

**The Secrets about Christian Lindtner-
a preliminary response to the CLT
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Preliminary, I want to state some points of interest. I have been in contact with Christian Lindtner [CL] now for several years, mainly concerning our shared interest in Nagarjuna. So, I was very happy to come to this symposium and meet CL in person.

We had e-mailed about the subject of Buddhist influence in the Gospels before and I was aware of the basics of the “CLT” [Christian Lindtner Theory], i.e. that the Gospels are translations – how distorted ever – of two key Buddhist texts, the Saddharmapundarika-Sutra [SDP= “Lotussutra”] and the Mulasarvastivadīn-Vinaya [MSV-V], esp. its last section, the Sanghabhedavastu [SBV].

I am glad that CL published his theory even at that a premature state in an inaccessible language albeit I disagree mainly completely with his methodology and conclusions; still, it is very important to draw attention on the fact that there is (massive) Buddhist influence in the Gospels.

I enjoyed the whole conference, beautifully set in Smaland’s gorgeous nature, although very few academic participants were present. In our very informal and disputative discussion, I was able to put forward some strong objections against the CLT, and I had the pleasure of observing, that CL changed his views on several points.

It would be much too premature to write a review of his book “The Secrets about Christ: The New Testament is Buddha’s Testament”, since this controversial and polemically written book is merely available in Swedish so far.

But at this early stage, I would like to summarize some of the main objections I made from my background as classical Philologist, Indologist and Lecturer in Religious Studies (Buddhist and Hindu Studies).

My objections partly side with Robert Countess remarks:

CL states that the New Testament is the result of Buddhist missionary activity. He supports this idea with quoting the extreme use of upaya-kaushalya in the SDP. He did not differentiate between the particular Ekayana doctrine of the Lotussutra and mainstream Mahayana. This has changed during the discussion. It is very important to see that the peculiar shift in doctrine from Wisdom/experience towards faith as encountered in the Lotussutra does not represent mainstream Mahayana.

The SDP was extremely successful in East Asia (esp. China, Japan), but apart from one Tibetan translation no traces of this particular sub-school, of Mahayana can’t be found elsewhere. Its doctrine of faith and missionarism is essentially foreign to core Buddhist thought, since overcoming confusion by engaging in Buddhist meditation experience is nothing to be forced upon anyone: Basically you have to “come and see for yourself” (*ehi

pasyika), i.e. sit and meditate!

The dating of the Lotussutra is another issue. I would be prone to date the short version in the first century CE [Common Era], while narratives (as opposed to doctrines) encountered in the SDP – like the parable of the Lost Son - certainly pre-date Christianity.

CL claims that – where-ever this “translations” were made – the “missionaries” used so extremely different texts as the Gilgit SGV belonging to a pre-Mahayana sub-school of Buddhist Realism and the revolutionary new Ekayanic Lotussutra.

This is, however, highly unlikely. Among the innumerable great amount of Buddhist sutras, why would two so different scriptures be chosen? Surely the Mulasarvastivadin’s themselves didn’t know or appreciate the Lotussutra since its doctrines contradict main points of their philosophy.

Let me just go into one detail: The resemblance of Romans 3 (the lie of the man enhances the truth of GOD) and the upaya-kaushalya concept in the Lotussutra, which CL uses as argument for a direct textual relationship, is totally unconvincing, since in Romans 3 Paul engages into a (pre-?)Rabbinic exegesis of a Psalm verse: there is nothing Buddhist about it.

Here we discover a main Secret about Christian Lindtner: A deep unwillingness to ponder the Jewish (and Hellenistic) background of the Gospels. In order to avoid going the trodden path of Hebrew and Aramaic heritage, CL wanders on the devious route into Sanskrit. But for almost any textual (as opposed to narratorial) unit which CL quotes in the NT, we have to look upon the Hebrew Bible or respectively the Septuagint and non-canonical early Jewish scriptures for interpretation. Only if we can’t find any Jewish or Hellenistic explanation for a passage we are justified to look further.

Basically, any attempt to proof a direct intertextuality (as opposed to motivic or narratorial intertextuality) is vain due to the immense textual problems itself: We don’t have an “Ur-“ version of the Gospels nor the SDP or MSV-V which we would need to establish this kind of “translation-assimilation” procedure. CL would want to bring his methodology up to a modern level in using some introductory book in literary criticism esp. intertextuality.

The “translation”-technique used by the Buddhist to create the Gospels as presented by CL is such an astonishing nonsense, that no scholar could possibly take it serious. CL refers to keeping sometimes the meaning of the alleged source text, sometimes consonant values (a Semitic concept alien to Indo-European languages!) or both with as many exceptions and modifications as to make the evidence fit into the hypothesis (German: Hinein-Interpretation): Thus consonants may represent any other consonants of the same group, Liquids sometimes are dropped or interchanged, the meaning sometimes shuns the letter by letter riddle-translation. With Robert Countess I would advise CL to take a arbitrary narrative – even some with a similar (religious) development structure like Goethe’s Werther and apply his method upon it: It would work. CL here very dangerously deviates from sound scholarship into the dungeons of half-insane amateurism. I remind the reader at the amateurs looking for an Ur-language for all the world’s languages etc.

Unfortunately, the same is true for CL's new obsession: Gematria or pseudo-pythagorean number-speculations: Cave insaniam!

Having said that, what rests? Is there no Buddhist influence in the gospels? Since more than hundred years Buddhist influence in the Gospels has been known and acknowledged by scholars from both sides. Just recently, Duncan McDerret published his excellent "The Bible and the Buddhist" (Sardini, Bornato [Italy] 2001). With McDerret, I am convinced that there are many Buddhist narratives in the Gospels.

I would differentiate between narratives (like parables), motifs (like Jesus walks on water) and some proper names like place-names etc. (like Magad[h]a). This narratives and elements were transmitted orally by mercenaries (esp. Parthians) along the trade routes, i.e. the Sea Routes and the Silk Route(s). They all have in common that they have a clear contextual and /or narratological functions in Buddhist sources and lack this function in the Gospels so that their Buddhist origin is narratologically proved even without taking more iconographical chronological evidence in favour of the Buddhist texts into consideration. I gave some examples in my book "Buddha" (Gütersloh 2001, Basiswissen). So there is "much Buddhist stuff going on in the Gospel". But its not the only source, not even a main source for the NT.