is becoming more and more alive. Within me, I have my old self, already as good as dead, who worries, who is alone, who tries to do everything on his own apart from God. That me is truly me. Still, it's not me. That "small self" hears Jesus, sees him on the way to his death saying "follow me," and for some reason it trusts him and follows. Death is scary, but his love is better than life. I go to my death, and find myself more alive than I've ever been before. Christian meditation is just spending time with Jesus. Psalm 23 describes it well:

The Lord (Jesus) is my shepherd.

I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside quiet waters.

He restores my soul.

That “restoration of my soul” is the transformation of the self – the death of the “small self” apart from God, and its rebirth as “big self” – the same self, re-created. This could be said to be similar to Zen in that the small self, by active will, becomes passive, and after resting with Jesus, is restored, re-created by its creator, and put back in right relation first with God and consequently with all of creation, all that exists. This mode of being must be quite similar, at least in function, to that of Suzuki’s “big self.”

2. On the Way

The meditations herein are, in several senses, “on the way.” “On the way” conveys a sense of journey: specifically, my own. These meditations are inseparable from my own life, and are born out of places I’ve been on the road away from Christianity, to Zen, through Zen to Christ, and with him to Japan, where I currently live.

They are also “on the way” in the sense that they are written on the general theme of “the way.” The Way (道, C. *Dao*) is a central element of Chinese thought, brought to a climax in Daoism and then in Chinese Zen, which is often described as the inheritor of the Daoist spirit. “The Way” also refers to Jesus Christ, who said “I am the Way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father (God) except by me.” On this account, the early Christian church was not called “church” or even “Christianity,” but was at first known as a sect of Judaism called “The Way.” It was only later that

Christians came to be known as Christ-ians, or “little Christs.”

These meditations are on “the Way” not only as it exists as part of Chinese Zen, but also as it exists as a part of Chinese Zen that is given a fuller meaning by Jesus Christ. It is also interesting to point out here that the Chinese character 道 (*Dao* – way, path) is also used in a sense meaning “to speak.” This makes it an interesting translation of the Greek word *logos*, which is found in the first chapter of John’s gospel: “In the beginning was the Word (*logos*), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Jesus, the Word of God, is a Word in a very big sense, a sense that goes beyond human language. John C.H. Wu, a Chinese Christian, used 道 as a translation for *word/logos* in his Chinese translation of the New Testament of the Bible. “And the Dao became flesh and dwelt among us...”^{xi}

3. Christian Readings of Zen Encounter Dialogues

“Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.”^{xii} The lives of those involved in the episodes recorded in the “recorded speech” (語錄) format that became popular in Tang dynasty Chinese Zen (Ch’an) generally included meditation, to be sure. The emphasis in these dialogues, however, is on the clashing of swords, the life-meets-life encounter between two people (or more, in some instances). This “clashing of swords” is not in the sense of a battle so much as in the quote above from the Bible (Proverbs): Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.

These encounters often represent opportunities for growth. Disciple meets teacher; a state of disequilibrium exists, at least in potential, within the student. The teacher intuitively says just the right words or performs just the right actions at just the right time in order for the disciple to be brought to a place where growth becomes possible. Perhaps the disciple falters; perhaps he is able to clear the situation and grow immediately. Either way, he leaves the situation changed, unable to go on as before (unless he's stubborn or self-righteous, in which case perhaps he just remains as-is).

Just the fact that these dialogues exist speaks volumes. Meditation is important, but so is encounter. The same goes for the Christian life – it is life together; no Christian lives only for themselves, or for themselves at all. Bonhoeffer went as far as to say that Christ *only* exists “for me,”^{xiii} – he only exists as he exists for the sake of the church, his people. Likewise, we exist for one another, and for him. We have no solitary existence; we exist in relation to one another. Everyone needs their time alone to pray, but we need time together just as much. If our lives become lopsided in one direction or the other, we end up growing stagnant, i.e. not growing at all. Interaction is good for growth.

These dialogues, called *mondo* (問答 – question and answer) in Japanese, often express attitudes and ways of life that bear similarity to Christian concepts, or serve to shed light on latent aspects of Christianity (some of which tend to fall into the background in forms that have been

influences by Western philosophy and culture). Just as “iron sharpens iron,” I found that Zen dialogues often serve to shed new light on my own faith. The following, rather than a proposal for a “correct interpretation,” is an interaction between myself and the text, a “Christian reading” of Zen encounter dialogues.

We’ll begin by getting a taste of what these dialogues are all about.

I like you just the way you are

大珠初參祖。祖問曰、從何處來。曰、越州大雲寺來。祖曰、來此擬須何事。曰、來求 佛法。祖曰、自家寶藏不顧、拋家散走作什麼。我這裏一物也無。求甚麼佛法。珠遂禮拜 問 曰、阿那箇是慧海自家寶藏。祖曰、即今問我者、是汝寶藏。一切具足、更無欠少、使 用 自在。何假向外求覓。珠於言下、自識本心。不由知覺、踊躍禮謝。^{xiv}

Dazhu Huihai came to see Mazu for the first time. Mazu asked, “Where did you come from?”□

“From Great Cloud Temple in Yuezhou.”□

“And what is your intention in coming here?”

“I come seeking the Buddha-dharma.”□

Mazu said, “You have a great store of treasure in your own house, yet you are throwing it away, running about here and there. What are you doing? I don’t have anything here. What sort of Buddha-dharma are you seeking?”□

Dazhu bowed, and then asked, “What is this ‘treasure in my own house’?”□

“The one asking me at this moment, you, are that treasure. You have all the tools you need, and lack nothing; you can use it all freely. There’s no need to seek anything outside.”□

Hearing this, Dazhu suddenly awakened to his true mind and danced for joy, giving thanks.

It wasn’t until I found myself in a place where I was utterly alone and without friends that I realized the value of Mister Rogers’ oft-repeated “I like you just the way you are.” We often need others to remind us of our

value; when true words come to us from outside, they resonate within us, and serve as a catalyst to release the joy that has been waiting within to find a means of expression.

There is a saying associated with Zen and attributed to its first Patriarch in China, Bodhidharma: “Point directly to peoples’ hearts” (直指人心). This is what Mazu is doing for Dazhu. Dazhu thinks there is some kind of secret, something that he hasn’t understood; if he could just grasp it, he would be free and alive. He’s looking for it, though, in all the wrong places. “You don’t need anything more,” says Mazu. “You already have everything you need. There’s no special secret other than that. You yourself are the treasure that you seek. You’re fine just as you are.”

I love that word, “treasure.” You are a treasure. You yourself are immensely valuable. I grew up hearing this, but I didn’t understand what it meant until I felt utterly un-valuable. I moved to Japan to start a new life, and found myself without Mister Rogers, without friends who know me and accept me, without family to fall back on, without a church community to be quick to love and slow to criticize. I was always extremely confident, but hadn’t realized how much that confidence was a gift from those around me. When you aren’t able to do anything that you feel is a valuable contribution to society, aren’t part of a community, don’t have friends, and don’t have a safe place to call home, hearing from a true friend that you are a treasure can be a very valuable thing.

Right words often require right timing. When your soul is in a certain condition, when circumstances have brought you to a place where you can no longer proceed on your own, a well-timed word that speaks directly to you can be a very joyful thing indeed. Perhaps Dazhu's searching had brought him to a point where he was "ripe" for Mazu's insight. Like a hen helping her chick out of his egg, Mazu adds that extra peck from outside that lets Dazhu enter a new world.

God has called his people a treasure before. To Israel, God said, "You shall be a special treasure to me ... a kingdom of priests."^{xv} Many years later, Jesus said, "Aren't two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid, then, for you are of more value than many sparrows."^{xvi}

In God's eyes, the most valuable thing in the world is not a person who has had some kind of mystical insight, done some fantastic deed, become a great teacher, or anything else like that. It's you. Just you. Not the things you do, not the clothes you wear, not the group you belong to, not your work, your talents, your performance, and not your play (though it includes all those things too) – just you. You have been running around seeking things outside of yourself, when all along God was actually looking for you, his treasure.

Those who know this – those who know that they belong to God –

are called his “special treasure among the nations,” a “kingdom of priests.” This is not because they’re more special than anyone else; they are “priests” because they are charged with the good work of letting everyone else know that they, too, are a special treasure – something like priest Mazu does. They follow the example of Jesus, who was also a priest of sorts, though much more than that:

[Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”^{xvii}

Zacchaeus was a tax collector – nobody’s friend. Tax collectors today, at least in the countries where I’ve lived, are generally fair (not to mention the fact that the closest thing we see to a “tax collector” is a 1040 form). In

Zacchaeus' day, this was not the case. Tax collectors collected much more than they were required to, and made up for their lack of friends by having lots of stuff. Scrolls, oxen, bonsai trees, troubadours, and the like. Zacchaeus was a very rich, very unpopular man.

When everyone hates you, and you yourself know that you're quite clearly a bad person, you don't tend to like yourself very much. If you do, it's just play-acting. Still, what options are you left with? Since everyone hates you anyway, you might as well enjoy yourself... or so Zacchaeus might have thought. In his heart, though, he yearned for friendship. When he heard about Jesus, he thought maybe there was something there that he might learn.

When he meets Jesus, perhaps for the first time someone accepts him. He must have had a rather large house, but it was utterly empty of friends. "I'm coming over," says Jesus. That was enough to make Zacchaeus turn his entire life around. Someone (and a very special someone at that) had accepted him.

Mazu's dialogue with Dazhu brings up more issues than just that of being accepted. Especially noticeable to me is that of the inside / outside dichotomy. Is the truth within you, or is it outside of you? Even Dazhu awakens to the truth of the "treasure within" through the external intervention of a well-placed word from a true friend, Mazu. Still, with

Buddhism, or at least with Zen, I don't think it's a mistake to say that the truth is seen to be pre-existent within one's self, at least in latent form. You may need someone to help you see it, but the truth that is seen is within the one who sees it – or rather, it is the very one who is doing the seeing.

I've spent a good deal of time speaking with friends who take this "inside / outside" issue as a point of contention with Christianity. "Christianity is dualistic – it makes you look for truth outside of yourself." This is not entirely inaccurate; I think the criticism comes for the very real danger that a christian may begin to shirk personal responsibility because "everything is up to God," thinking that because God does the saving, they don't have to do anything at all, or that if they don't change, it's not their fault. Or, it may come simply from the fact that God enters the picture; many have the misconception that God is someone very far off, removed from one's self. These objections are not objections to true Christianity; they are objections to things that Christians ought to object to as well. Those who dismiss Christ on these grounds betray a lack of understanding of, or a lack of exposure to, one of the most essential aspects of the Christian faith. In addressing this, I'd like to begin with another episode from the recorded sayings of Mazu Daoyi.

Dualistic Thinking

唐開元中、習定於衡嶽伝法院、遇讓和尚。知是法器、問曰、大德、坐禪何什麼。師曰、 叻作仏。讓乃取一磚、於彼菴前磨。師曰、磨磚作麼。讓曰、磨作鏡。師曰、磨磚豈得成 鏡。 讓曰、磨磚既不成鏡、坐禪豈得成仏耶。師曰、如何即是。讓曰、如牛駕車車不行、 打車 即是、打牛即是。師無對。

xviii

During the beginning of the Tang dynasty, while Mazu was practicing at Hengyue's Chuan Fayuan temple, he met master Huairang. Perceiving that Mazu was able to receive his dharma, Huairang asked him,

“Virtuous monk, what do you intend to accomplish by sitting zazen?”

“I intend to become a Buddha.”

Huairang then proceeded to take a tile, and began polishing it in view of Mazu.

“Why are you polishing that tile?” asked Mazu.□

“I’m going to polish it into a mirror.”□

“You can’t make a mirror by polishing a tile.”□

“If I can’t make a mirror by polishing a tile, how do you expect to make a Buddha by sitting zazen?”

“Then what should I do?”□

“If you hitch an ox to a cart and the cart doesn’t move, do you whip the cart or the ox?”

Mazu was lost for words.

First, dualism is only a bad thing if it isn't true. Dualism in Zen is seen as seeing things as two when they are really one. For example, the

thought that one must “become” a Buddha. Everyone has the Buddha nature; you already are a Buddha. You can’t “become” what you already are; in fact, if you run around trying to find the Buddha outside of yourself, or trying to make yourself into something that you are not, you’ll only compound your problem. It’s like trying to polish a roof tile into a mirror. A roof tile is best at being a roof tile; a mirror is best at being a mirror. Mazu already is a mirror (an enlightened being, a Buddha), but thinks that he is a tile (someone who is not a Buddha) that must be polished until it becomes a mirror. He thinks that he needs to change his own essential nature. No one, however, can change who they are. Mazu’s attitude towards his practice – that he must persevere in his own effort until he “becomes” something else – is an example of unhelpful, dualistic thinking.

Christians do see something as “two,” but that’s because that something really is “two.” In the case of Chinese Zen, God doesn’t enter into the picture at all – Zen neither believes in nor disbelieves God; the question itself hasn’t come up. For this reason, this sort of “two-ness” has no parallel in Zen. The “twoness” of Christianity is this: God and humans are separate and have a broken relationship. They ought to be “one” – God and humans ought to be so utterly united in love that it becomes hard to tell where the human ends and where the divine begins – but the actual circumstances are that we find ourselves separate. In this case, seeing things as “two” is not “dualistic” at all; it’s simply an acknowledgement of some

unfortunate-but-true circumstances.

For this reason, at least in a sense, the Christian does need to look for the truth outside of herself. She's looking for God, for her true love, who she's lost. Again, this aspect of our faith has no direct parallel in Zen, which deals only with humans. There is no God, and as such there is no sin, because there is no one to sin against, since humans are all on a level playing field. "Against God and God only have I sinned,"^{xix} prayed David. No human is perfect, but God is. If we hurt other humans, we only hurt people who are just like us, imperfect. We only need to be patient with one another and remember that we're in no position to judge one another. We're all Buddhas. Buddha has no reason to judge Buddha. When God, who loves perfectly in a way that surpasses even the best Buddha, enters the picture, we have a problem – he can judge us, and he *is* in a position to do so.

But he doesn't. He took judgment and turned it on himself in Jesus. "His own arm made salvation for him." He decided to love us instead of judging us. It is in this sense that we look for salvation "outside" of ourselves. We've lost God's love, and we can only get it back from God, whom we are not. As far as Zen is concerned, salvation could be summed up in saying that you yourself are a Buddha – so it would be foolish to look for anything outside. For the Christian, since God comes into the picture, before we can look to anything inside, we need to take care of our broken relationship with God. In Jesus, this is satisfied, and we are re-united with God just by believing. Thus

when God sees us as a special treasure, the issue of withholding judgment and restoring relationship tends to enter the picture as well:

Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear.

So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"

She said, "No one, Lord."

And Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you; go and[k] sin no more.”^{xx}

People can’t judge one another, but God, in Jesus, can – but he doesn’t. He sees us as we truly are, laid bare before him, and instead of judgment gives forgiveness and love – and that love changes us; that’s why he can say, “go, and stop sinning.” He wouldn’t have said it unless it were possible by his love.

God is, or at least was, on the outside, and there was the absolute need for Jesus to come and repair that broken relationship. Once that external fact was completed, though, we return to the “inside,” where there is indeed a truth that we need to awaken to. This is where we can again return to Zen and find parallels with Christianity.

In the previous chapter, Mazu helps Dazhu awaken to the truth of his Buddha-nature. Dazhu already is a Buddha – he needs only to trust this fact, and live out the life that is already within him. Mazu’s encounter with Dazhu takes place when Mazu is already mature, a leader in his community. His above encounter with Huairang, however, takes place when Mazu is still a novice, still just a student. It is this encounter with Huairang that urges him to awaken to his true self, setting the foundation for his later activity, leading others like Dazhu to awaken to their true selves as well.

Mazu, just like everyone else, is a Buddha. The only problem is that he thinks that he isn’t. Still, there is no visible “proof” that one is a Buddha;

we are dealing with the invisible world. Who can see a person's mind, their heart, to prove whether it's a Buddha or not? This is an issue that belongs to the realm of faith. If he doesn't believe that he's a Buddha, he won't act like the Buddha, and will continue to do violence to his nature, perhaps through "religion," i.e. a system of ritual actions that somehow supposedly turns unacceptable people into acceptable ones. "If I keep sitting zazen, I'll eventually become a Buddha."

The sitting isn't the problem; it's the attitude, the faith (or lack thereof) of the sitter. I call this a "religious spirit" – an attitude wherein one thinks that one has to do certain actions or activities that will somehow, almost magically, make them acceptable. This disease is common to all humans. Christians suffer it too, of course. As soon as we lose faith that God loves us as we are, we start making "rules" for ourselves to live by. "As long as I don't smoke, I'm OK" ... "If I pray for 3 hours a day, God will love me" ... and the list goes on. Religion and ritual themselves can make lives richer, but when they become mere rules, they only bring harm. Christians often miss out completely on life because they waste it away trying to make themselves worthy of God's love, rather than just believing that they have it in the first place, regardless of what sort of people they are.

Even if you are not a "religious" person, you are just as susceptible to the religious spirit. I had a friend in high school whose parents were divorced, and largely absent from her life. She still felt the need to be

accepted, though, and would often “punish” herself if she had been, in her eyes, mean to someone. If she had said something rash to someone else during the day, she would skip eating dinner that evening as a punishment. We want to be loved, we want to be acceptable humans, but we tend to have the feeling that we aren’t, so we try to do something to prove ourselves acceptable and worthy of love.

These attempts all inevitably fail. “I said something mean to Marcy the other day, but I skipped lunch as a punishment. Whew! I feel so free!” ... It generally doesn’t work that way. It’s rare that achieving these sorts of goals ever actually frees us; rather, even if we do succeed in achieving them, they just breed a sort of lust for more, because they don’t ever actually make us free. “If I sit zazen 4 hours a day for 10 years, I’ll get enlightened!” ...Or maybe you’ll just get more and more frustrated.

It’s fine that Mazu is sitting; the problem is just that he doesn’t have faith. “I have to sit so I can become a Buddha!” makes for a much different experience than “I’m a Buddha, and I feel like sitting.” The former is grounded in anxiety, and only promotes more anxiety, doing violence to one’s nature by rejecting it (“I’m not acceptable yet! I have to try harder!”). The latter is grounded in faith and rest (“I’m OK just as I am, so I’m free to do what I want”), and lets one’s nature blossom, like a tree watered by the rain and nurtured by the sun’s light.

As far as I'm concerned, Mazu's original attitude wasn't completely off-base, either. He intuitively knew that his nature, as it is, was not acceptable and needed to be change. His mistake was in thinking that he was able to change it. For the Christian, this impossible task is done for us by God – we are given the gift of God's own nature, just for asking. Again, this has no parallel in Zen, as God never enters the picture. Once this is finished, though, we are just like Mazu: it is essential that we awaken to what we now have.

[God's] divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness ... so that ... you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.^{xxi}

Peter here is talking about the holy spirit, the presence of God himself within us. We have everything we need for life and godliness, and participate in the divine nature. The fact of God himself living in us is one of the most important, if not *the* most important facts of the Christian faith. Paul calls it a “mystery,” in that it is something that separates Christianity from the Judaism that it sprung out of, something new, something newly revealed that had only been hinted at before:

God chose to make known how great ... are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you^{xxii}

The mystery that was once hidden but now known is that of “Christ in you.”

Jesus does a pretty good job of explaining it, too:

A woman from Samaria came to draw water.

Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”

The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.”

Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”^{xxiii}

Christians need an external God, but that God quickly takes up residence in their own hearts, becoming a fountain of life. The difference between Zen and Christianity isn’t so much about one being “inside” and the other being “outside.” The main difference is not the “how,” but the “who,” the object of

faith.

I'm not sure that this captures all of the nuances of the situation, but I think we could express the difference as this: Zen says, "believe in yourself." Jesus says, "believe in me." The student of Zen has "Me in me." The follower of Christ has "Christ in me." Some would go as far as to equate the Christian "Christ" with the Buddhist "me," but for the Christian, though the two become one, it is in the sense of a marriage, where two individuals become one, rather than a complete sublimation or a dissolution of the personality. Jesus remains Jesus, and I remain me, yet the two become one.

Your Mind is flapping!

六祖、因風颺刹幡。有二僧、對論。一云、幡動。一云、風動。往復曾未契理。祖云、不是風動、不是幡動、仁者心動。二僧悚然。^{xxiv}

At a temple where Huineng was teaching, a flag flapped in the wind.

Two monks engaged one another in a debate:

One said, “the flag is moving.”

The other said, “The wind is moving.”

They couldn’t agree as to who was correct.

Huineng said, “It’s not the wind that’s moving, nor is it the flag that’s moving. Your minds are moving.”

The two monks were awestruck.

I wanted to translate “moving” as “flapping” on account of the image it invokes. “The flag is flapping,” argues monk A. “No, it’s the wind that’s flapping,” says monk B. The religious world is full of arguments like this. In Christianity, various sects have various positions on issues such as humans’ free will: does it exist? When someone comes to be reconciled to God, is it because he chose God? Or is it because God chose him? If it was God choosing him, and he had no say in it, then he becomes some sort of a robot, with no will of his own – and those who are not reconciled to God, it would appear, are just arbitrarily damned to hell. God, in this case, seems to be a bit unfeeling. If the person in question was reconciled to God because of his own

will, though, it destroys God's grace; God is not all-powerful, and humans are in a precarious position where their fate lies in their own hands. Their salvation is not secure: just as they gained it by their own will, they might also lose it. And the debate goes on. Points of contention such as this have lead to all sorts of factions within the church.

Huineng offers his two cents. "Your minds are flapping!" You are putting the issue outside of yourself, when it really lies in something much closer to you than the flag or the wind: your own heart.

In both cases – that of the flag, and that of most any other religious debate, such as that on the free will of humankind – the participants are making an idol of understanding, forsaking direct engagement and relationship. With humans, the desire for understanding can take a craven form, becoming an end unto itself, never satisfying no matter how much it increases, leading only to a lust for more. (I do not, of course, mean to put down curiosity and wonder, which are likewise never completely exhausted. These represent an approach to mystery which, though never completely "answered," remains quite satisfied in its sense of awe.)

In a very important period in my own life, I was struggling with my faith. One of the main questions I had was that above – do I have a free will? Or does God choose me, in a sense where his choice of me implies that he specifically doesn't choose my friends who do not happen to be Christians? Is a god who doesn't care about my friends really the living God? If we look to

the Bible for an answer to the question of free will, we don't find one. We only encounter a paradox. At times it appears that we humans must make a decision. At other times, it appears that God is taking care of everything regardless of what we do.

In the end, the answer I found was something like what Huineng says to the two monks. "Your minds are flapping!" It's not about God choosing, and it's not about me choosing. Jesus is alive here and now, speaking in my heart: "Follow me."

Me: Jesus, do humans have a free will?

Jesus: Follow me!

Do I follow him, or do I not? I chose to follow him. Some questions are just an excuse to keep sitting around. Sometimes it's time to leave the questions aside and just go on trust. The real question behind my philosophical quandary was this: "Is God really good?" Jesus's response: "Taste and see!"^{xxv}

Interestingly, the Hebrew word for "know" (יָדָה - *yadah*) implies more than just a mental understanding. It implies full, engaged, relational knowledge. To know a flag flapping in the breeze does not entail winning a philosophical debate. It may look something more like a joyful "ooh!" coming from a two-year-old girl (OK, I'm thinking of my daughter May here) being amazed at seeing the way the flag bellows and slips past itself like a big, flat fabric snake.

That same Hebrew word first appears in the Bible in the creation story: Adam *knew* Eve, and she conceived and bore a child. This implies a very intimate, passionate, loving sort of knowledge. It is the ultimate earthly metaphor for the soul's knowledge of God, and for his knowledge of us. He wants to be known and loved, to know and to love. Jesus never said to anyone, "Come, figure me out." He never says, "Come, make a systematic diagram of my personality so that, once you've understood it completely, you can be like me." He only says, "Come, follow me."

The call to follow Jesus is a call to be with him, and consequently, to be with his people. It's a call to love, to being loved, and also a call to suffering, perplexity, peace, joy, and hope. It's a call to life itself – eternal life, beginning now, ending never. It's a call to be transformed into the image of God's son, to become a true child of God. It's a call to participation – "taste and see." This is not something that can be comprehended rationally – not from the start, not along the way, and not even at the end, because the end of our life is only the end of the introduction, only a signal of its true beginning.

Huineng's "mind flapping" comment is his first public debut, and won him many disciples. It's no doubt that many were, in a sense, smitten by the raw life they saw shining out of Huineng. The psalmist's "taste and see" is a welcome sentiment in the world of Zen. I personally owe Huineng something myself, because his comment helped me to see the Bible as it actually is: not a platform for understanding and Western philosophy, but

the word of the living Christ, Jesus who lives here and now, and says,

“Follow me.”

Left Brain, Right Brain

身是菩提樹 心如明鏡臺
時時勤佛拭 莫使有塵埃

菩提本無樹 明鏡亦非臺
本來無一物 何處惹塵埃^{xxvi}

**The body is a Bodhi tree,
The mind like a bright mirror stand.**

**Always wipe it well to see
That no dust should cling to it!**

**The Bodhi is no tree.
The mirror has no stand.
From the first there is no thing,
So where does this dust cling to?**

These two poems were written by two people: the first by Shenxiu, and the second by Huineng. The story basically goes like this: the abbot of the temple, Hongren (the fifth patriarch of Zen in China), decided that it was time to choose his successor. He asked the monks to compose a poem that would express their insight. Shenxiu, the head monk, was considered the most obvious choice; so much so, in fact, that no one even bothered to compose a poem. Shenxiu, a diligent and responsible fellow, knew that he didn't have his master's insight, but, at least in order to meet everyone's expectations, did his best. He wrote the resulting poem on a wall at the temple.

There was another monk at the temple that no one paid much heed to. He was a southerner, and considered somewhat of a hick, a hillbilly. He couldn't read or write, either. Still, he didn't let that deter him. In the middle of the night, he came to where Shenxiu's poem was written, and composed his own on the spot. Since he couldn't write, he asked someone else to write it on the wall for him next to Shenxiu's poem.

Seeing the two poems, the abbot Hongren knew immediately that Huineng was to be his successor. The other monks weren't ready to hear that their new leader was some hillbilly, though, so he found himself on a roundabout journey before becoming publicly recognized as the sixth patriarch.

Key here is Huineng's statement that "from the first there is no thing." We could take it a number of ways; some say it means that there is nothing that actually exists, i.e., there is no "self." Another way to take it is that (the self) is not a thing (to be objectified).

If we want to get theological / philosophical, the first option provides some interesting things to think about concerning Buddhism and Christianity. In a sense, Zen Buddhism comes to the "conclusion" of this: nothing. The self doesn't exist. From a human perspective, this is the farthest that religion or spirituality can take you – beyond the self, to the unnamed eternal. There is no self. It doesn't exist. There is something else,

but for lack of a name or appropriate title, it is given the title, “nothing.”

Christianity is not so far off from this. To follow Christ is to die. “Everyone who follows me must take up their cross daily,”^{xxvii} says Jesus. When you follow him, you follow him to the death of your self. However, on the other side, where Zen (perhaps for lack of any other word to express it) has something called “nothing,” Christians have the spirit of Christ – the holy spirit, the “living water” that Jesus spoke of, the comforter called alongside to help^{xxviii} – this is Christ living in us, eternal life. In this sense, I see Christianity not as negating but as filling up, or fulfilling, Zen Buddhism. When you decide to follow Jesus, along with the death of your self, you find the life of your new self, reborn in Jesus, filled with God’s own substance.

The second option, however, is just as interesting and it is there that I would like to focus. The self is not a thing to be objectified. Shenxiu and Huineng’s poems represent two states of mind; I like to think of them in terms of left-brain and right-brain. I’m not a neuro-scientist, so my terminology may be a bit off or outdated, but I found it to be a helpful way to understand them.

The left brain is the logical side. It represents mathematics, thinking, things that can be concretely known – data, facts, etc.; accounting, keeping track of time, keeping schedules, and so on. It represents the judging mind, that which determines right and wrong, that which keeps us disciplined and diligent. The right brain is the creative side. It is comfortable

and at home. It speaks in images and poetry, and is comfortable with mystery. It represents sayings like “time flies when you’re having fun.” It doesn’t judge; it just accepts things as they are.

Both sides have a proper time and place for their respective functions, and when you’re really cookin’ they tend to work together flawlessly. For a carpenter, lefty takes care of the calculations and safety measures, and righty takes care of the sensitivity of design and the artful building of the house. While lefty measures, righty whistles a tune (“Whistle While You Work” is a good example of a song that represents a full-functioning state of being). While righty daydreams about the beauty of the mural you are painting on the ceiling, lefty sits quietly in the background, speaking up only when righty is about to get caught up in a daydream and fall off the ladder, choke from the fumes, etc..

In matters of the soul, certain personalities (mine being one of them) have a tendency to let the left brain dominate everything. We want to be seen as a “good boy” or “good girl.” We want to make sure we have everything right. We analyze and scrutinize ourselves and everything else, and forget to rest. We seldom give ourselves “play time,” because we are always at work on making ourselves better. Unfortunately, the more we scrutinize ourselves, the worse off we seem to become.

I used to work at a frame shop. We would chop and assemble frames, then mount the artwork and fix it inside the frame with a sheet of glass

protecting it in front. Before fixing the glass and the artwork in place, we would use compressed air to blow off any flecks of dirt that were attached to the glass. This often proved a tedious task. Just when you thought you had the last fleck of dust blown off the glass, it would appear somewhere else. You blow off one fleck, but the burst of air kicks up some dust on the work table that finds its way onto the glass. You blow it off the glass and fit the artwork into the frame only to look at it from the front and find a little black fleck of something sitting right in the middle of a white section of the painting. Our soul is the same – the closer you look at it, the more problems you find. You wipe the mirror, but the very act of wiping it leaves more dust behind, dust that was clinging on to you rag. The more you wipe, the more dusty it becomes.

The left brain has very important functions, but we often don't know when and where to apply them. The soul is mysterious, and can't be understood by reason or in a factual manner. This is not a very appropriate place for the skills of the logical, analytical left brain. Again, for a Christian, judgment is something that is very real, but it belongs to God, not to humans. I think this is what Paul meant by "I judge no one; in fact, I don't even judge myself." We are called to listen to God, to follow Jesus and to obey him, but we are not called to judge ourselves or anyone else. The left brain is good at judging, but the soul is an area where that skill is generally best left to others.

Shenxiu is in a sense a very dear character. I can certainly relate to him. I don't think that he's like the Pharisees, the self-righteous characters who often go up against Jesus in the Bible. Shenxiu is just someone who hasn't quite seen the way. He feels that others expect him to write a poem, but he knows that he can't provide what's expected. Still, he feels obligated because of his position, and writes something anyhow. Perhaps that in itself is a bit prideful – it might have been better just to not write anything at all, or to admit his flaws. Still, he provides a nice dramatic stage for Huineng to shine. Anyhow, Shenxiu is the one who wants to be seen as a “good boy,” who goes into left-brain mode and meditates, taking his self as an object to be scrutinized and cleansed, doing the tedious and unending work of polishing the mirror of his soul.

Huineng's poem represents a more appropriate use of the right brain. His poem may at first seem very deep, very mystical and beyond the reach of ordinary folk. I don't think that's the case, though. His insight is not really beyond anyone's reach, and I don't think that he considered it to be so, either. Most people have experienced something similar to this state of mind, where one's self disappears as an object and enters into a relationship with someone or something that is “other.”

Painters may experience this when painting a natural scene. They may begin by consciously designing their work, thinking about placement, perhaps even scrutinizing their work, deciding it's no good, and trying again.

Still, most artists have also experienced times when they forget that they are even painting, when the scene they are viewing seems to enter them and flow out through their brush; times when they forgot themselves, where they supposed that only an hour had passed yet it turned out they had been “working” late into the night.

Musicians experience this when they finally master a piece – they play a piece over and over until it enters them, becomes a part of them, and then finally becomes their own, new expression, rather than being simply that of the original composer. Their left brain helped them along the path as they memorized notes, practiced difficult sections, and so on, but finally the right brain was able to take over, and the song became their own. It’s times like this that one might feel that “rather than me playing the music, it was like the *music* was playing *me*.”

When lovers love, the effect is the same. When you look into your spouse’s eyes and they shine in a certain way, and you simply *see* them, when you get lost in conversation (rather than trying to think of what to say), you are in Huineng’s realm, the right brain, the place of love, non-judgment, creativity, and play.

I mentioned that Christians often (mistakenly, at least in the case of Zen) criticize Eastern meditation for being passive. It’s true that this is in a sense a “passive” state of mind, but it is only passive in the sense the left-brain functions are in an appropriately passive state. For the Christian,

this is a matter of the soul sitting before God. When I'm with my God, I'm not in a place to judge. I'm not in a place to calculate and determine the right path on my own, to be "proactive" or to take the initiative. Jesus said, "I say nothing on my own initiative; I do what I see my Father (God) doing." Prayer (and I mean prayer in the sense of having a relationship with God in every aspect of your life) is first a place for listening.

Coming before God, we look, we listen. Maybe we meditate on something from the Bible, or maybe we just stay silent. As we rest, as we let go of our attempts to make ourselves "good," as we renounce our own efforts to be wise, we find something new taking place. This is a place for the left brain to rest. "He makes me to lie down in green pastures ... he leads me beside quiet waters ... he restores my soul." This is not a place for the left brain to be on guard, for one to scrutinize one's self, to try to be better, to try to find the right way to go. As we rest with God, we move over to relationship, to the right brain, who is very much at home in restful, playful places. Jesus took away our judgment; there is no judgment here. It's a place of trust and safety. Prayer, here, is being together with a true friend. God speaks to your soul – he tells you of the things that he's concerned about, he speaks to your heart with words that give you encouragement and life. He loses himself in you, and you are lost in him. You begin a relationship in which you begin to *know* God – not in the sense of knowing facts, but in the sense of being in a relationship with a lover.

Here, the soul is no object to be scrutinized by itself. It is a special treasure of God, a friend of a Friend, a magical mystery, a new creation. Like the musician who has mastered a song, the soul no longer attempts to create itself; it finds itself being created. This is passive, but also very active; the root of activity, though, is rest, rather than some planned, self-driven, un-restful mode of being.

Where Zen ends in “no self,” Christianity picks up in the “new self,” Christ in you. Where Zen says, “nothing,” I say “Jesus.” He is my nothing, my everything. In Zen, the right-brain, soulful state of mind is found as the left brain is given opportunity to rest. You sit, and you trust, though you may not have anything or anyone specific that you are trusting. Still, people like Huineng intuited that a state of trust, rather than a state of self-scrutiny, is the most practical when it comes to the soul.

Christianity’s “nothing” is Jesus. We trust Jesus. We rest with him. The judging mind can rest, because he judges. He judges, but he doesn’t judge those who live covered by his love. Living covered by his love means to hate evil, and to love him. It means spending time with him because you love him, because he loves you. If you love him and spend time with him, you listen to him. If you listen to and obey him, you find it easier and easier to be with him all the time. You find your left brain resting from judgment, and only working when it needs to. You find your whole being working together

more harmoniously, and ironically, you find yourself with a great deal more wisdom, because you have renounced your own. “I have more insight than all of my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation,”^{xxix} prayed the ancient Israelite king David. With God, it doesn’t take someone smart to be a king. It doesn’t take someone who is a talented teacher; it only takes someone who is willing to rest and listen, who follows their heart when they hear Jesus’ call of love, “follow me.”

When you hear him say to you, “follow me,” and your heart says, “Yes,” it is because he is alive in you, this very minute, speaking to you, and somehow you know that he is trustworthy, because you have begun to taste and see that he’s good. When your heart says yes, though, the only thing to do is to get up and follow him. Once you’ve learned to sit, you stand and walk.

Bright for Bright, Dark for Dark

因普化常於街市搖鈴云、明頭來明頭打、暗頭來暗頭打、四方八面來旋風打、虛空來連架打、師令侍者去、纔見如是道、便把住云、總不與麼來時如何。普化托開云、來日大悲院裏有齋。侍者回舉似師。師云、我從來疑著這漢。^{xxx}

Fuke was always in the streets ringing his bell, saying,

Come bright, and I'm bright;

Come dark, and I'm dark;

Come from all sides, and I'm a whirlwind;

Come like the empty sky, and I'm a flail.

Rinzai sent his assistant, telling him to catch hold of Fuke as soon as he heard him saying these lines, and ask, "What about when [it] doesn't come in any of those ways?"

Fuke broke free of his grasp and said, "There's a meal at [the temple] Dai-hi-in tomorrow."

The monk returned and reported what he heard to Rinzai.

Rinzai said, "I always thought that guy was a special case."

Priest Fuke was a wily character. He appears several times in the *Rinzai Roku* (The Recorded Saying of Rinzai) – ringing his bell, shouting, flipping over tables, supposedly dying, then disappearing into the empty sky. Even more than Zen master Rinzai himself, Fuke seems to be utterly free and unbound by things like social convention, worry, or even death itself.

His poem in this passage reflects his nature. “Come light, and I’m light. Come dark, and I’m dark.” He walks though the streets, chanting his song and ringing his bell. When someone comes to him in a “dark” mood, he responds as such. Perhaps someone came to Fuke mourning the death of a loved one; Fuke, rather than sermonizing and offering explanations, would mourn with them. If someone came in a lighthearted mood, he would joke around with them.

I think the next line might have to do with life’s circumstances; when things are coming at him from all sides, he is like a whirlwind. When there is a lot to deal with, he deals with it, and when his work is done, he settles down.

When emptiness comes – maybe this could be a meeting with nature itself, or with another like-minded individual – he’s like a flail. Frankly, I’m not sure about this one. The image is of a flail attached to a long pole, used for pounding grains. Whack, whack, whack, in quick succession. Could this just indicate the free expression of his nature? Or maybe Fuke’s work was that of using a flail to husk rice? I’ll leave it to your imagination.

“What about when it doesn’t come in any of these ways?” asks Rinzai. “You’re only talking about external people or circumstances. What about the inside? What about you?” But Fuke offers no direct reply. I feel like this question is prodding the priest for the source of his poem, for the place his abilities come from. “So you meet people as they are, and you respond to the situation as it is. But who are you?”

Fuke leaves the question unanswered, and fires back with an invitation: “Why not come eat lunch with me at my temple tomorrow?” “If you want to get to know me, come and meet me face to face.” This reminds me of how Jesus always ate with his disciples. Christians, especially those here in Japan, still like to maintain that tradition by eating together after Sunday worship. Sharing a meal provides an open, comfortable environment for getting to know one another. As your belly fills, you relax, and your heart opens up more easily. Maybe this was Fuke’s answer to Rinzai’s “And who are you?” – “Come and see!” says Fuke.

Going back to Fuke’s poem, though – I’m reminded very much of something that the Apostle Paul said:

Though I am free and belong to no one,

I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews.

To those under the law I became like one under the law

(though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.

To those not having the law I became like one not having the law

(though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law),

so as to win those not having the law.

To the weak I became weak, to win the weak.

I have become all things to all people

so that by all possible means I might save some.^{xxxii}

Fuke, like Paul, was in a sense an evangelist. He was trying to awaken people to the truth – not to the truth of Christ, of course, but to the fact of their own selves, their own natures. In order to do this, he himself became empty – empty of any conscious, contrived motivations, so that his true self could shine forth just as it is. As such, he was able to meet people where there were, without himself trying to make them into anything that they were not.

For the Christian, Christ is our true self. Paul says elsewhere that “it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.”^{xxxiii} As we become empty of our own motives and actions, we give way to obedience to Christ, who lives in us, and lives all the more as we listen to him. This frees us from our selfish selves, and allows us to respond to anyone and anything with true love, the love of Jesus.

The whole reason that Paul was willing to have no self – the reason he wanted to become a Jew to the Jews, a Greek to the Greeks, and so on –

was nothing but the love of Jesus. Love finds itself in others. It has no personal ends to serve; it lives only for its object, its beloved. Paul lived for Christ, and Christ Jesus lived (and died) for everyone. When Paul met someone, before class, sex, nationality, or anything else he saw God's own beloved in them.

How, though, did Fuke obtain this emptiness? And how did Paul actualize this love? I think that the secret has to do with prayer. Fuke happens to be the patron saint of the Fuke-shu, a now-defunct sect of Japanese Zen. Fuke-shu was unique in that instead of chanting sutras, its adherents would play the shakuhachi, a simple five-holed bamboo flute, in imitation of the sound of Fuke's bell. They also took Fuke's poem as a mantra, reciting it at formal meetings.

The shakuhachi only makes a sound because it is empty. When playing, you likewise become "empty," entering into a relationship with the place or person before whom you are playing. At the same time, it is a very honest instrument. If you are holding on to any stress or anxiety, it comes out clearly in your breath and affects your sound. It tells you about who you are.

The aim though, as I see it, was to be like Fuke, to enter directly into relationship with the other, be it a person, a waterfall, or what have you. Playing shakuhachi is a practice in being present. Likewise, Christian prayer is a practice of being present with God, and of knowing his presence

with us. By spending time with him, you start to taste his love, and it changes you. You start to lose your biases, and you start to see people as God sees them. As you begin to know God's presence, you begin to be able to be present to others, to meet them where they are. Paul's evangelism was always rooted in prayer, without which he would never have been able to be so present and loving toward the very people who were mocking him, beating him, and sending him to prison.

If Rinzai ever met Paul, he may well have been just as curious about him as he was about Fuke. Paul was quite the enigmatic figure: loving and compassionate, but also free; poor and often hungry, but never needy; causing both peace and riots. Had he sent word to Paul saying, "Who are you?" I have a feeling that Paul might have responded just as Fuke did: "How about joining me for dinner?"

Zen and Sin

六祖、因明上座、趁至大庾嶺。祖見明至、即擲衣鉢於石上云、此衣表信。可力爭耶、任君將去。明遂舉之如山不動、踟躕悚慄。明白、我來求法、非爲衣也。願行者開示。祖云、不思善、不思惡、正與麼時、那箇是明上座本來面目。明當下大悟、遍體汗流。^{xxxiii}

Huiming caught up with Huineng at the top of a mountain.

Huineng, seeing him coming, put his robe and bowl down on a rock and said,

“This robe is a symbol of faith, not something to be taken by force. Go ahead and take it if you want it.”

Huiming tried to lift it, but it was like a mountain, and wouldn’t budge. He faltered, struggling, then said,

“I came seeking the dharma, not the robe. Please, will you enlighten me?”

Huineng said, “When you are thinking neither of good nor of evil, which is the true you?”

Huiming was immediately enlightened, and broke out in a full sweat.

There are several versions of this story, but the one that appears in *Mumonkan*, an ancient collection of koans for monks to meditate on, is particularly interesting.

I always thought that Zen had no concept of sin. Another version of

Huineng's poem in the previous chapter replaces "From the first there is not a thing" with "The mirror is originally clean and pure," i.e. "your self is pure just as it is." This would generally make a Christian think that Zen teaches that there is no sin. If you read Huineng's Platform Sutra, though, that seems less and less to be the case.

Huineng has inherited the fifth patriarch's robe and begging bowl, the symbols of the patriarch. Since he was a southern hillbilly, a band of some hundred monks decided to pursue him after he was urged by Hongren (the fifth patriarch) to flee in the night, intending to take the robe and bowl from him by force.

Finally, one of them (Huiming) catches up to him, apparently intending to steal the robe and bowl. Huineng fights evil magnificently: he doesn't resist it at all. "This is a symbol. I am who I am with or without it. If you want it, take it." Huiming's heart was hard, bent on taking it by force, but meeting no resistance, he begins to falter. Still, he decides to follow through, and tries to take the robe and bowl.

They aren't very heavy items. A child could lift them. Huiming, though, must have a very heavy conscience at this point, because they are no easier to move than a mountain (which, consequently, faith is said to be able to move^{xxxiv}). He's struggling inside – "Who am I? I came here thinking that I was in the right, but now I'm seeing otherwise... Do I continue the act? I could keep insisting that I was right in wanting to steal the robe and bowl,

but it's becoming more and more obvious that I'm a fool for doing so. Should I just give up? Should I let this hillbilly get the better of me? But he is in the right..."

He gives in, but not completely. He has a change of heart, but cooks up a thinly veiled lie to make it seem like he was in the right all along. "I never wanted the robe and bowl in the first place." (Oh really? Then why did you try to grab them?) "I came here seeking the truth, from you, honorable one. Won't you help me?"

Here, Huineng is truly kind. He can see that Huiming is having a change of heart, but that he is struggling. He knows he's in the wrong. Huineng, instead of judging him (he could easily say, "Sinner! You know who you are. Get away from here!"), accepts him as a friend. I can't help but feel a strong love here flowing not just from Huineng to Huiming, but back in the other direction as well.

"Stop thinking about good and evil. Give up trying to justify yourself. When you're not worried about who's wrong and who's right, who are you, Huiming?" At this, Huiming's defenses are shattered. He sees himself. He's nothing. He's not good. His intentions were all wrong; that's who he is. And Huineng, who knows this fully, knows himself to be essentially no different. He doesn't judge; by speaking to him thus, he accepts him as a friend.

Huiming's self discovery is not a glorious event. He breaks out in a full-bodied sweat. There is some kind of glory there, though: he's not a good

person, but he's acceptable just as he is, and somehow, that acceptance changes him. It's kind of like the story of Zacchaeus that we looked at earlier.

From this, I have to wonder if I ought not take the alternate version of Huineng's poem, "The mirror is originally clean and pure," as meaning that "The mirror, with its stains, is acceptable just as it is." There's no need to clean it; in fact, by accepting it, it becomes clean. After this event, the direction of Huiming's life changed significantly.

Maybe I'm wrong. I can't tell for sure. Still, I think it's very possible that the main difference between Zen and Christianity in terms of human sinfulness is not the actual conditions, but the language used to describe them.

On the Zen side, the self, with all of its impurities, is all we have, so we need to just accept it. It's a very practical way of looking at things. If you don't accept it, you just grow worse and worse. There is sin there, but we don't call it "sin," because we have nothing to contrast it with, since a perfect and holy God isn't in the picture. Using Christian language, Zen's message could be put thus: "It's OK."

On the Christian side, we can't accept the self as it is, because we see what purity truly is, in Jesus, who has no sin. Now, we call it "sin," because there is something (someone) that is not sin, who has no sin, to contrast it with. Still, Jesus died instead of us, so that our sin could be taken away. He renews our self, recreating us in God's image. The Christian

message becomes this: “You have sin, but it’s OK.”

In Zen, you think you’re not OK, but you really are. If you accept yourself, you’ll be clean. In Christianity, you think you’re not OK because you really aren’t, but Jesus took care of it and accepts you as you are. It’s not how, but who. In Zen, you accept yourself. In Christianity, God accepts you. Moreso than any concepts of sin or trappings of religion, the only major difference between the two faiths is this: Jesus.

ⁱ Matthew 5:17

ⁱⁱ To be fair, they may be right in many cases. Indian/Hindu spirituality is not my area of expertise, but at least some schools of thought may be more accurately said to seek to “empty” the mind completely. Again, in the case of Buddhism, Zen is only one sect among many. Buddhist sects are just as diverse and Christian churches and denominations, making blanket statements nearly impossible. Here, however, we’re just dealing with Zen.

ⁱⁱⁱ See (資料) *The Record of Mazu Daoyi*, p. 15

^{iv} 1 Thessalonians 5:17

^v Phillipians 4:7

^{vi} Suzuki 66

^{vii} Bonhoeffer 30-39

^{viii} Phillipians chapter 2 speaks wonderfully to this effect. I’ll quote vs. 5-10 here: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth...”

^{ix} As reported to me by a friend who went to see him speak in the States.

^x Mark 4:3-20. Verses 18 through 20 are of particular interest: “And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and

bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”

xi His translation, though now out of print, can be viewed online at http://jesus.tw/New_Testament.

xii Proverbs 27:17

xiii Bonhoeffer 41

xiv Baso Goroku 10.14 (馬祖語録十、十四)

xv Exodus 19:5,6

xvi Matthew 10:29-31

xvii Luke 19:1-9

xviii Baso Goroku 2 (馬祖語録 二)

xix Psalm 51:4

xx John 8:2-11

xxi 2 Peter 1:3-5

xxii Colossians 1:27

xxiii John 4:7-14

xxiv Mumonkan, section 29

xxv Psalm 34:8

xxvi Rokuso Dankyo, 7. “Eno no Ge” (六祖壇經・慧能の偈 Eno’s Gatha)

xxvii Luke 9:23

xxviii John 14:16. See King James version for the translation, “comforter.”

xxix Psalm 119:99, New American Standard version

xxx Rinzai Roku, Kanben 7 (臨濟録・勘弁七)

xxxi 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

xxxii Galatians 2:20

xxxiii Mumonkan, section 23

xxxiv Matthew 17:20. Jesus says, “If you have faith... you will say to this mountain ‘move from here to there,’ and it will move.”