A Christian Contemplative Approach to the Ten Ox-herding Pictures of Zen Buddhism: interreligious Dialogue as Mutual Self-mediation

By Jaechan Anselmo Park, OSB

Table of Contents

1. Introduction................................................................................................................................................. 1

2. The Meaning of the “Ten Ox-herding Pictures” in Zen Buddhism.................................................. 4

3. Learning a Christian Contemplative Life from the “Ten Ox-herding Pictures”................................. 13
   3.1. Practical Process towards Enlightenment: Seeking – Struggling – Controlling.............. 15
   3.2. Enlightenment through the Stability of Being “Home” and Self-transcendence........... 19
   3.3. Integration of Contemplation and Action through Love and Compassion...................... 21

4. Interreligious Dialogue through the “Ox-herding Pictures”............................................................... 24
   4.1. The “Ox-herding Pictures” As Universal Wisdom, Spirituality, and Art.......................... 24
   4.2. The “Ox-herding Pictures” As an Example of “Mutual Self-mediation”.......................... 26
   4.3. Development of “Friendship” in Love and Compassion....................................................... 28

5. Conclusion ................................................................................................................................................ 30

APPENDIX: The Various Versions of the Ox-herding Pictures................................................................. 33

REFERENCE................................................................................................................................................... 37
1. Introduction

The Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue’s, “Dialogue and Proclamation,” emphasize the sharing religious experience and spirituality: “The dialogue of religious experience, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.”

Through sharing of spirituality with the other religions, the Christian Church, as a learner and a teacher, can not only be enriched and complemented in her own self-understanding but can also dialogue in that encounter with an attitude of respect and friendship. This new perspective with regard to interreligious dialogue is developed from Bernard Lonergan’s concept of “mutual self-mediation.”

John Dadosky, in his article “Towards a Fundamental Theological Re-interpretation of Vatican II,” suggests that “mutual self-mediating relations, as graced, express that the Church can learn from the Other and be enriched in her own self-understanding by that encounter.” For example, through encountering Zen Buddhism, Christians may learn the ways of prayer and contemplation and ways of searching for God. Robert E. Kennedy, a Zen teacher and a Jesuit, suggests that “the Church has always greatly valued the contemplative aspiration; [he] contend[s] that there are aspects of our contemplative prayer life which could be enriched by a study of Zen…. Zen can be of great help to those Christians who desire to deepen their contemplative

---


Although there are differences in worldview, theology, and soteriology between Buddhism and Christianity, obtaining enlightenment through self-discipline and sharing with others through “compassion and love” reflect a similar spirituality in the lives of the people in both religions. Thus, Christians may learn more deeply about the contemplative life through the spiritual practices in Zen Buddhism, and dialogue with Buddhists through these spiritual practices.

Among the various teachings in Zen Buddhism with regard to the journey to enlightenment, the “Ten Ox-herding Pictures” have been a teaching and a learning resource for Buddhist practitioners. The Pictures are a widespread Buddhist parable in Asia which could be easily understood in the context of the agrarian society of rice farming. The meaning of the Pictures was the artist’s attempt to portray the progress towards enlightenment by exemplifying certain stages of development. Yong Zhi, a professor in Temple University, U.S.A., states that “as the classical illustration of Zen’s spiritual journey…[the Pictures] present a visual parable of the path to enlightenment in a narrative sequence of a Boy’s searching, seeing, wrestling, riding, and transcending of the Ox.” Interestingly, the last picture that the Ox-herding Pictures describes after enlightenment, the herder returns to the world to teach what he has realized to all those who will listen. This action is similar to Christian spirituality with regard to the relationship between contemplation and action. In addition, the herder is associated with a bodhisattva who takes care of human life. He may be compared with Jesus or Mary.

---


6 Younghae Yun points out the obvious difference between the two religious lives: “for Christian religious, motivation is closely related to relationship with God, to emulate Jesus, and to completely encounter God. [However], Buddhism pursues a life of freedom that can be realized only by following the natural order of the world and human beings.” See: Younghae Yun, “A Comparison of Buddhist and Christian Religious Life,” chap. in *Monasticism Buddhist and Christian: The Korean Experience* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2008), 188.


Western and the Eastern authors interest in the Ten Ox-herding Pictures is gradually increasing. For example, Addison Hodges Hart, a retired pastor and College Chaplain, compared the Ox-herder to Jesus, as an image of the good shepherd in his book, *The Ox-Herder and the Good Shepherd: Finding Christ on the Buddhas Path*. Robert Kennedy in his book studied these pictures as spiritual gifts to Christians, *Zen gifts to Christians*. Ekman P. C. Tam, compared these pictures with *The Interior Castle* by Teresa of Avila from a perspective of spiritual maturity, and Bou-Yong Rhi, studied these picture from a Jungian perspective.\(^9\) These pictures are also studied from the perspectives of art, poetry, and meditation.\(^10\) However, interest in the study of the Ox-herding Pictures from a perspective of interreligious dialogue has been carried out less. The potential in the Pictures for interreligious dialogue is fruitful. Originally, the pictures did not come from Chan (Chinese) Buddhism, but Chinese master Kakuan (1065-1135) who reformed the pictures from the eight pictures of Taoism, in order to teach with regard to the process of enlightenment in Chan Buddhism.\(^11\) If the Pictures are available for spiritual seekers, Christians may additionally have the enriched possibility of using these pictures. The Pictures may become potential resources for interreligious dialogue. Therefore, the study of the Ox-herding Pictures can provide a spiritual source for interreligious dialogue and can inspire a more Christian understanding of the spiritual pilgrimage toward enlightenment in Christian contemplative life.

---


In order to support this argument, I will first present the meaning of the Ox-herding Pictures. Second, I will describe the spirituality of these pictures and mention some of the beneficial elements of these pictures for the Christian contemplative life. Finally, I will present the Ox-herding Pictures as an example of interreligious dialogue and “mutual self-mediation” in order to develop a model for “friendship” between other religions.

2. The Meaning of the “Ten Ox-herding Pictures” in Zen Buddhism

2.1. The First Stage: Seeking the Ox

When one’s “present view of the world and the sense of [one’s] existence become[s] problematic,” leaving home, in the spiritual journey, to seek one’s true nature requires the strength of one’s mind and means the beginning of the spiritual quest from various bewilderments. Hart points out that “the state of mind described in the first of the Ten Pictures is similar to the sort of personal crisis….Confusion, disorientation, loneliness, fear, and a sense of loss; the idea that ‘home’ has been left far behind and one cannot find one’s way back.” To want to search for the Ox, in itself, is a precious gift since the practitioner initiates an awakening of his spirit in order to overcome his spiritual problems. The long and arduous journey to find one’s true self [Buddha mind] is not a journey outside of the mind but journey the inside mind since Buddha-mind is “everywhere and never lost; but in each one of us, as the principle of our being and consciousness.” From this perspective, it

---


13 Yong Zhi, 169.


15 Ibid., 21.
can be said that the Ox that the Boy is searching for represents what he desires to achieve within himself, in other words, the Boy’s true self.\textsuperscript{16} Although the goal is to realize the principle of unity with everything, the spiritual journey has to begin as a solitary endeavour.

\textbf{2.2. The Second Stage: Finding Traces of the Ox}

In this second picture, the Ox-herder finds the Ox’s footprints and a bridle, which indicated that he has his mind set on the Ox. This tracking of the Ox symbolizes the way to enlightenment in Zen Buddhism. Zhi points out that “in order to reach enlightenment as the dreamland of Buddhism, one must find his way; otherwise he will keep wandering and get nowhere.”\textsuperscript{17} The commentary of Kakuan indicates that the practitioner finds his or her way in “the sutras and teachings,” namely, in scriptures and tradition.\textsuperscript{18} Mumon Yamada Roshi, a Japanese Zen Master, suggests that “if we do not first study the sutras and ponder the records of the ancients, we will end up going off in the wrong direction altogether.”\textsuperscript{19} Thus, as without the footprints the Boy would not find the direction to the Ox itself, the practitioner has to study Buddhism seriously through various scriptures and accounts of the lives of Buddhist sages. The latter point him to enlightenment on a theoretical level, and have brought an intellectual understanding of basic Buddhist truths, which are “characterized as the discriminating the true from untrue.”\textsuperscript{20} However, the intellectual study is not an ultimate goal, but tools. Hart claims that “the tracks are not the Ox, and the scriptures are not

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Ekman P. C. Tam, 8.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Yong Zhi, 170.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Philip Kapleau, \textit{The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment} (New York: Beacon Press, 1965), 303.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Ekman P. C. Tam, 8; Addison Hodges Hart 53; Yong Zhi, 171.
\end{itemize}
substitutes for enlightenment or God….Scriptures are signs; but what we search for is reality, the goal.”

Thus, a practitioner has to learn from scriptures and Buddhist teaching which act as milestones on the way to finding his or her true path of life.

2.3. The Third Stage: Seeing the Ox

After following the footprints of the Ox, in the third stage, the Ox-herder can see the half-hidden Ox. This picture teaches that one can find one’s own true mind, as a true Source, in his inner-self: the poem of Kakuan states that “the Ox is there all by himself, [he has] nowhere is…to hide himself.”

In the East, the Ox has been used not only as a symbol of pastoral life, but also as a symbol of the mind which must be confronted, tamed, and disciplined due to its wild and unruly nature. The Ox also represents the opposite of the “true self” which is already present in the Ox-herder’s mind. The encounter with the Ox is open to direct experience rather than only through intellectual study or abstract contemplation. It is at this point that genuine Zen practice really begins as “an important watershed” in the spiritual journey to enlightenment. At this stage, the practitioner has to concentrate on his or her inner-self, as the object of contemplation. Zhi argues that “Zen particularly emphasizes the discipline of concentration because it is a gate [way] to action….To focus on an object is to bring the attention all the way down to the object so that the agent not only thinks about what he is dealing with, but also physically sees, hears, touches, and grasps it.”

Through concentration on his inner-self, the Boy can see all the features of the Ox.

---

21 Addison Hodges Hart, 56.
23 Scarlett Ju-Yu Jang, 54-55.
24 Lewis Hyde, 57-58.
25 Ekman P. C. Tam, 8.
26 Yong Zhi, 172.
2.4. The Fourth Stage: Catching the Ox

In the fourth picture, the Boy is trying to catch the wild Ox with his rope, but the Ox fights the Boy since it does not want to be caught. The fight between the Boy and the Ox may symbolize the tension between two aspects of the mind within ourselves: “the conscious mind [seeking] a deeper knowledge of its true nature” (the Boy), and “the subconscious mind [at its] natural, earthy, animal level (the Ox).”27 The Ox, itself, represents the wandering mind “due to overwhelming pressures of the outside world.”28 During meditation, the practitioner realizes his or her own potent passions and fights with subtle thoughts of enmity, hidden fears, sins, and lust.”29 Yet, this spiritual darkness is also “the raw energy and power of enlightenment.”30 Through continuous meditation, the Boy and the Ox eventually encounter one another in the Boy’s catching, struggling with, and taming the Ox. It is only after this encounter that the goodness of the Boy and the Ox is discovered.31 In a symbolic way, the Ox is being dragged along on the ground and this may indicate that one’s passions and desires are not easy to be fully transcended. The difficult struggle between one’s true nature and one’s passion is illustrated in this picture by showing that while a person has a glimpse of one’s true nature, known as Buddhahood, he or she still has to struggle in breaking free from habitual wants and desires.

27 Addison Hodges Hart, 67.
28 Ekman P. C. Tam, 9.
29 Addison Hodges Hart, 67.
30 Ekman P. C. Tam, 9.
31 Addison Hodges Hart, 67.
2.5. The Fifth Stage: Taming the Ox

In this picture, the Boy is gently taming the Ox and the Ox is illustrated as white, indicating progression, and without a nose-ropesymbolizing the need for less control. This progress describes the gradualawakening of the practitioner towards his or her true mind(Buddhahood). Hart comments that “taming, or training, the Ox refers to taming our thoughts, our mind, and thus determining the direction our lives will take.”

With the tamed Ox (the tamed mind), the Boy contemplates the Ox. This level is called “samâdhi” the Buddhist term. Tam points out that “the main focus at this stage…is the development of one’s power of samâdhi - the deliberate cultivation of a deeper, unmoving concentration. Through deep samâdhi one reaches and uproots the suppressed seeds or predispositions of vexation.”

The Boy has gained control of the Ox with a smile, namely, the subject has overpowered the object. Zhi points out that “the spirituality at this level is discipline, which indicates the…power directed from a subject onto an object….The self will be softened and the tension between the subject and object will be alleviated in a harmonious relationship, which will unfold in the subsequent stages.”

That the object (the Ox) gradually becomes a whitening Ox symbolizes that the false self of the subject is gradually becoming the purified self, since traditionally the “White Ox” is a symbol of the purified mind. Yet, the Boy is not completely unified with the Ox, so he still needs a nose-ropes, namely, “[the] return to meditation and watchfulness and those things conductive to discipleship.”

---

32 Ibid., 72.
33 Ekman P. C. Tam, 9.
34 Yong Zhi, 174.
36 Addison Hodges Hart, 77.
2.6. The Sixth Stage: Riding the Ox Home

In the sixth picture, the Ox-herder is sitting leisurely on top of the Ox as he makes his way back home playing a flute. Tam indicates that ‘Riding the Ox Home’ marks the first sign of [a] breakthrough, [in] which the relation between the ox-herder and the ox is so intimate that he can ride it effortlessly without needing to pay the slightest attention to where it is going.”

Now the Boy is united to the Ox and “the master-slave relationship between the subject and object disappears.” The Boy is not of two ‘minds’ anymore, but “the conscious and subconscious, the reasoning self-identity and the super-rational natural mind, the outer self and the true indwelling (Buddha-) nature – are conjoined and forming one enlightened, free, self-reliant, and happy person.” The result of the spiritual discipline is spiritual freedom and joy, which is not being apathetic about human weakness. Tam points out that “at this stage…[the Boy’s] life has become simple, natural, and spontaneous. Formal external training is no longer essential once one has become firmly anchored in awareness of the Buddha-nature.”

The awareness of one’s own Buddha-nature involves interior relaxation which happens through one’s feeling of freedom from confusion and delusion from a deepen contemplative experience. This experience of interior relaxation is similar to the experience of being reborn by becoming childlike, free of complexities, pretense or masks. Through this

---

37 Zhi points out that “the picture, the poem, and the commentary reveal a carefree spirit in the boy’s performance of music. The allusion of learning music is implied throughout poetry that goes with the series of pictures. The performance of music provides a perfect analogy to the journey of enlightenment. The music symbolizes the insight of enlightenment. According to Zen, all people have their inner music, and the Zen’s journey is to discover, attune, and perfect it.” See: Yong Zhi, 175.
38 Ekman P. C. Tam, 24.
39 Yong Zhi, 174-175; Robert Kennedy, 68.
40 Addison Hodges Hart. 84.
41 Ekman P. C. Tam, 9.
42 Addison Hodges Hart, 84.
spiritual rebirth, the Boy has control over his mind and can now return “home” to his true mind (Buddhahood) with joy and contentment in his heart and mind.  

2.7. The Seventh Stage: Forgetting the Ox, Self Alone

In the seventh picture the Ox disappears and the herder is left alone and resting at home. The Boy sits serenely by his hut and he appears to be dreaming placidly. The sun is high and red in the sky, and he sits in leisure. As the Ox has disappeared, the whip and rope lie useless. The Ox has brought the Boy home and has vanished. Hart comments that “‘Home’ in this case is as much metaphorical as it is literal, and leisure means more than just ‘free time.’” As he stands all alone, he forgets about the Ox. He is at peace in his heart and mind. By forgetting about the Ox, the Ox-herder transcends the “self.” That the Boy is at home with himself means that he is now no longer in need of searching for himself. He can be who he has become through the journey. Kennedy describes this as that “the journey is complete: the ox herdsman has returned to his origin, his true nature. ‘Now there is no ox any longer’… All the anguish the experienced in his separateness has been put to rest.” There is no longer any ego, or any notion of the “self” to delude the Boy’s [a person’s] mind. Meditation and discipline are no longer hard for him but are now part of his natural life. Tam points out that “the state of meditation is as normal now as walking or breathing and is no longer associated with any sense of

---

43 Zhi suggests that “the idea represented by the sixth Ox-herding picture indicates a spiritual ideal and fulfillment of Buddhism and Hinduism, a major source of Buddhism. The image of the Boy playing the flute on the back of the Ox is obvious reminiscent of Krishna, a Hindu deity who were particularly known in teaching the wisdom and spirituality of action in The Bhagavad Gita, a major Hindu scripture.” See: Yong Zhi, 176.
44 Kakuam states that “the Ox now vanished, and alone and serene sits the man.” See: Philip Kapleau, 308.
45 Addison Hodges Hart, 86.
46 Robert Kennedy, 79.
motivation or of separation from the goal.”⁴⁷ There is only stillness. This settledness and interior stability can lead to the next higher level.

**2.8. The Eighth Stage: Transcending the Ox**

Now, that both the Ox and the Ox-herder have disappeared, and all that is left is an empty circle. This empty circle represents the “emptiness” attained by forgetting both the Ox and the self since both are one and the same. Tam claims that “all is one. When a self is…the original self-nature, there is no self, [and] no nature. The ox and the ox-herder are actually…unreal; they are a perfect totality - one, not in the arithmetical sense of the word.”⁴⁸ At this point, one realizes that everything comes from emptiness since “the spirit of [emptiness] is neither inside nor outside; Seeing, hearing, forms [of Buddha] are all empty.”⁴⁹ In the teaching of Zen there is no such thing as the supernatural outside of us. The Buddha, the Ox-herder, you, and I are all one in our emptiness.⁵⁰ This emptiness, however, is not nothingness, but the possibility of endless change with fulfillment.⁵¹ Through this emptiness, the herder achieves the ultimate stage of enlightenment. Kennedy points out that “to live is for us to participate in the absolute to the extent that we are capable. Because the [Zen] masters insist that their teaching is not nihilistic, they constantly remind us of the Absolute within.”⁵² Thus, transcended enlightenment itself is not “the end of the spiritual journey toward highest wisdom…[one is still] far from being a Buddha.”⁵³

---

⁴⁷ Ekman P. C. Tam, 9.
⁴⁸ Ibid., 10.
⁵⁰ Robert Kennedy, 91.
⁵² Robert Kennedy, 94.
⁵³ Ekman P. C. Tam, 10.
2.9. The Ninth Stage: Returning to the Source

In ninth stage, there is no Ox, nor is there the herder; instead, there is only a beautiful pastoral picture which illustrates the scene of the original source (Buddha-nature). With his or her clear mind the awakener is transformed into the fullness and wholeness and can see all things as they truly are. Mountains are mountains, and rivers are rivers. Tam describes that “this ninth stage…expresses a return to an awareness of the world after the deeply inner experience of absorption in the oneness of the original nature.” Now, the awakener learns “non-attachment, non-assertion, and non-striving…and there’s a time for measuring and using the resources of nature, but this time of leisured contemplation isn’t that time.” By having returned to the ground and origin, the awakener has become totally one with the universe and is “now ready to give up the attachments and limitations associated with the separate individual self.” By adding the ninth and tenth pictures, Kakuan wanted to show the life of the true awakener after enlightenment, i.e., union with all things and sharing life with all people.

---

54 Lewis Hyde suggests that “there is an old saying in Zen: ‘Before enlightenment, mountains are mountains and rivers are rivers; after enlightenment, mountains are mountains and rivers are rivers.’ The difference is that in the first instance sense perceptions give rise to identity; later they do not. In the first Oxherding poem there are mountains and rivers but they seem ‘wide’ and ‘distant’ (and the Oxherd is weary, exhausted); by the ninth poem, when the Oxherd has ‘Returned to the Roots,’ there things are simply present: ‘The waters are blue, the mountains are green.’” See: Lewis Hyde, 68.
55 Ekman P. C. Tam, 10.
56 Addison Hodges Hart, 108.
57 Robert Kennedy, 102.
2.10. The Tenth Stage: Entering the Marketplace

In the final picture, the Ox-herder as an integrated human being, returns to the marketplace (the world), after years of practicing and perfecting his faith. Hart states that “finally, enlightened and whole, he returns to the world as a man – and not just a man, but a bodhisattva like Hotei, whose joviality and ample charity bring even withered trees to life again.”58 The enlightened ones appear very ordinary and natural. Tam states that “without artificial calculation, they do what is appropriate to the dispositions and needs of others.”59 They teach what they have realized to all those who will listen so that they all become enlightened. This last picture depicts the core of Zen Buddhism: freedom, wisdom, and compassion. Hart points out that “by putting Hotei in his final picture, Kakuan is offering this compassionate, generous bodhisattva as a model of what a life committed to the spiritual path of enlightenment should ultimately look like.”60 Through the description of Hotei, Kakuan teaches his disciples what the life of enlightenment is: freedom, compassion, flexibility, self-control, and self-reliance.

3. Learning a Christian Contemplative Life from the “Ten Ox-herding Pictures”

In the Christian spiritual life, believers long to obtain an integrated life of contemplation and action and to find God in their lives; however, it is not easy for the laity practise contemplation in their daily life. Cunningham points out that “the contemplative life is nothing

---

58 Hart comments that [Hotei] was by all accounts a good-natured Zen Buddhist monk, living two centuries before Kakuan produced his version of the Ten Ox-Herding Pictures. Hotei achieved enlightenment, and subsequently was regarded as an incarnation of the bodhisattva, Maitreya. A bodhisattva, you may recall, is a buddha (‘awakened one’) whose chief aim, born of universal compassion, is to bring others to enlightenment. Hotei is, therefore, a bodhisattva himself, an incarnation of great compassion and infinite generosity. See: Addison Hodges Hart, 27.
59 Ekman P. C. Tam, 10.
60 Addison Hodges Hart, 26.
else but making present [the] image of God through us."61 One of the potential results of the contemplative life is the contemplative’s ability to attain love for God. This can also lead to a change of the self or a transformation from the false self to the true self. Spiritual practices, such as, silence, meditation, and prayer can contribute to finding one’s the true self, and lead one to unity with God. The life of kenosis (self-emptying) can assist a person to be in communion with others since the true self embraces both the solitude necessary for encounter with God and the inner encounter with oneself, while at the same time it allows for the sharing of the experience of God’s love with others.52

Christian contemplative life is not merely exclusive to the monastic life or mystical life but is open to all people. Thomas Merton suggested that contemplative life has to become part of daily Christian life.63 Through this contemplative life Merton hoped that all people might see and love each other as brothers and sisters in Christ because “the nearest ‘thou’ at hand is an epiphany, a manifestation of God’s love.”64 Indeed, today, many efforts are made to integrate the deep experiences of silence and harmony into the practice of contemplation in daily life.65 However, as previously mentioned, it may not be easy for the laity the practice of contemplation in their daily life. They may need a guide or a model to grow in a contemplative life. At this point, for Christians, the Ten Ox-herding Pictures could be a good guide. As in the Christian contemplative life, “there is a movement from transcendent awareness back to the dusty roads and to human life”

62 James Finley, Merton’s Palace of Nowhere: A Search for God Through Awareness of the True Self (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, 1978), 44.
64 James Finley, 96.
65 Frances Vaughan, 28.
in order to share the love of God as Christ did.\textsuperscript{66} Thus, following the ten stages of the Ox-herding Pictures, Christians may be helped to learn the way to find their true-self through the process living a contemplative life.

\textbf{3.1. Practical Process towards Enlightenment: Seeking – Struggling – Controlling}

\textbf{3.1.1. Seeking the True Self}

In the first picture, Christians may learn the beginning stage of spiritual practice and returning to Christ in order to seek the true self. Hart compares the Boy in the first picture with the prodigal son (Luke 15:17). He suggests that “the Boy, like the prodigal, is all at once shocked to find that his life is in a mess. …What the prodigal son wants is the way back ‘home’ [cf. true self] back to his father (the origin), and, in the language of Jesus, the kingdom of God.”\textsuperscript{67} The reign of God, a Christian’s “Home” is always among them (Luke 17:22-37), and with the Boy and the prodigal son, the Christians are called to seek the reign of God (home or the true self) through spiritual practice. Contemporary Christians may lose their way the spiritually due to materialism and commercialism. Merton argues that “contemplation is both a ‘gift’ (a ‘grace’) and an ‘art’ [practice of certain traditional discipline]. Unfortunately, we…‘lost art.’ And for this lost art there is certainly in the world today.”\textsuperscript{68} They need spiritual discipline and practice, and the Ten Ox-herding Pictures provide one such vehicle, a set of images to promote it. Kennedy suggests that “let us receive and practice this gift from our Zen brothers and sisters with deep gratitude.”\textsuperscript{69} To illustrate this concept, in the first picture, the Boy is called to begin his spiritual journey of union with the Ox. Both the Ox and the Boy are actually one but initially are divided.\textsuperscript{70} Likewise, the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{66} Addison Hodges Hart, 17.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 43-44.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Thomas Merton, “Contemplation and Dialogue,” in Mystics and Zen Masters (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1967), 203-204.
\item \textsuperscript{69} Robert Kennedy, 18.
\item \textsuperscript{70} Addison Hodges Hart, 21.
\end{itemize}
Christian and Christ are actually one, but initially they may be divided and they are called to unification with Christ through prayer and meditation. For Christians, to begin the spiritual journey to search for the Ox they have to return to Christ to find their true identity which may be lost in a materialistic culture. 71

Through the second and third pictures, Christians can learn the basic way for seeking God in a contemplative life. As the Ox-herder finds half the Ox by following the footprints of the Ox, Christians also have to search for the deeper truths of oneself, and of God, and to hear the latter’s voice through study of scripture and tradition, and the practice of meditation and prayer. 72 In Christian contemplative life, scripture and tradition are useful tools to reach the gate of the reign of God. Christians, however, cannot perfectly know God through scripture or doctrine alone. In this vein, Kennedy suggests that “we realize that we cannot grasp any truth as a finality to which nothing can be added and that this not grasping at truths is the path to human and spiritual development.” 73 This realization with regard to “not knowing,” can lead to spiritual awareness since a contemplative life may be not a process of knowing, but a process of “not knowing” (cf. the Dark Night, St. John of the Cross). Union with God through a contemplative life is an unending process beyond human understanding. 74

Through the contemplative life Christians can realize that God is present everywhere. With this awareness, the first step of the contemplative is to find God in his inner-self. As the Ox is no longer hidden from the Boy in the third picture, the inner-self of a contemplative reveals to him that God is no longer hidden, but is part of his inner-self. Kennedy describes this realization as

71 Hart argues that “the beginning of grace, to use Christian terms, is to return to our true nature and true mind in Christ, and to escape from the futility of an ersatz self formed in an artificial and impermanent environment.” See: Ibid., 22.
72 Ekman P. C. Tam, 23.
73 Robert Kennedy, 21.
74 Ibid., 30-31.
“the gift of self-reliance.” He points that “the gift the third picture epitomizes is self-reliance….the ox is not outside himself and that he must now rely only on himself. [It] makes him stronger in his determination to live his own true nature to the fullest extent possible.” Through self-reliance, a contemplative can encounter God in his or her inner self. The hidden God secretly and indescribably is revealed to him or her, as “the Source.”

3.1.2. The Struggle with the Self

In Christian contemplative life, the practitioner often struggles with his or her spiritual darkness during meditation or prayer. Hart suggests that this struggle occurs since “the conscious contemplative mind, having ‘taken hold of the Ox,’ the undisciplined unconscious and unruly mind, seeks the strength of the Breath of God moving within to tame it.” As the Boy fights the Ox with heightened tension, the Christian practitioner is also faced with his or her undisciplined unconscious mind before God, and to persistently stay with the presence of God. Tam claims that “the struggle in the early stages of the spiritual itinerary is indispensable and rewarding…. [For] practitioner[s], to be able to experience a breakthrough in spiritual growth, they must not be sloppy in their practice. No pain, no gain!” At this point, however, the practitioner does not suppress his or her negative emotions or thoughts by force, and he or she needs to take a middle way instead of excessive asceticism. Hart suggests that “Buddhism teaches a middle way between extremes in every aspect of life… [and] it’s the best way for the mind to focus on contemplation.”

---

75 Ibid., 34.
76 Addison Hodges Hart, 68.
77 Ekman P. C. Tam, 23.
78 Addison Hodges Hart, 69.
beneficial for the practitioner, as for the Boy who uses the whip.\textsuperscript{79} The whip of the Boy may be compared with the direction of a Zen master since “practitioners at this stage can make rapid progress by following a more advanced master.”\textsuperscript{80} In Christian contemplative life, although the practitioner may be faced with various mental mists, resistances, and ravines, like the wild Ox, he or she has to remember that it is a part of the process in order to find the true self.

\textbf{3.1.3. Self-control to Find the True Self}

Christians can learn the attitude of “Samādhi” from the fifth picture. Hart suggests, “Watchfulness [Samādhi] will entail effort and intense concentration, particularly when one is starting out on this course. Watchfulness means that we watch (from above, if you will) the succession of thoughts that emerge (from below, out of our inner depths) while we seek to still the mind.”\textsuperscript{81} As the riding Ox-herder returns home playing the flute in true peace and joy, the person who prays to God without distractions can find his “spiritual home” (the reign of God) and a free spiritual joy and peace (cf. Rom. 14:17; Luke 15:6, 9; John 15:11).

Through the Christian contemplative life, a practitioner can achieve the level of self-control or self-mastery and virtue through persistent discipline. The practice of virtue without any effort through self-control may be compared to riding the Ox effortlessly in the sixth stage. This advanced state, namely, “breakthrough…comes after ardent struggles in knowing God more deeply or in extending the awareness of one’s Buddha-nature to every act and thought.”\textsuperscript{82} Through self-discipline, the false self of the practitioner is trained and tamed. In this “Riding the Ox”

\textsuperscript{79} For instance, Hart states that “often a sharp crack across a practitioner’s shoulders from a \textit{keisaku} – a flat wooden stick – wielded by a monk overseeing a meditation session is used to stimulate greater concentration or even sudden self-realization. It’s not intended to hurt, but to awaken the mind from potential wandering”; Hart, 68–69
\textsuperscript{80} Ekman P. C. Tam, 9.
\textsuperscript{81} Addison Hodges Hart, 75.
\textsuperscript{82} Ekman P. C. Tam, 24.
Picture six, Christians can learn “how Zen expresses self-mastery.” From the perspective of Zen, self-mastery is the act of opening the gates of one’s mind and heart in order to know one’s own gifts and talents, and to feel one’s own power as well as one’s weaknesses. Self-mastery means to live a full life in the present, attached to nothing. In addition, through the experience of oneness during contemplative practice, Christians can learn that one’s spiritual journey is accompanied by spiritual gifts, such as, freedom and joy. However, perfect love and joy are not experienced as his or her original “spiritual home” until he or she realizes in God’s mind. Through self-transcendence under the grace of the Holy Spirit continual spiritual practice, staying in the presence of God may help the practitioner to find the way towards being at home in God.

3.2. Enlightenment through the Stability of Being “Home” and Self-transcendence

Through the “Ten Ox-herding Pictures,” Christians may learn that there are two different kinds of “Homes”: an integrated home of the Ox-herder’s self (Picture 7) and the marketplace as the awakener’s new home (Picture 10), but they are integrated ultimately into one within the Ox-herder. This integration between two homes may be compared to the integration between contemplation and action. The first returning home reminds Christians that “they are meant to be self-controlled, to possess self-mastery, and that there is nothing at all wrong about becoming self-reliant and self-trusting.” Through staying deeply integrated in one’s inner-self, Christians may experience self-transcendence by the grace of God.

In the seventh picture, Christians may learn about stability in their “inner Home.” By staying centered in God with a simple and emptied mind, the love and grace of God may penetrate

---

83 Robert Kennedy, 59.
84 Ibid., 61; Kennedy further says, “If self-mastery cannot be reduced to imitation or piety, neither can it be reduced to sacrifice. …the way to self-mastery is not to sacrifice our animal energies but to integrate them into a vibrant human life…” See: Ibid., 60-63.
85 Addison Hodges Hart, 83.
into the practitioner’s mind. Hart points out that “to leave the ersatz and official world behind and to retreat to a simpler life, closer to nature and favorable to deepened attentiveness, is a recurring ideal in both Taoism and Zen Buddhism. In the West, too, we see the same ideal.”

In this regard, Merton writes reference his new hermit life that “this is not a hermitage – it is a house….Up here in the woods is seen the New Testament: that is to say, the wind comes through the trees and you breathe it….I am not inviting anybody to try it. Or suggesting that one day the message will come saying NOW. This is none of my business.”

As Merton found his home in God, the practitioner can also abide in the true love of God by maintaining serenity. Stability in one’s inner home may provide the opportunity for one to live totally in God, and totally for others, through relationships of love. Hence, stability may compare with a chrysalis or a womb of new life. Hart suggests that “Home” is basically wherever Christians find their leisure and integrated selves that Christians may have become, which lies on “the other side of confusion, searching, struggle, self-discipline, and finding our true mind.”

Integrated selves in their “inner Home” are found in the stage of contemplation when practitioners can truly accept themselves as they are through stillness, settledness, silence and being in God’s presence. Thus, stability in their home can provide a stable place for transformation, and by staying in one place, they may experience God’s love with serenity.

In Christian contemplative life, the eighth picture can be compared to self-transcendence through union with God. As Picture eight describes an empty circle, Christians also cannot depict God or the ultimate. In the words of the Tao Te Ching, “[the] Tao is empty yet it fills every

---

86 Ibid., 88.
88 Addison Hodges Hart, 90.
89 Ibid., 91.
90 Ibid., 96.
vessel with endless supply. Tao is hidden yet it shines in every corner of the universe…So deep, so pure, so still… It has been this way forever…“91 Likewise, in Christianity, Hart suggests that “God transcends infinitely every analogy or notion we have [of] concerning him. We call this way of reasoning about the divine the ‘negative way’ (via negative) or ‘apophatic’ theology.”92 Meister Eckhart, the thirteenth-century mystical theologian, argued that all concepts of God must be abandoned in the deepest contemplation: “The soul must exist in a free nothingness. That we should forsake God is altogether what God intends, for as long as the soul has God, knows God, and is aware of God, she is far from God.”93 Moreover, the “Empty” represents our thoughts and active considerations which vanished in the presence of God. The empty circle points “the viewer not only towards an apophatic understanding of the transcendent One, but also towards the effects that our union with that reality has on our character and aspirations.”94 In this moment, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit in a Christian contemplative life, the contemplative experiences self-transcendence and is united with Christ, so that Christ becomes his way, his truth, and his life (cf. John 14:6). Kennedy suggests that “transformation into the absolute or the whole as an enlightened way to live is not only a Buddhist way of thinking; other world religions encourage it, especially Christianity.”95 Through dying to self in Christ, Christians can be transformed into Christ and can achieve emptiness and fulfillment in Christ.

3.3. Integration of Contemplation and Action through Love and Compassion

In the ninth picture, Christians can contemplate God’s ceaseless creation. Hart points out that “[Christians] find that nature and its perpetual transformations endlessly flow from that

92 Addison Hodges Hart, 98.
94 Addison Hodges Hart, 100.
95 Robert Kennedy 103.
indefinable Source which Christians and others call God. [They] can no longer see nature and not see the Source behind it."\(^96\) Through this new vision, Christians can get the greatest affirmation of nature and human nature that “the Word became flesh” in Jesus Christ (John 1:1, 14). This transformation may be compared with Christian Eucharist. The bread and wine, as parts of nature, are transformed into the body and blood of Christ, and Christians are united with Christ by taking the body and blood of Christ. Kennedy points out that “the Eucharist is meant to transform us into Christ, to help us to be one with Christ…. Zen Buddhists would agree with…that the Eucharist is not a thing but an action involving the mutual presence and interpenetration of Christ and the faithful.”\(^97\) Beyond finding one’s true self, beyond contemplative union with Christ, and beyond interpenetrating with nature, the practitioner goes into daily life in order to save other human beings: this is the “integration of contemplation and action.” The true Christian contemplative life can be discerned through the fruit of love: ‘He who does not love does not know God; for God is love’ (1 John 4:8). The “Home” of the awakener becomes all the world, and he or she acts for the people’s enlightenment. Hart states that “the goal of ‘Buddha-mind’ is to shine with generosity and love among the people of the world…[and] Jesus’ goal for his disciples is also a luminous practice of love towards even the most unlovely.”\(^98\) Christians observe that the enlightened life is attentive and compassionate with joy and wisdom. Kennedy points out that “compassion without wisdom would be sentimental just as wisdom without compassion would be unthinkable.”\(^99\) Indeed, a contemplative life without love and compassion is not completed since “contemplation and meditation exist to deepen our empathy with all persons and all things.”\(^100\)

\(^{96}\) Addison Hodges Hart, 109.  
\(^{97}\) Robert Kennedy, 110-111.  
\(^{98}\) Addison Hodges Hart, 33.  
\(^{99}\) Robert Kennedy, 118-119.  
\(^{100}\) Addison Hodges Hart, 37.
In the final picture, Christians may compare a Buddhist bodhisattva with Jesus. The bodhisattva “leaves his own gate closed behind him and journeys through the mud and dust of the defiling world into the social world of daily human life.”\textsuperscript{101} Similarly, Jesus was a healer of the sick (Mark 2: 29-34), and ate and drank with sinners as a friend with compassion (Matt. 9:10-13; 11:19) by mingling in the marketplace, and proclaimed the good news of the reign of God (Mark 2:28) in order to save all people through his sacrificial love on the Cross (John 15:13). Tam argues that “the Christ-like Christian[s] and the enlightened Bodhisattva[s] return to ordinary [their] routines of everyday life like any other…person. The difference is that their presence is for others, [they have] a sense of the presence of the Sacred…. [And they realize] the Sacred is in the ordinary.”\textsuperscript{102}

Throughout all Ten Ox-herding pictures, Christians can learn the way of “the individual spiritual inner path…how to be who [they] really are, how to know God as he is in [their inner] experience, how to relate to the natural world as a revelation, and how to mingle in the social world without fear or hypocrisy, but with love and empathy.”\textsuperscript{103} Hart suggests that “we should together become a community of Christian bodhisattvas, disciples who support both the commonality and the personal diversity of discipleship.”\textsuperscript{104} Through contemplative life, the practitioner may experience the spirit of God, and realize that God exists in all things. This teaching of Zen challenges us to accept and open our minds and hearts. As Paul says: “I live, now

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 113; Peter Feldmeier claims that “in the past lives of the historical Buddha, he could have attained Nirvana eons ago, but he forestalled this attainment for the sake of saving others as a Buddha. The bodhisattva vow is unique and relegated to those few extraordinarily developed beings that seek to become a Buddha.” See: Peter Feldmeier, \textit{Encounters in Faith: Christianity in Interreligious Dialogue} (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2011), 164.

\textsuperscript{102} Ekman P. C. Tam, 29.
\textsuperscript{103} Addison Hodges Hart, 117.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 117.
not I, but Christ lives in me” (Gala. 2:20). Through Christ, in Christ, and with Christ the awakener contemplates and acts for the salvation of all people, as does the bodhisattva.

4. Interreligious Dialogue through the “Ox-herding Pictures”

4.1. The “Ox-herding Pictures” As Universal Wisdom, Spirituality, and Art

The Ox-herding Pictures contain various elements of interreligious dialogue, such as, truth, spirituality, and art. First, the Pictures are not the sole domain of Buddhism but they are open to all spiritual practitioners, regardless of religion. Although these pictures are widely known as the ten pictures of Chinese Zen master Kakuan from the 12th century, the eight pictures have already been used by Taoists and Confucians, previously. Historically, in ancient China (in the Tang Dynasty: 618-907) the oxen painting was seen as a pastoral symbol in the agrarian society, and Taoists, Confucians, and Buddhists used these pictures from their perspectives. Hart points out that “influenced by both Confucianism and Taoism, Zen Buddhism developed a form and expression that was distinctively Chinese in character.” Scarlett Ju-Yu Jang, who studied the Ox-herding Painting in the Sung Dynasty (960-1279), claims that “Being free was the quintessential Taoist ideal – self-governing instead of being governed. It was also, with certain qualifications, the ultimate Ch’an ideal and part of the Confucian ideology of eremitism.” This phenomenon indicates that truth or wisdom in spirituality is held common regardless of religion or ethnicity. Zhi suggests that:

---

105 Swami Abhayananda, The Divine Universe: An Alternative to the Scientific Worldview (Bloomington, IN.: iUniverse books, 2008), 114; The Ox-herding pictures have appeared in a number of versions even Taoism and Confucianism. Scarlett Ju-Yu Jang claims that “the hermit T’ao Hung-ching of the Liang dynasty (502-556) painted two oxen, one with a golden halter, the other grazing freely in the pasture…. Clearly, the ideology of Confucian retreat is revealed in Lu Yu’s writing through the image of the ox.” Lu Yu (1125-1210) was the famous poet-official in China. See: Scarlett Ju-Yu Jang, 55, 62.
107 Addison Hodges Hart, 14
As the path to universal wisdom of life, the Ox-herding Pictures can provide a path for human spiritual growth and enlightenment beyond religions and faiths. Hart points out that “a Christian should never be fearful of the location of truth. Even when it’s in other faiths…it’s still truth…All truth is God’s…. the Christian can even draw on the various sources of wisdom.”

Thus, as Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism have used these ox-herding pictures, to represent the way to enlightenment, Christianity can also use these pictures as a source describing spiritual transformation and ways of sharing love and compassion.

Second, the Ox-herding Pictures can also be used as a resource for interreligious dialogue from a spiritual perspective. For example, Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, “Dialogue and Proclamation,” suggests:

Contacts in daily life and common commitment to action will normally open the door for cooperation in promoting human and spiritual values; they may also eventually lead to the dialogue of religious experience in response to the great questions which the circumstances of life do not fail to arouse in the minds of people. Exchanges at the level of religious experience can give more life to theological discussions. These in turn can enlighten experience and encourage closer contacts.

The Church realizes that interreligious dialogue at the level of religious experience is a proper form of dialogue and can provide enrichment in Christian spirituality; for example, “with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.” In this regard, since the Ox-herding Pictures, which contain ways of religious practice and spiritual transformation, can be viewed as a masterpiece presenting the general wisdom of life. Therefore, people from various traditions and disciplines can interpret and appropriate these pictures to their own interest.

---

109 Yong Zhi, 168.
110 Addison Hodges Hart, 1-2.
111 “Dialogue and Proclamation,” (n. 43), 105.
112 Ibid., (n. 42), 104.
development in order to achieve enlightenment and to share love and compassion, the can be a
good resource for interreligious dialogue from a spiritual perspective.

Finally, “Art,” present in most religions and cultures, can become a useful tool for
religious dialogue. Ruth Illman argues that “[what] I call creative interreligious dialogue…the
practice of using art as a platform where persons of different religious backgrounds can meet and
discuss in open, respectful and inventive ways.”\(^{113}\) Thus, the Ox-herding pictures have been
described by various forms of pictures and sculptures by many artists in different regions. These
works can be used as a “platform” for people to encounter, appreciate, and discuss spirituality
regardless of religion.\(^{114}\)

### 4.2. The “Ox-herding Pictures” As an Example of “Mutual Self-mediation”

Among the four kinds of mediation identified by Bernard Lonergan, “mutual self-
meditation” is reinterpreted as “one of the hermeneutic keys to articulate the complex of relations
between the Church and the Other,” according to Dadosky, in his article “The Church and the
Other: Mediation and Friendship in Post-Vatican II Roman Catholic Ecclesiology.”\(^{115}\) From an
interreligious perspective, mutual self-mediation means that the Church, as a teacher, and as a
learner, can be influenced and can learn from the world in a complementary relationship.\(^{116}\) Ovey
Mohammed, in his article “Catholicism in Dialogue with World Religions: The Value of Self-
Denial,” argues that “for Catholics to be good Catholics they must not only talk, but also listen;

---
\(^{114}\) Ox-herding Sculptures at Mt. Baoding in Dazu County in China are the representative sculptures. See:
Henrik H. Sørensen, 217-222. About various forms of pictures and sculptures, see an “Appendix” in this paper.
\(^{115}\) John D. Dadosky, “The Church and the Other: Mediation and Friendship in Post-Vatican II Roman
\(^{116}\) Joseph Komonchak, 89.
they must not only teach others, but also learn from them.”  

Gustavo Gutiérrez, a Dominican priest and Peruvian theologian, suggests that “a theology of the Church in the world should be complemented by a ‘theology of the world in the Church.’” Thus, through the relationship in mutual self-mediation the Church can be enriched, complemented by Others and can dialogue with Others.

In this regard, the Ox-herding pictures of Zen Buddhism can become a good example of mutual self-mediation with regard to contemplation and action. For example, Merton states that “I am particularly interested…[in] all Buddhists, as I am quite involved in the study of comparative mysticism – or ways of ‘contemplation’ – and in relations with Buddhists and Hindus.” William Johnston, an Irish Jesuit and scholar of Zen Buddhism, claims that “I should say that the Oriental technique can deepen the prayer life of those who are already contemplative. Much of the Zen technique will help them practice the counsel of the mystics to abandon thoughts and images in order that the tiny flame of contemplative love may arise in the heart.” Dadosky argues that “it is possible that one of the things that Buddhism has to offer Christianity is the practice of being in the present moment through various forms of meditation…[it] can steer the Christian to daily

---

117 Ovey N. Mohammed, “Catholicism in Dialogue with World Religions: The Value of Self-Denial,” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 20/1 (2004): 36; Kennedy argues that “I believe the Zen teaching concerning ‘no last word’ is a gift to Christians because it helps to open for us a larger and legitimate understanding of the impermanence of all teachings. This in itself fosters interfaith dialogue: We realize that all faiths have a vision they would like to share. We learn to listen without prejudice and without dominating the dialogue.” See, Robert Kennedy, 55.


contemplation of the eternal within the temporal.”

Kennedy suggests that “there will be Christians who will be drawn to interfaith practice and will wish to enhance their faith with the Zen gifts depicted in these ox-herding pictures.” Thus, the ten Ox-herding Pictures not only can be used the source of interreligious dialogue, but they can also offer the possibility of reinterpretation by Christianity, as they were reinterpreted by Chan (Zen) Buddhism in order to describe the process of religious enlightenment in the Chinese Buddhist context.

4.3. Development of “Friendship” in Love and Compassion

Through mutually self-mediating relations Christianity can foster their deep friendship with other cultures and religions. The ecclesiology of Communion has been formally recognized as the principal ecclesiology of Vatican II for the relationship between the local and the universal church. For relationships between the Church and the Other, Dadosky suggests the ecclesiology of “Friendship.” He argues that “friendship is a proper condition for mutually self-mediating relations, an ecclesiology of friendship can meet this need, not to replace the achievements of Communion ecclesiology, but rather to complement it.” Through the relation of true friendship, the Church and other religions can complement each other’s strengths, and can enrich each other by sharing their gifts, and can encourage each other in mutual growth. Indeed, friendship is a “source of great joy…[and] a way to enlightenment and to union” between God

---

122 Robert Kennedy, 123.
123 For instance, according to Dadosky, “Ricci, engaged in mutually self-mediating relations with Chinese culture and that his method was friendship!” See: John D. Dadosky, “Towards a Fundamental Theological Re-Interpretation of Vatican II,” 750.
124 John D. Dadosky, “The Church and the Other,” 321-322; Dadosky suggests that “the ecclesiology of Communion (family) and of friendship would complement each other and thus account for both the understanding of Church as ad intra and ad extra respectively.” See: Ibid., 322.
125 Ibid., 316.
and humanity, communities, or individuals. In this friendship, love is an important element: "the love mediated between friends can flow over as generosity into acts of charity and friendship to others." 

With regard to the Ox-herding pictures, in the tenth picture Buddhists and Christians may encounter Bodhisattva or Jesus through love and compassion, and may form good friendships by co-sharing the love and compassion with each other. This may lead to dialogue and friendship. By external practice of love together, Buddhists and Christians can enhance their friendship through sharing this internal practice. Both Buddhist and Christian disciplines agree that the root of all human problems does not start from the external structures of society, but from the internal human mind. By finding the true self through continued meditation, Buddhists and Christians can foster their friendship by doing meditation together. For instance, James L. Fredericks, a Professor of Loyola Marymount University, suggests:

Catholic and Buddhists have been opening up their monasteries to one another in friendship. In sharing their religious lives and cherished beliefs, the Buddhists have been very skilful in inspiring their Christian friends to think about prayer and meditation, sin and transcendence, Christ and the monastic life in new and creative ways.

For this friendship, the Ox-herding pictures can lead to contemplative dialogue between friends “under the true monastic conditions of quiet, tranquility, sobriety, leisureliness, reverence, meditation, and cloistered peace.” Through this contemplative dialogue both religions can obtain mutual learning, enrichment, and growth with good friendship since “meditation’s

---

126 William Johnston, 160.
127 John Dadosky, “The Church and the Other,” 316.
contemplative stance is ‘grounded’ in landscape, built on teaching, and reflects particular practices.” Friendship between Zen Buddhism and Christianity can be strengthened by doing their respective meditations, and through enlightenment can be two spiritual friends in the same marketplace who through love and compassion can work together for the enlightenment of all people.

5. Conclusion

The Ox-herding pictures are not just for Zen Buddhists, but for all those who want to find their true self, or who want to live an enlightened life. The Pictures can provide a good guide for the spiritual journey. From a Christian perspective, the Ox-herding pictures describe the process of a contemplative life, which proceeds from finding one’s true self (Pictures 1-6) to self-emptiness and self-transcendence (Pictures 7-8), to sharing Christian love and compassion for all in daily life (Pictures 9-10), under the grace of the Holy Spirit. Through the relationship depicted between the Ox and the Herder, Christians may be aided in realizing the relationship between the false self (ego) and the true self (enlightened being), or the relationship between an individual Christian and Christ through dying to self in Christ. In Picture 6, the Ox is united with the herder, and in Picture 8, the herder is united with the Absolute, and in Picture 10, the herder is sharing his compassionate service for all people. In the same manner a Christian contemplative is united with his or her true self through spiritual discipline, and then integrated with God through grace, he or she then shares God’s love with all people as Jesus Christ did. Hart concludes:

The Ten Ox-Herding Pictures remind us of the perennial wisdom to be found in all the world’s great spiritual traditions. Christians can look at the Boy, the Ox, and Hotei as a depiction of the disciple’s path. We can see, if we have eyes to see, the figure of the Good Shepherd behind that of the Ox-Herder. Jesus is never far

---

wherever truth is found.\textsuperscript{132}

Spiritual wisdom is found in all the world’s great spiritual traditions. Christians today are seeking these commonalities so as to dialogue with other religions through the universal truth and wisdom.

After Vatican II, Christianity has gradually realized that the Church is a learner as well as a teacher, and that it needs to strike up a friendship with other religions and cultures. The Ox-herding Pictures have been used as an illustration of the Zen Buddhist spiritual journey and as a vivid description of self-discipline by Taoism and Confucianism since the 6th century. Thus, from a perspective of mutual self-mediation as espoused by Lonergan, the Pictures can contribute to learning about the contemplative life for Christians, and can provide a platform for dialogue with Buddhists, Taoists, and Confucians with regard to a method of finding one’s true self, the process of spiritual practice, and the sharing of the fruits of a spiritual journey. The sharing of religious experiences and spirituality can lead to friendship between religions. When many practitioners of various religions obtain spiritual enlightenment, they can enter the marketplace with love and compassion, and work for enlightenment or salvation for all people. Tam suggests that “while the Buddhist and the Christian, in responding to the Call, take different spiritual paths outlined by their specific traditions, they somehow, in reaching the stage of maturity, could see in the other person similar qualities of holiness expressed in ordinary life.”\textsuperscript{133} For each religion to achieve this spiritual level in daily life, the process may be facilitated by monks or nuns who in most religions are expert spiritual practitioners.\textsuperscript{134} As the Ox-herder spends much time, and experiences a lot of

\textsuperscript{132} Addison Hodges Hart, 117.
\textsuperscript{133} Ekman P. C. Tam, 4.
\textsuperscript{134} Though this expertise is not exclusive to this domain, for instance, in Korea, the “Samso” (三笑, Smile of three people) conference was started by different religious nuns (Seon-Buddhist, Won-Buddhist, Catholic nuns, and Anglican nuns) a conference of interreligious dialogue extent since 1988. In their meetings, they do meditation, spiritual conversation, and pilgrimage to each other’s religious sacred places together.
trials and errors, in order to tame the Ox, friendship among religions and cultures is also
developed slowly, and sometimes can be faced with crises. Through spiritual enlightenment, the
practitioners may transcend their religious doctrine and theory, and realize that all human beings
are friends and all are with the Absolute, all are one in God.
APPENDIX: The Various Versions of the Ox-herding Pictures

1. Traditional Version, Artist Unknown

2. The Ten Ox-herding Pictures By P'u-ming in Hong Kong (ca. 1150s)

---


3. Ox Herding Pictures by Tenshō Shūbun in Japan

Looking for the Ox  Noticing the Footprints  Catching Sight of the Ox  Getting Hold of the Ox  Taming the Ox

Riding Home  Ox Vanished, Herdsman Remaining  Ox and Herdsman Vanished  Returning to the Source  Entering the Marketplace

4. Ox Herding Pictures by Chen, Chao Bao in Taiwan

Searching for the Ox  Discovering the Footprints  Sighting the Ox  Catching the Ox  Taming the Ox

---


5. Ox-herding Pictures by Songgwang-sa in Korea

6. The Ox-herding Sculptures at Mt. Baoding in Dazu County in China

The 1st scene: The initial struggle between the herdsman and the ox

The 2nd scene and 3rd scene: Turning the ox around and Whipping the ox

The 4th scene: The ox obeys the herdsman

The 5th scene: Joyous after the struggle is over

The 6th scene: Letting go of the ox

The 7th scene. The herdsman rests while the ox roams free

The 8th scene: The herdsman plays his flute in the garb of a Daoist immortal

The 9th scene: The herdsman in blissful oblivion

The 10th scene: The meditating figure of Zhao Zhifeng

The 11th scene: The circle-form

140 Henrik H. Sørensen, 217-222.
REFERENCES


**REFERENCES OF OX-HERDING PICTURES**


