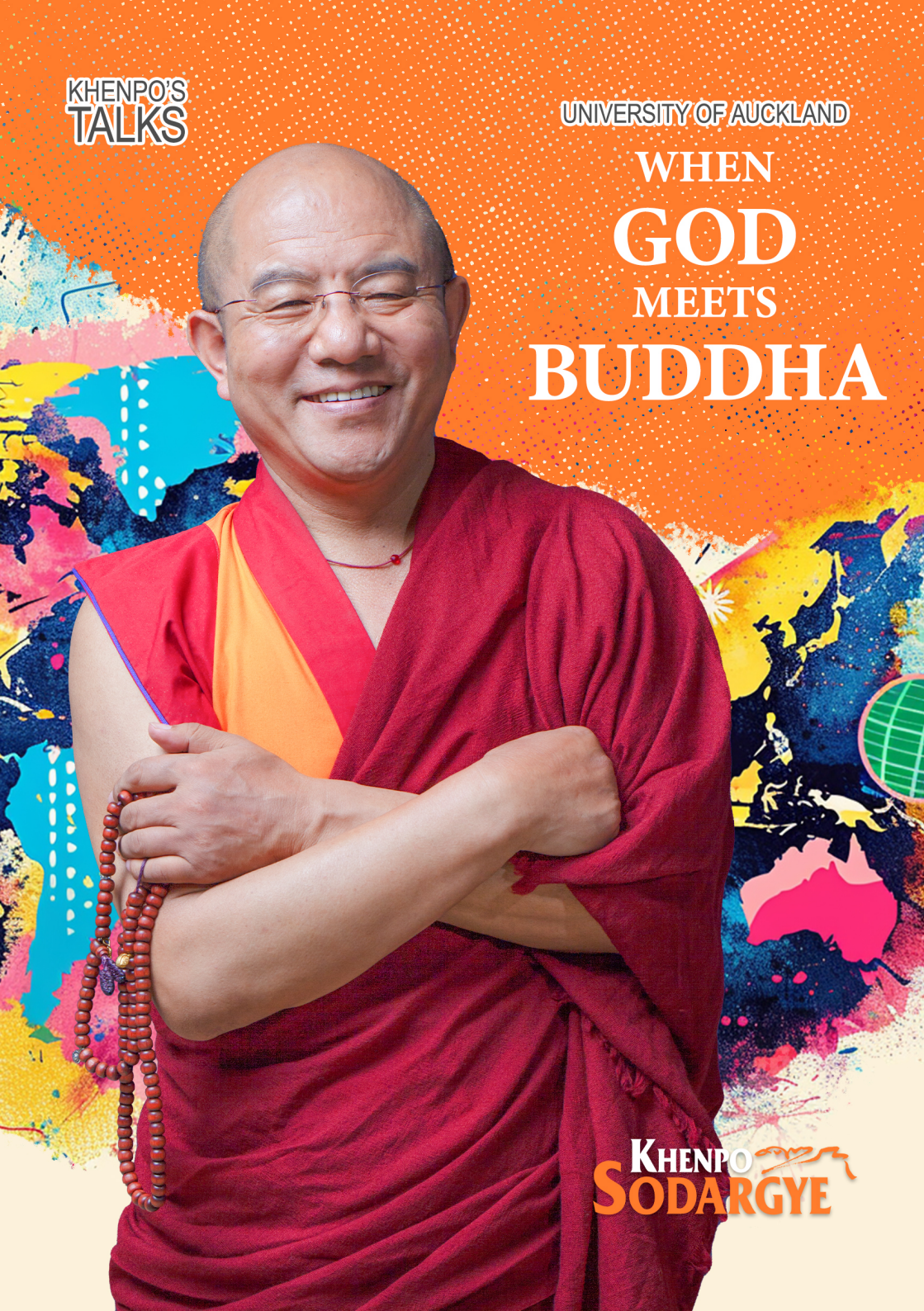


KHENPO'S  
TALKS

UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND

WHEN  
GOD  
MEETS  
BUDDHA

KHENPO  
SODARGYE



KHENPO'S TALKS

# When God Meets Buddha

University of Auckland, New Zealand

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Khenpo Sodargye

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**J**ust as the earth's vibrant flowers make our homeland extraordinarily beautiful, and just as people dressed in varied colors enrich our visual world, so too do different religions, with their unique values and wisdom, make our shared spiritual landscape more wondrous.



University of Auckland

WHEN GOD MEETS BUDDHA

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# PROFESSOR ELAINE WAINWRIGHT

Good afternoon, and welcome to this special lecture by Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche. I extend a warm welcome to the students and staff of the university, to members of the Buddhist community, and to all members of the general public joining us today.

My name is Professor Elaine Wainwright, and I am the Head of the Theological and Religious Studies in the Faculty of Arts here at the University. It is my great pleasure and honor to introduce and welcome Rinpoche. He will be making his entrance shortly, and I kindly ask everyone to please stand as he enters and takes his place at the front of the room. Thank you.

(The following is delivered after Rinpoche has entered and taken his seat.)

Khenpo, I would like to extend a very warm welcome to you. Thank you for visiting us here in Aotearoa, New Zealand, and for generously offering your time to speak with us today.

Rinpoche will be speaking on the topic, "When God Meets Buddha." We hope this subject will be of interest to everyone in

our audience, and I am confident it will challenge and expand our conventional categories. Many of us have been taught to think of Buddhism as non-theistic, while viewing many other world religions as theistic. We therefore look forward to hearing Rinpoche guide us into a new space and a new understanding—where God meets Buddha.

Rinpoche, I now invite you to the podium to address us. Thank you.

# KHENPO SODARGYE RINPOCHE

First and foremost, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the University of Auckland for the honor of this invitation, which has afforded me the precious opportunity to visit the breathtaking land of New Zealand. This is my first journey to this remarkable country, and I am deeply moved by its natural beauty and the genuine warmth of its people.

It is a great privilege to gather with distinguished faculty, students, and guests—friends from various religious traditions and those who embrace no formal faith. While I come before you as a Buddhist practitioner, I hold deep respect for all present, whether your journey is illuminated by spiritual conviction or guided by secular wisdom. Through our dialogue today, I hope we may discover the common threads that unite us—our shared longing for peace, our search for meaning, and the universal compassion that dwells within each human heart.

## THE WISE ELDERS OF MILLENNIA

I have long been fascinated by the rich diversity of world religions. Why? Because humanity yearns for shared aspirations and transcendent ideals, and faiths serve as profound vessels for this collective longing. Though diverse in doctrine, the world's religions illuminate our path like torches—guiding humanity toward virtue and elevating culture through teachings of compassion, ethics, and spiritual awakening.

What distinguishes religion from other doctrines or cultural systems is its remarkable longevity. While philosophical schools and political ideologies often fade within decades or centuries, religions endure as pillars of human civilization. Consider Hinduism, rooted in Vedic traditions from approximately 3000 BCE—more than five millennia of continuous wisdom. Judaism and Roman Religion emerged around 1000 BCE, their narratives woven into the fabric of early human history. Buddhism arose in the 5th century BCE, while Taoism, Confucianism, and Jainism emerged nearby in time, each carrying a legacy of more than 2,500 years. Christianity has journeyed through two millennia since the 1st century CE, and Islam, emerging from 6th-century Arabia, bears a rich heritage of some 1,500 years.

Even ancient Greek philosophy, particularly Plato’s teachings that blended philosophical inquiry with spiritual dimensions, has endured since 400 BCE—a testament to the lasting interplay of reason and transcendence. These timelines remind us that religions are not mere historical artifacts but living traditions, shaped by centuries of human devotion and refined by the crucible of time.

While scholars may debate the precise origins of these faiths, their millennia-spanning presence remains indisputable. Religions have never traveled an easy path; they have weathered schisms, conquests, and the tides of modernity—yet none has vanished. They persist in billions of hearts today, a testament to their enduring social relevance and the profound meaning they bring to human life.

I often envision these traditions as venerable elders of wisdom, standing watch over humanity for millennia. Buddhism and Christianity, among others, are wellsprings of wisdom that nurture ethical clarity and purpose. They serve as compasses, guiding us toward compassion, integrity, and reverence for life. Imagine a world without these spiritual traditions: a landscape where moral horizons blur and progress lacks direction. Even as humanity advances technologically, without the ethical

frameworks these faiths provide, our journey risks becoming aimless.

In recent years, it has been my sincere aspiration to contribute, however humbly, to the harmonious coexistence and flourishing of all faiths. My hope is that each tradition may fully embody its capacity to manifest truth, goodness, and beauty—qualities at the heart of spiritual practice and serve as a unifying light for humanity.

Several years ago, I collaborated with university colleagues to establish the World Youth Buddhist Symposium—an annual gathering dedicated to interfaith harmony and collaborative action. This initiative creates a space where diverse spiritual traditions and academic disciplines converge in meaningful dialogue.

This year's symposium welcomed participants from over 200 universities and more than 20 nations, including scholars and religious leaders from the United States, Canada, India, Germany, and beyond. Their faiths span Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and others—each bringing unique wisdom to our shared conversation. Through relaxed, inclusive, yet purposeful dialogue, they addressed pressing global challenges: social responsibility, spiritual education, and

environmental stewardship, offering insights from their respective traditions to forge paths toward collective healing.

I believe all who walk a spiritual path have a sacred duty to confront such challenges with open hearts and minds, drawing from the wellspring of our faiths to inspire solutions. In this way, such symposia of exchange yield profound fruits.

For those interested, detailed information about the World Youth Buddhist Symposium is available on our official website. While we have welcomed participants worldwide, representation from New Zealand's universities has been modest in recent years. We would be honored to see more of you join us, should this mission of dialogue and unity resonate with you.

That said, I wish to clarify: this is not recruitment—the symposium receives abundant heartfelt applications annually. This year alone, over 2,000 individuals sought to participate, though we could only accommodate 600. Such demand speaks to the universal yearning for connection that resonates globally—a yearning that your presence, should you choose to embrace it, would help fulfill.



## WHAT IF GOD MEETS BUDDHA?

Upon encountering this topic, many may wonder with keen curiosity, “What insights will this Buddhist monastic offer?” Let me assure you that I approach this topic with open-hearted impartiality.

What spark might ignite when God meets Buddha? I believe it would be one of harmonious wonder, for Christianity and Buddhism share profound common ground in their core teachings—threads of compassion, ethical responsibility, and the elevation of the human spirit that are woven through both traditions.

It is clear that Christianity and Buddhism possess significant distinctions, yet these differences do not necessitate incompatibility. Consider, for example, the internal diversity within Christianity: Catholicism, Protestantism, and Orthodoxy differ in doctrine, precepts, and ritual, yet they coexist not as rivals, but as branches of the same spiritual tree. Similarly, Buddhism encompasses a rich diversity—Theravada, Tibetan, and Han Chinese Buddhism each bear unique characteristics. Theravada venerates the singular figure of Shakyamuni Buddha, while Han Buddhism celebrates a pantheon of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

Tibetan Buddhism extends this cosmic vision even further, with an even more expansive array of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Yet, these major traditions do not threaten one another, struggle to coexist, or denounce the others as non-Buddhist. Instead, they dwell in harmony.

As all faiths share this planet, they are called to amplify their commonalities and soften their differences. In doing so, they become a blessing for all humankind. Next, I will systematically explore the commonalities between Christianity and Buddhism through eight key dimensions.

## **1 Prayer and Confession**

Prayer lies at the heart of Christian practice—a sacred dialogue through which believers seek alignment with the Divine will. In Buddhism, too, devotees engage in heartfelt supplications to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, trusting that the sincerity of prayer awakens latent spiritual power and may fulfill their deepest wishes.

For the purification of past misdeeds, Christianity invites believers to confess before clergy or within the sacred space of the church—a ritual of spiritual renewal. Buddhism echoes this through the practice of confession, where practitioners

acknowledge their errors before Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, or spiritual teachers, fostering mindfulness and the purification of negative karma. Both traditions recognize confession as a path to liberation, rooted in the belief that humility dissolves the veil of ego.

## **2 Enduring Harm from Others**

The practice of forbearance forms a profound bridge between these faiths. The Christian New Testament instructs: “If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also”—a call to transform aggression through love. Buddhism’s Four Principles for Shramana mirror this ethos: “When struck, I shall not strike back; when reviled, I shall not revile; when hated, I shall not hate; when provoked, I shall not retaliate.” Both teachings reject the cycle of vengeance, affirming that compassion dissolves conflict.

## **3 Mind of Equality**

Christianity proclaims the universal embrace of the Divine: “He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous”—a testament to God’s impartial love. Buddhism articulates a similar teaching: “All sentient beings are equal; sandalwood and an axe make

no difference.” Whether one offers fragrant sandalwood to the Buddha or wields a destructive axe before him, the Buddha’s compassion remains unwavering. He would neither cling to the first with attachment nor reject the second with aversion. As it is often said, even if the ocean were to part from its waves, the Buddha’s compassionate care would never abandon any being. Therefore, whether it is God or Buddha, both treat all people—whether good or evil—with the same impartial kindness.

#### **4 Simple Living**

Christianity advocates thrift and opposes waste, while Buddhism teaches contentment, moderation of desires, and the value of simple living.

As we all know, in the 21st century, human greed and desire have reached unprecedented heights. Many people own one car yet remain unsatisfied—they want two; once they have two, they desire three. Living in a 70-square-meter apartment no longer brings contentment; they yearn for a 100-square-meter home, and after moving in, they begin to dream of a 200-square-meter house. In this way, people become trapped in an endless cycle of pursuit, never finding true satisfaction. In reality, if humanity

continues to consume resources so recklessly, our planet could never sustain such appetite.

Yesterday, I asked someone here, “Why are there so many cars on the road?” The answer was, “In New Zealand, there are more cars than people.” This made me wonder: How many vehicles can one person truly use? What purpose does such accumulation serve?

We live in a world increasingly dominated by materialism, where many believe that acquiring more possessions will fill an inner emptiness and bring happiness. Yet this hope often proves illusory.

Consider the phenomenon of Apple products. I cannot speak for New Zealand, but in China, the iPhone 6 release created a cultural frenzy. Before my departure, friends asked: “If you go to America, please bring back an iPhone 6—they say it’s cheaper there.” I gently declined: “I travel not as a merchant.”

Although Steve Jobs, the visionary founder, has passed into memory, Apple’s product cycle spins ever faster. With each new release—iPhone 7, iPhone 8, and beyond—consumers eagerly await the next model. But let us recognize what drives this: desire itself, the very craving that Gandhi identified when he

said, “The Earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s need but not for every man’s greed.” Left unchecked, this greed threatens to become our collective undoing.

Here, Christianity and Buddhism find common ground: both advocate a middle way—not a life of poverty, nor one of excess, but a life of balance. Whether through religious practice or by cultivating a mindful attitude, everyone should strive to develop a sense of contentment. When we have access to a basic, reasonably comfortable standard of living and sufficient resources, we ought to feel a sense of satisfaction rather than perpetually grasping for more.

## **5 The Concept of Giving**

Christianity inspires acts of charity—building hospitals, founding schools, and uplifting the marginalized—as expressions of divine love. Buddhism, too, extols the practice of generosity, identifying three profound forms: 1) giving the Dharma: sharing wisdom and spiritual teachings to illuminate the paths of others; 2) giving material things: offering material support to alleviate physical suffering; 3) giving fearlessness: protecting beings from harm and danger.

Each of these forms reflects the belief that generosity dissolves the boundaries of the self, nurturing both the giver and the receiver.

## 6 Compassion

Christianity's call to selfless love resonates deeply with Buddhism's ideal of great loving-kindness and compassion. I once translated Mother Teresa's Nobel Prize acceptance speech into Tibetan, and two stories from her address have stayed with me ever since.

In the first, she and her sisters discovered four destitute individuals on the street, one of whom was gravely ill. "You take care of the other three," she said, "I will take care of this one that looks worse." She brought the dying woman in, settled her into bed, and held her hand. She gave her all her love and did everything possible. Though medicine could not save her, the woman smiled peacefully, held of Mother Teresa's hand, and whispered "thank you" before passing away.

This profound gratitude moved Mother Teresa deeply: "What would I say if I was in her place? I would have said: 'I am hungry, I am dying, I am cold, I am in pain', or something. But she gave me much more—she gave me her grateful love." While many

recoil from beggars, Mother Teresa saw them as embodiments of the divine greatness—a perspective that transcends ordinary understanding.

Buddhism teaches that a Bodhisattva is recognized not by robes or rituals, but by a heart of selfless altruism. To relieve suffering unconditionally for any being is the the mark of a genuine Bodhisattva.

The second story tells of a man rescued from a drain, half his body consumed by worms. Mother Teresa and her sisters carried him to the home. As he died, he said, “I have lived like an animal in the street, but I am going to die like an angel, loved and cared for.” While many hesitate to spare even a coin for the homeless, Mother Teresa’s love demonstrates the transformative power of compassion—a love that sees no distinction between “worthy” and “unworthy,” but simply serves.

She reflected, “It was so wonderful to see the greatness of that man who could speak like that, who could die like that without blaming, without cursing anybody, without comparing anything. Like an angel—this is the greatness of our people.”

In Buddhism, compassion extends beyond humanity to embrace all sentient beings, reminding us that suffering knows no

bounds, and neither should our capacity to heal. In Buddhist tradition, there is the story of Bodhisattva Asanga, who practiced asceticism on Mount Jizu for twelve years. When he finally descended the mountain, he encountered a female dog whose lower body was festering and infested with maggots. Despite her agony, the creature seethed with rage, snarling at anyone who approached. Moved by profound compassion, Asanga cut flesh from his own body to feed the suffering animal.

This story illustrates how Buddhism extends rescue and care with an impartial heart—not just to humans, but to all sentient beings. For in the Buddhist view, all living creatures share the same capacity for suffering and joy, and thus deserve our compassion equally.

## **7 The Concept of the Pure Realm**

Both Christianity and Buddhism teach that those who walk the path of virtue will, after death, dwell in a realm of purity. Many scholars and esteemed religious figures have suggested that Christianity's Heaven and Buddhism's Pure Land are essentially alike.

In modern Chinese history, the eminent monk Master Xuyun, who lived to the age of 120, once shared with Sun Yat-sen and

Chiang Kai-shek his view that Buddhism and Christianity share a common spiritual root—that the Christian Heaven is, in truth, synonymous with the Buddhist Pure Land.

## **8 The Shared Savior**

Christianity anticipates a Savior who will redeem humanity—the Messiah foretold in scripture. Some scholars propose that this figure parallels Maitreya, the Future Buddha in Buddhist tradition.

This perspective emerges from serious scholarly inquiry. Ji Xianlin, the esteemed scholar and former Vice President of Peking University who studied at the University of Göttingen, arrived at this conclusion after years of collaborative research with his student Qian Wenzhong: the Messiah of Christianity and the Buddhist Maitreya—the Buddha of the Future—might represent the same archetypal figure expressed through different cultural lenses.

I present these observations for your reflection, not to advocate any particular position, but to illuminate potential bridges between the two traditions.



## A VAST SPIRITUAL HOUSEHOLD

For those who embrace a religious path— whether Christianity, Buddhism, or any other tradition—it is wise to remain steadfast in one’s commitment. Some may begin as Christians, later convert to Buddhism, and eventually abandon religious belief altogether. Such lifelong wavering between traditions, I suggest, brings little wisdom.

Guided by respect and mutual understanding, adherents of different faiths can explore and learn from one another without compulsion to convert. Christians need not become Buddhists, nor Buddhists Christians. Instead, followers of different traditions can delve into each other’s wisdom, celebrating their distinct heritages while fostering genuine dialogue.

Yesterday, I asked my Buddhist friends in New Zealand, “How do you coexist with local Christians?” They replied simply, “We share coffee and tea, and take trips together.” To me, this embodies the ideal spirit of interfaith relations.

In this world, people of diverse faiths will always live side by side, making peaceful coexistence our shared responsibility. Even within a single household, beliefs may differ. I know of a family in Gansu, China, where the father is a Christian,

the mother a Muslim, the daughter a Buddhist, and the son a Communist Party member with no religious affiliation. Yet they live in harmony, proving that different paths can walk together in mutual respect.

Thus, diverse religions need not be compelled to assimilate; instead, they can cultivate harmony through shared aspirations and universal values. Adherents might gather for collective prayer, alternating between the Bible, Buddhist sutras, and other sacred texts. Christians may study Buddhist scriptures, just as Buddhists may read the Bible. For those on spiritual paths, an open heart and mind hold profound significance.

During my 1993 visit to the United States, I learned about Thomas Merton, a champion of interreligious harmony. Born in France to a New Zealand father and American mother, educated at Cambridge and Columbia, Merton became a renowned Catholic priest who believed Christianity and Buddhism were complementary rather than contradictory. He once declared he was not only a priest but also aspired to deepen his Buddhist practice in spirit.

Merton engaged in profound dialogue on life and faith with spiritual luminaries including Japanese scholar D.T. Suzuki, Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh, and Tibetan teacher

Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. With Trungpa Rinpoche, he planned to co-author a work comparing Christian and Buddhist practices. Tragically, Merton's unexpected death in December 1968 left this vision unfulfilled.

I believe we should all aspire to understand other faiths more deeply and embody the universal ideals of truth, goodness, and beauty inherent in all religious traditions. History teaches us that belittling or slandering others—or attempting to diminish others to elevate ourselves—achieves nothing but illusion. Therefore, diverse religions must collaborate wherever common ground exists, and such potential for cooperation is abundant. Followers of different religions should genuinely befriend one another. We need harmonious relationships built on mutual understanding, respect, and sincere dialogue.

Once, a Tibetan Buddhist master encountered a Christian practitioner in the Himalayas who had been in retreat for five years. When asked about his spiritual practice, the Christian replied that he had been cultivating love and kindness throughout those years. In Buddhism, we call this bodhicitta—the awakening mind that seeks to benefit all beings. Though our terms differ, the essence is remarkably similar, both embodying a selfless, compassionate spirit.

Just as the earth's vibrant flowers make our homeland extraordinarily beautiful, and just as people dressed in varied colors enrich our visual world, so too do different religions, with their unique values and wisdom, make our shared spiritual landscape more wondrous.

The University of Auckland exemplifies this inclusive vision, welcoming students from over 80 countries and regions. The study and exploration of religion require such openness—one that nurtures the possibility of harmonious coexistence for all humanity. Moreover, each religious tradition brings its own human, material, and spiritual resources. When these converge, they create meaningful contributions for all humankind.

Finally, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Professor Buttle, Professor Lin, Professor Manying Ip, Professor Wainwright, Professor Mullins, and Master Changling. I am deeply grateful for your presence and support. Thank you all.



## QUESTION AND ANSWER

**PROFESSOR MARK MULLINS** Good afternoon. My name is Mark Mullins, and I am a professor of Japanese Studies in the School of Cultures, Languages, and Linguistics. It has been my honor, together with Professor Wainwright, to co-host Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche for this public lecture. I will now serve as moderator for the Q&A session.

To begin, I have invited my colleague from the Department of Philosophy, Professor John Bishop, to join me at the podium to offer a brief comment and question. Afterwards, as time permits, we will have microphones available for questions from the audience—hopefully two or three more. Thank you.

**QUESTION 1: PROFESSOR JOHN BISHOP** Thank you, and good afternoon, everyone. Khenpo, it has been a privilege to receive your teaching today. You have presented a clear vision of how every religion is a treasure for humanity. You have also emphasized the importance of protecting that treasure—that when we are fortunate enough to have a religion, we should remain within it and explore its depths, while also taking the further step you

encouraged: to share with and learn from one another. As a Christian, I believe I can deepen my own faith by learning from Buddhism, and I intend to do that.

I have here your book, *Footprints on the Journey: Enthralled With Life's Chance Encounters*, translated from Chinese. The book is written in a diary format, and I'd like to read from one particular day's entry that deeply moved me.

You write, "Oh no, the bothersome backache is here again," and reflect that "one becomes most susceptible to the thought of death in illness." To encourage yourself, you cite a verse on realization by Hong Zhi from the Southern Song dynasty: "Dharma bliss is my sustenance. Compassion is my dwelling. Faith in the Buddha is my final settling place. This body is merely on loan. Mindfulness is my sole endeavor. I have no time for worldly affairs."

You continue: "Take Dharma bliss as sustenance. Regard love and compassion as dwelling places. Take faith in Buddhism as the final destiny. Remember the body is temporary. Always diligently maintain mindfulness. Spare no time in chasing mundane affairs. Keep off fame and

wealth. Crave no external attractions. Always see life as a candle flickering in the wind.”

Then you ask yourself, “Can I accomplish all of this?” and honestly conclude, “It is tough.”

Reading that, especially the reference to “dwelling in compassion,” I was reminded of something from my own tradition. In the First Epistle of John, we read: “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.”

In your talk “When God Meets Buddha,” you drew many parallels between Christianity and Buddhism. While you didn’t elaborate on the nature of God, perhaps that was not necessary. As you suggested through your reference to Merton, perhaps God is the love in which we dwell, and insofar as we practice that love, God is with us.

My question is: Do you see this Christian understanding of God as love as a meaningful bridge between our traditions? Thank you.

**KHENPO SODARGYE** Indeed, it can. In the renowned Buddhist treatise *Commentary on Valid Cognition*, it is taught that the Buddha’s state reaches the culmination of great compassion. One might even say that the Buddha embodies love in its purest

form. When love or compassion reaches its zenith, it reflects the Buddha's own awakened state.

Thus, whether we speak of Buddha or God, both represent a realm where love has reached its ultimate perfection. Yet such a state transcends the limits of ordinary language and lies beyond the grasp of conventional thought, for it dwells in the realm of direct spiritual realization.

**QUESTION 2** A Christian priest once asked me, "Buddhism teaches of the six realms of rebirth. In which realm should God be placed?" How would you respond to this question?

**KHENPO SODARGYE** When discussing noble beings or ordinary individuals within the Buddhist context, their actions and attributes may indeed be evaluated through the lens of Buddhist doctrine. However, when engaging with the concept of God in Christianity, it is essential to employ Christian theological principles as the interpretive framework. This is analogous to the necessity of adhering to New Zealand's legal norms while residing there, as American laws would not apply in such a context.

Simply put, it is more coherent to interpret the figures and ideas within each religious tradition using their own teachings as a guide.

**QUESTION 3** Most religions have a history of 2,000 to 4,000 years. In contrast, modern science is only about 400 years old, yet it has developed so rapidly that many people believe science is the only thing worthy of belief. How do you view this?

**KHENPO SODARGYE** While modern science has advanced remarkably since its inception, it primarily engages with the study of external phenomena. Religion, by contrast, is a profound inquiry into the inner mind—a domain whose relevance persists across all stages of human history.

Through religious cultivation practices, the mind can attain transcendent states beyond scientific observation. Core religious teachings—such as Buddhism’s precepts against taking life, stealing, sexual misconduct, and false speech—remain eternal moral foundations requiring no reform or updating.

That said, the methods of transmitting religious wisdom may indeed be adapted to contemporary contexts. For instance,

modern technological tools can serve as skillful means for sharing timeless teachings.

Even as science propels human progress, the ethical and spiritual guidance of religion continues to serve as a foundational compass for life. Thus, religion embodies an irreplaceable dimension of human experience. In an age of scientific marvels, its role as a guide to the inner life remains both profound and indispensable.

**QUESTION 4** When we turn on the TV or browse the Internet, we witness various natural disasters and man-made accidents occurring worldwide, highlighting the fragility of life. How should we confront such a reality?

**KHENPO SODARGYE** Life is indeed profoundly fragile. Whether traveling by car, airplane, or simply walking, the potential for sudden danger is ever-present—reminding us that we exist in light one moment, and impermanence’s shadow may fall the next.

Buddhism thus instructs practitioners to contemplate the impermanence of death—recognizing any moment could be our last. This teaching calls us to diligently fulfill our responsibilities and wholeheartedly engage in meaningful action while we can.

At the same time, cultivate mental preparedness for death's inevitability.

Through deliberate and systematic practice, cultivating awareness of impermanence yields profound benefits.

**QUESTION 5** Does humans truly have past and future lives?

**KHENPO SODARGYE** Yes, humans do have past and future lives. Thorough analysis would require extended discussion. In previous lectures at Nanjing University, Northwest University, and elsewhere, I have drawn upon Buddhist teachings and scientific perspectives to elaborate this subject. I've also translated the renowned Tibetan text by Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro, *On Past and Future Lives*, which substantiates this through religious doctrine, logical reasoning, and verifiable cases. If you have doubts, I encourage you to invest time in its in-depth study.

**QUESTION 6** The title of today's talk is intriguing, and while I may lack vivid imagination, I would like to ask Khenpo to help us visualize: what would happen if the Abrahamic God were to meet the Indian Buddha?

**KHENPO SODARGYE** Should the God and the Buddha ever meet, I believe there would be no clash of interests, nor would

there be jealousy or anger. Their encounter would be transcendent, suffused with compassion and wisdom, far surpassing the mundane interactions of ordinary beings.

At Sun Yat-sen University, I once discussed certain aspects of Jesus' journey, including some sources that suggest he traveled to the Himalayas, where he was exposed to Buddhist teachings. Thus, when the principles of Christianity and Buddhism converge—when God truly meets Buddha—I envision a world with far less sorrow and lamentation.

I earnestly hope that all members of the religious family—sisters and brothers alike—may cultivate profound unity and coexist in deep harmony and peace. Such unity would make our world a warmer and brighter dwelling place for all beings.

**QUESTION 7** It is said that Jesus atones for sinners, while the Buddha extends forgiveness to those who transgress. For a non-religious person who has committed wrongdoing, which framework holds greater appeal? In whom should one place their faith?

**KHENPO SODARGYE** Both Christian and Buddhist ideologies advocate for the forgiveness and redemption of all who

transgress. When faced with those who have caused harm, both traditions urge responding with wisdom and love.

This is vividly exemplified—in Buddhism by the Buddha's bodhisattva practices across countless kalpas, where he unhesitatingly offered his head, eyes, and even marrow for beings' welfare; in Christianity by Jesus' self-sacrifice, culminating in his salvific act upon the cross. Thus, both faiths uphold a selfless, unconditional love—a love that has inspired countless hearts throughout history.

In this world, only selfless love brings true happiness, while the gravest affliction lies in selfish attachment or the calculated usurpation of others' rights and wealth.

Upon close examination, one discerns that much worldly love is fundamentally self-serving. By contrast, the transcendent love upheld by many religions is an unconditional dedication to the service of others. This love is truly moving, whether manifested in the Buddha, Jesus, or their followers.

## PROFESSOR MARK MULLINS

I must now bring our session to a close. I see many hands still raised, and I suspect we could continue for hours more. Unfortunately, time constraints require us to conclude.

On behalf of everyone present, I extend our heartfelt gratitude to Khenpo for his illuminating lecture and generous responses to our questions. Thank you all for attending—it's been wonderful to see such a large and engaged audience. Special thanks to our volunteers, including the Puxian Temple group and others who made this event possible.

I only wish my knowledge of Japanese extended to Chinese so that I could have participated more fully in today's discussion. It has been a genuine pleasure having you all here. Please join me once again in thanking Khenpo for his inspiring lecture. Thank you.

## Dedication

May the merit resulting from this piece of work contribute  
in the greatest possible measure to the long life of all great  
masters, to the flourishing of the Buddhadharma,  
and to the welfare of all sentient beings.

It is always our wish to present a work of the highest quality to the readers so that anyone who reads this text would find inspiration. So we would very much appreciate your comments, feedback or suggestions for how this text might be improved and made more valuable. You are also greatly welcomed if you want to make a contribution to any of our other projects of translation. Please email us at: *translation@khenposodargye.org*



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