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Buddhists Talk about Jesus, Christians Talk about the Buddha

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Encapsulating a wide range of current theological scholarship, this insightful debate will inspire Christians to seek more knowledge of Buddhism and it will compel Buddhists to ponder Jesus in the light of his many Buddhist-like works.

The book consists of a dozen essays with the underlying theme of Jesus and the Buddha both as historical figures and as teachers. The essays are organized so that the writers respond to each other in a kind of literary debate. It is a creative approach that anticipates and answers readers' questions on key differences between two very different world views.

The most difficult factor in reading this book is that the writing styles range from clear and precise to meanderingly scholarly. It is a minor problem that is outweighed by the quality and insight of the work as a whole.

The authors are straightforward with their intentions: "I honestly do not expect my predominantly Buddhist world view to be enriched by learning more about Christianity," writes one. Another argues neither position is superior; they are both equal ways to a truth.

The overriding tone is that Christians and Buddhists need each other to make the world a better place. Neither group of authors expects to convert the other. Marcus J. Borg, in the essay "Jesus and Buddhism: A Christian View," writes "…if Jesus and the Buddha were ever to meet, neither would try to convert the other—not because they regard the task as hopeless, but because they would recognize each other."

It is with this thread of tolerance and expectation that a synthesis is woven. It is in this space between these two dialogues that readers will gain insight. Although these essays are about Buddhist and Christian values, it is the human values illustrated by both views that are pleasantly and intellectually appealing.

JOE MIELKE (March / April 2000)

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