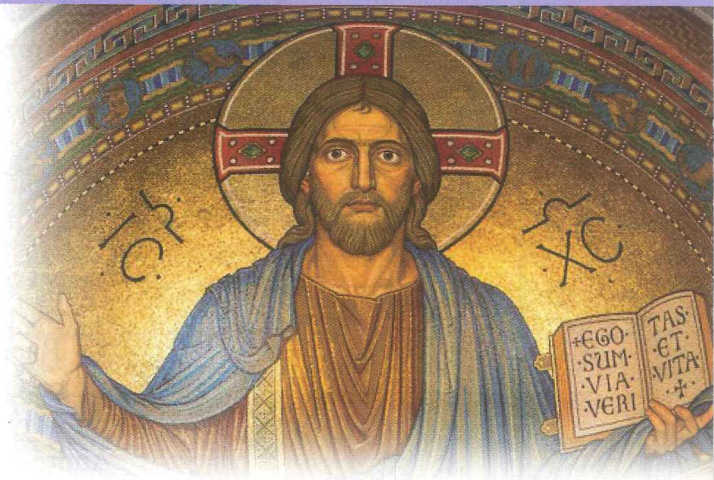


Bulletin 2019

Vol. 51, No. 7/8 - July-August

SEDOS



I BELIEVE

Editorial	1
È ancora ragionevole credere in Dio? <i>Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran</i>	2
Etre croyant dans un monde qui change: Une perspective catholique <i>Vincenzo Buonomo</i>	6
Being Church in the World today: From a Devotional Church to a Kingdom-Driven Church <i>Kevin J. Ban</i>	13
Understanding Revelation and Inculturation <i>S.M. Michael</i>	20
Mistagogía de la belleza de Dios: El valor del silencio creativo <i>Pilar Avellaneda Ruiz, ccsb</i>	27
Je crois en Dieu, Createur du ciel et de la Terre: La Foi, ses débuts et ses fruits <i>Jean M. Van Parys, SJ</i>	32
DOCUMENT: On the simultaneity of the Christian and Mahayanist revolutions in the first century <i>François-Marie Périer</i>	41
INVITATION: SEDOS Autumn Seminar 2019: Discovering Mission in a lay context	44

Sedos - Via dei Verbiti, 1 - 00154 Roma
TEL.: (+39)065741350
E-mail address: execdir@sedosmission.org
Homepage: <https://www.sedosmission.org>

SEDOS - Servizio di Documentazione e Studi sulla Missione Globale
SEDOS - Service of Documentation and Studies on Global Mission
SEDOS - Centre de Documentation et de Recherche sur la Mission Globale
SEDOS - Centro de Documentación y Investigación sobre la Misión Global

On the simultaneity of the Christian and Mahayanist revolutions in the first century

In the 1st century A.D., the immense Kushan Empire stretched from the center of China to the plains of northern India a few steps from the Ganges Delta, including most or all of today's Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Nepal. Purûshapura, now Peshawar in Pakistan, and Mathurâ, south of Delhi, were its capitals. Its territory was bordered and mixed with Taoism, the Persian religions of Zoroaster and Mithra, the Greek religions of Heracles and Apollo, the religions and ways of Salvation of India, including Buddhism of the Origins, strongly implanted since the time of Ashoka (3rd century B.C.), with its many schools.

Located in the heart of this Empire, on the Silk Road where Greek and Aramaic, the languages of trade, culture and diplomacy, and two of the supposed languages of Christ, were spoken and written, Gandhâra was composed of today's Afghanistan, Pakistan, Punjab and Kashmir. Strongly Hellenized, it was the heir of Alexander's Empire from 326 B.C., and of the Indo-Greek Kingdoms, and also owned one of the two capitals of the Kushana, Purûshapura.

Suddenly, in the first decades of our era, at the precise moment when a new religion of Salvation was preached by a Jewish prophet in the Middle East, at the other end of the Silk Road, and without official explanation by the Buddhist historians, new written and iconographic traditions witnessed new Buddhas without historical existence, new dogmas, new cults, which took the name of Mahâyâna, the Great Vehicle. A buddha of the infinite Light emerged, Amitâbha, formerly Dharmâkara, the Bearer of the Law, who had renounced his earthly kingdom to embrace the life of a wandering monk, out of compassion for Humanity. The constant and fervent repetition of his name allowed his faithful to enter his

Paradise of the Pure Land of the West and inaugurated a way of devotional Salvation, hitherto unknown in Buddhism from the time of Shâkyamuni



Amitâbha had manifested, to relieve Human kind's sufferings, a Bodhisattva of Compassion, Avalokiteshvara, "the Lord who looks down to the World" or "He who hears the pleas of the World". White with skin, endowed with all the knowledge of Amitâbha and participant in his Light, Avalokiteshvara had made the vow to save all beings. He received and spread the teaching of the Supreme Wisdom of the Heart, visited and emptied Hell of its souls. His body, when he expressed the doubt of making his vow, burst into a thousand pieces but was reconstituted by Amitâbha next to whom he reigns, standing at his right hand, in the Western Paradise. Bodhisattva of the thirty-three major forms, whose mantra is Khri, Avalokiteshvara has been in charge in the Mahâyâna, since the first decades of the 1st century A.D., to watch over Humanity until the coming of the messianic Buddha, Maitreya.

Another bodhisattva appeared in the same period, Mahâshtâmaprâpta - "Arrival of a great power" -, completed Amitâbha and Avalokiteshvara, forming a triad associated with the West, which was transmitted to Tibet

and China where it was called "The Three Saints of the West".

New fundamental Sûtras rose and spread in a quick way in the Kushan Empire in the first decades A.D. The Lotus Sûtra mentioned Maitreya, Avalokiteshvaran, Amitâbha, the Paradise of the Pure Land, Mahâshtâmaprâpta, Mañjushrî and had parables extremely similar to the Gospel: a prodigal son, a father and doctor that gives a cup to drink to his sons, dies and resurrects. The Heart Sûtra mentioned the Supreme Wisdom and Avalokiteshvara deeply moving in her course with the teaching of Emptiness.

A new art, the first example of direct fusion between civilizations, the Greco-Buddhist art or Gandhâra Art, also emerged in the 1st century of our era, demonstrating the link between Greece, and the Kushan Empire thousands of miles away through the Hellenized Silk Road. In the first representations of the Buddhas transmitted to us by Greco-Buddhist art, as in later sculptures and representations, it would have been difficult to distinguish between Avalokiteshvara, Maitreya and Mañjushrî, as if they were a single person.

A remarkable fact is that an Eternal feminine immediately saw the light of day in Buddhism, until now exclusively masculine: Wisdom and Târâ, the Star, She who crosses the ocean of Samsâra, also born from Amitâbha and then from Avalokiteshvara, of whom she was sister and consort in Great Compassion and Love. Identical to the Sophia of the Gnostics who was united with the Savior in the Bridal Chamber, and very close to the Orthodox one, Wisdom was called the "Mother of all Buddhas". In China and Japan (under the name of Kannon), the fortune of Guan-yin, the feminine form of Avalokiteshvara, the white goddess dressed in white, sitting on a throne with a child on her

knees, became immense and has lasted until today.

Furthermore, circa the year zero of our time, at the same time as the Middle East and the Roman Empire, Messianic fevers had crossed China and the Far East waiting for a Savior, restoring great strength to the cult of the Great Mother of the West.

In the new traditions of the Mahâyâna, the aim was no longer as in the Buddhism of the Origins to become an arhat to dissolve in Nirvâna, but now to take the path of the bodhisattva who renounced dissolution to stay in Samsâra and save all beings. Sacrifice, including one's own body, out of compassion, was proclaimed the supreme value of the Great Vehicle and the bodhisattva surpassed the arhat of the Buddhism of the Origins in this regard, which was later called Hinayâna (Small Vehicle) or Theravâda (Vehicle of the Elders).



If Zoroastrianism had a role with Mithra and his eschatology, as well as Hellenism, Taoism and Hinduism, present for centuries in the Gandhâra or in contact with this region, it seems difficult to attribute to these cultures and religions

the sudden revolution of Mahâyâna in Buddhism, with its profound transformation in the sense of devotion to the new Buddhas, the compassion for all humanity and the new sûtras that gave another two turns of the wheel to the Buddha's Dharma. Despite the multiseular presence of these traditions, nothing in the Buddhist schools in Gandhâra or India, a few decades earlier, could have foretold the wave of the Great Vehicle and the new turnings of the Dharma Wheel. Even if the term Mahâyâna could have existed before Christ in the Buddhism of the Origins, none of the points just mentioned was present in it.

From the beginning, instead, the new Great Vehicle possessed incredible points in common

with the Good News preached simultaneously in the Middle East and throughout the Roman Empire by the proselytized and very active apostles and disciples of a prophet with subversive and peaceful accents at a time, despite the persecutions they had begun to suffer. A few years after the crucifixion and resurrection of their Savior and God, Jesus Christ, who had sacrificed his life out of love for humanity, their faith had already spread to southern India, probably through the Spice Road, with his direct disciple, Thomas, and to Provence and the island of Brittany, along the Tin Road. On the Silk Road, Christians, as they were called, necessarily left for the East, Persia and the Kushan Empire, but curiously, there is no mention of any mission or diocese before the 5th century in Sassanid Persia or Gupta India, while it is well known that countless branches and preachers of Christianity spread throughout the world, founding communities.

But, in the 1st century of our era, in the Kushan Empire, the Mahâyâna was born with stories, values and dogmas extremely similar to Christianity and to the life and prophecies of Christ. The two new religions, addressed to the whole of Humanity and to the Salvation of all beings through devotion to a being of infinite

Compassion, to his heavenly genitor, or to his feminine form, quickly spread to touch after a few decades the Atlantic Ocean and the Chinese Sea, converting two continents. Even where, in Asia, the Theravâda did not give way to the Mahâyâna, it integrated the cult and expectation of the Buddha of Love or Buddha of the Future, Maitreya, whose eschatology was extremely close to that of the Apocalypse of John, largely inherited from Zoroastrianism (Mithra) and the Old Testament.

Is it possible that a single being is at the origin of the double revolution of Christianity within Judaism, and of the Mahâyâna within Buddhism, fundamentally transforming the spirit and the map of the world religions until today? Is it conceivable that the meeting of the Great Buddhist Vehicle and the Christian West, which has taken place in recent years, is the meeting of two family members with different languages and roles, but from the same father, who have always ignored each other's existence? I believe so.

(Ref.: Article received from the Author)

