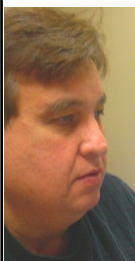




## First Thoughts



Even in hell there is compassion. What do you think, is there compassion in hell? It is an idea that appeals to many people in our culture. But, where does such a notion come from? If the subject has your attention, be sure and read our feature article about a local promotion.

### Crosswinds Lands in Thailand

I am excited to announce that Crosswinds Foundation is launching a new ministry, CrossTies Asia, to be located in Chiangmai, Thailand. While ministering in Thailand will be new for us, it is old hat for Dwight Martin who will head up CrossTies.

Dwight and his wife, Mary Kay, are a great addition to our team and we are glad to have them working with us. In the upcoming weeks CrossTies will have its own website where you will be able to keep up with them and this new work in Asia. Learn more about the Martins on page 4.

The primary religion of Thailand is Buddhism and with the continuing encroachment of eastern religions into our culture (see Culture Tracks, p. 4), Dwight's understanding of, and expertise in, these religions will prove beneficial to our ministry in the States, as well. This month's feature article should be an eye-opener as to how important it is for us to understand eastern religions.

### Just in From Afghanistan

Crosswinds' Associate, Don Malin has finished his tour of service in Afghanistan. Thanks to all of you who prayed for him and supported his ministry

there to school kids and to our soldiers through the Table of Grace Ministry.

Don is excited about being home and is already making plans for how he might minister to those who have returned from the Middle East and still struggle with experiences while deployed, as well as, readjusting to home life. We'll keep you informed about this new opportunity to serve our military folks and how you might help.

Our men in Romania, Ieremia and Nelu, continue to be very busy. Ieremia's family has recently come out of being quarantined for the swine flu (his wife had it, but all are well); and in the past few weeks he made presentations in six cities. In addition to their ministry in Romania, Nelu recently gave presentations in Portugal, Ireland, and Paris; his first time to minister in all of these. As you can see, their ministry is literally throughout Europe.

With our new work in Thailand, we now have ministry points on three continents: America, Europe, and Asia. We are quite amazed at this considering we only started Crosswinds about eighteen months ago. It is certainly beyond where we had envisioned being in such a short time span; obviously, God's plan was bigger than our own.

Thanks to so many of you who made this possible by believing in and supporting this work with your prayers and finances. I, our staff, and Board wish you, and yours, a very merry Christmas.

Blessings,

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To make a financial investment in our ministry make your check payable to: Crosswinds Foundation and mail to:

P.O. Box 12143  
Birmingham, AL 35202

For information on giving by credit card (Visa, MC, Discover, AMEX) contact us at 205-327-8317

## You can now make your donations online.

Visit our website at: [crosswindsfoundation.org](http://crosswindsfoundation.org) and click on the "Donate" button.

## No Compassion Found in Hell by Bob Waldrep

"Even in Hell there is compassion."

That was the message on a large sign draped in front of a building near our office in downtown Birmingham, Alabama - the heart of the Bible-Belt, no less. The presentation certainly gets your attention; it got mine. The message, without question, is thought provoking.

I get that this is intended to be an attention-getting, in-your-face, wake up call for the need to have compassion; kind of a "What the World Needs Now is Love Sweet Love", for the new millennium. However, one must admit, it is a rather odd statement. After all, the inference is that hell is better than here since, at least in hell, you'll find compassion.

It has been my experience that even those who do not believe in hell understand it does not represent a "good" place to be - not even for a visit. I don't recall ever hearing someone say, "If, only we could make it to hell, everything would be better". I have heard people refer to this life as a living hell; as in, "I have already spent my time in hell" - but, again, this portrays hell as a negative.

So, who came up with the idea of putting a positive spin on hell and using it to promote compassion,



...compassion, from p.1

of all things? Seemingly, a good place to find the answer would be the Compassion Project website, which is promoted on the sign.

Unfortunately, their website doesn't have a lot of information about their campaign and who is behind it (at least not as of this writing). However, from Space One Eleven (SOE), a nonprofit supporting the arts and the sponsor of the local effort, we discovered it is the work of Shana Berger and Nathan Purath of the Coleman Center for Arts in York, AL. We also learned they have a companion billboard campaign with a number of billboards placed in Atlanta, Memphis, and New Orleans. These proclaim the same message of compassion in hell.

SOE is quite candid that this is an art exhibit that is intentionally religious in its expression; and, at least in this instance, is not aimed toward promoting a Christian worldview. In their press release for the exhibit, they state:

"The Compassion Project is a conceptual art billboard undertaking that uses the vernacular of Christian marketing campaigns to examine spirituality and politics in America...this expression offers traditional fundamentalist Christian heritage an expanded way of viewing damnation. The art illustrates that escape from hell is universally available to every human through compassion."

"An expanded way of viewing damnation"? In other words, the view held by Christians that the only way to escape hell is through Jesus, is incorrect and needs to be "expanded". So, what is the origin of this information that hell is not such a bad place and the Christian depiction of it is wrong?

Berger and Purath found this idea, not in a more "expansive" view of the teachings of Christianity, but in the teachings of Buddhism. According to Purath's website, the Compassion Project is inspired by a story told by a Buddhist monk. Here is how he explains it on the website:

"The Compassion project is inspired by a story about the Buddha told by the Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hahn. In a past life, prior to enlightenment, the Buddha was in Hell. He was with another man, and they were being tortured by a guard whose duty was to cause the two men suffering. The Buddha, tired of seeing his companion in pain, told the guard that he should not beat the man or cause suffer-

ing in others. The guard became very angry and stuck his fork in the heart of the Buddha. The Buddha died but was simultaneously reborn into a new life on earth. Even in Hell there is compassion."

Purath states, "The Compassion Project...honors multiple ideals of god by drawing from a Buddhist legend...[It]...embraces compassion as a broad spiritual principle, true to the values of Jesus as a historical, political, and spiritual figure."

Were this simply an effort to promote compassion, I think we could all agree that is something that is much needed in this time we live. However, must one be critical

**"...this expression offers traditional fundamentalist Christian heritage an expanded way of viewing damnation. The art illustrates that escape from hell is universally available to every human through compassion."**

of the teachings of the Christian Church in order to promote compassion? Is the intent here really to promote compassion; or, is it to call into question the teachings of the Christian Church regarding the place of Jesus in the salvation of humanity?

In addressing the reason for sponsoring this exhibit, SOE states it is as part of an emphasis titled, "Found Around the South, Two" which, is intended to recognize, "artists/curators based in the Deep South who address issues that ripple out into the world". Tellingly, they continue, "The series explores the area's unfortunate attachment to anti intellectualism..."

Who are those who oppose intellectualism? The inference, of course, is Christians. Consider the focus of the previously quoted statements made by The Compassion Project and the exhibit sponsor.

First, Christianity is portrayed as "fundamentalist" in its view of Hell and, thus, salvation. It is presented as holding a much too narrow view of what Hell is and who can escape it; while Buddhism, on the other hand, recognizes the way out of Hell is

broad and available through an individual's own acts of compassion. It is not the Buddhist who needs a better understanding of the true nature of hell and, thus God, but the Christian. Simply put: Buddhism - Good; Christianity - Bad.

It is even implied by SOE that their message is being hindered by Christianity; which, apparently, they believe is controlling morality through economics. In responding to Lamar Advertising's decision not to run the "Compassion in Hell" billboard campaign, Space One Eleven decries, "The billboards were respectfully declined in Birmingham, AL and Knoxville, TN by Lamar Advertising. This sadly demonstrates economic influences on morality."

Actually, Lamar's decision was probably made on the basis of its understanding of the community values in the market it services. Recently, Lamar made a similar decision regarding selling signage to an atheist group. (CrossingCurrents Vol.2:7)

While SOE may find such a decision "sad" it is a decision well within Lamar's rights to make. And, whatever one might think of Lamar's decision, at least they are clear and consistent in their position. It would be nice if SOE was similarly clear in its purpose regarding this exhibit. Is it truly intended for any artist who's ideas "ripple out into the world", including Christian artists, with a Christian idea? Let us hope that it does.

It doesn't appear that the ultimate goal of SOE, Purath, and Berger is to advance Buddhism. In fact, I doubt those associated with SOE are even all that familiar with Buddhism. Instead, what is being promoted is an increasingly common worldview, more rooted in the pantheistic beliefs of eastern religions than those found in Christianity.

It is the idea that man is self-determinative concerning his future - man is god. It is not so much a search for "the" truth as it is a search for "your" truth; a truth which might be found in, or supported by the teachings of any religion; thus, all religions are true.

In the case of these artists, it appears they have rejected the Christian teaching of hell, finding it unacceptably narrow. In support of their viewpoint they found the story quoted from Buddhism—one they believe not only refutes the position held by Christians, but also calls for compassion. After all, if there is compassion in hell, why not on earth?



There is compassion on earth; maybe not as much as we would like, but it can be found, and is, by many. And, more to point, hell is not a good place to be - even in Buddhism.

The Buddhist teaching of hell is that it is temporary. It is a place of suffering just as it is depicted in the story told of Buddha and the other man being tortured there. For the Buddhist, hell is not a place to find compassion; it is a place where one is sent to endure suffering until the karma they accumulated in a prior life allows for their exit through reincarnation - which might be considered an act of compassion.

Simplistically put, according to the teachings of karma and reincarnation, the fact that Buddha and this man were in hell indicates they deserved to be there; their torture was deserved (note, in the story it was the guard's duty to torture them). They were paying the debt for the evil they had done in their previous life, even as the good they had done would be added to their ledger to shorten their stay. So, Buddha would have known that no appeal on his part could alter the torture being given the other man - he deserved it.

So, if this story really teaches compassion, it is for selfish reasons. Do not let it escape you that the one on whom Buddha, allegedly showed compassion, remained in hell. It was Buddha who actually received the compassion and escaped. The point of the story is not that Buddha had compassion and through his kindness changed the state of the other man. Rather, it is this final act of goodness on the part of Buddha, seemingly, tipped the scales in his favor and allowed him out of hell.

Unfortunately, in Buddhism, once reborn more suffering awaits you on earth. For, Buddha taught that suffering was one of the Four Noble Truths. It can never be escaped until a person reaches Nirvana - the state where one has no desire (detachment) and no longer experiences suffering, nor joy; pain, nor pleasure. The process by which this is obtained is the reincarnation cycle, which means one may have spent millions of lifetimes of suffering before reaching it.

Jesus also told a story about someone who was in hell and asked for compassion. On that point it is similar to the story told by the Buddhist monk. However, the teaching regarding hell and how one escapes it is vastly different. The Gospel of Luke recounts the story, as follows (Lk 16:19-31):



Sign draped over front of Space One Eleven Bldg

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

"He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

"Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

"'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

"He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.' "

As in the story told by Buddha, this man also asked for compassion; first, for himself in asking for but a drop of water. Finding no

compassion for himself, as in Buddha's story, he asked for compassion for another (his brothers that they might not suffer his fate). Unlike, Buddha's story, there was no compassion to be found in hell.

As regards his brothers, Jesus points out that compassion is to be found while one yet lives. In other words don't put your hope in a next life. This life is the only chance you get; so make it count.

When compared to what Jesus taught, the Buddhist teaching of hell doesn't seem all that appealing. For, even when one reincarnates out of it, they just enter a new life of suffering, which eventually leads to another stay in hell and even more suffering. Where's the hope in that?

Jesus did not teach there was compassion in hell; he taught that one does not have to experience hell at all. He came to give hope that through trusting in his work, one can avoid hell all together. The only logical conclusion that can be drawn here is that the view of hell taught by Jesus is not compatible with that taught by Buddha.

This is actually the point being made by SOE and their exhibit. They clearly recognize and acknowledge that the message of the Compassion Project stands in stark contrast to that of the gospel of Jesus, the Christ. And, if Purath, Berger, and the members of SOE want to embrace and promote Buddhism, it is their right to do so. If they truly believe it, they should be vocal in their belief; as they are.

Likewise, Christians have every right to talk about what we believe. If we truly, believe that Christ is the answer, we must not wait within the walls of the Church building in hopes that seekers will find us. Instead, we should get out in the marketplace and begin to participate in spiritual discussions like the one being promoted by the Compassion Project.

There is a choice to make. We can look at a sign like the one hanging from the building by my office and be critical of its sponsors; or, we can recognize that the fact such a sign is being prominently displayed indicates an opportunity for us to engage the culture in a meaningful discussion of spiritual matters. It is an invitation for dialogue and though that may not have been the artists' true intent; they have opened the door for the conversation.

Knock, Knock! Are you listening?



**Culture Tracks**  
Statistical data reflecting the cultural footprints of Americans.



**CrossTies Asia**

A Ministry of Crosswinds Foundation

**"Cultural Trends Related to Religion in America"**

Contrasting Buddhism in America and Other Parts of the World.

Countries with Highest Proportion Buddhist Population

- 1. Thailand 95%
- 2. Cambodia 90%
- 3. Myanmar 88%
- 4. Bhutan 75%
- 5. Sri Lanka 70%
- 6. Tibet 65%
- 7. Laos 60%
- 8. Vietnam 55%
- 9. Japan 50%
- 10. Macau 45%
- 11. Taiwan 43%

% of World Population Identified With Major Religions

- 1. Christianity (33%)
- 2. Islam (21%)
- 3. Secular/Nonreligious/Agnostic/Atheist (16%)
- 4. Hinduism (14%)
- 5. Buddhism (06%)
- 6. Judaism (0.22%)

(From Adherents.com)

% of US Population Identified With Major Religions

- 1. Christianity (78%) \*
- 2. Secular/Nonreligious/Agnostic/Atheist (10.3%)
- 3. Jewish 1.7%
- 4. Buddhism (0.7%)
- 5. Islam (0.6%)
- 6. Hinduism (0.4%)

(From Pew Research Report)

\* Note the % of US population that identifies with Buddhism surpasses that of Hinduism and Islam, while falling below these religions when compared with worldwide numbers.

THAILAND—This month Crosswinds launches our new ministry in Thailand which will be led by Dwight Martin. In future issues we will be sharing more about the work of CrossTies, but for now we wanted to introduce Dwight to you.

Dwight was born in Thailand, the son of American missionaries there. After high school he moved to the United States to attend college, eventually receiving an MBA in Technology Management from the University of Phoenix. Dwight spent over 25 years in the software and document imaging industry and was the co-founder of AQ2Technology (formally Acuracy Corporation).

Dwight began to sense God leading him to serve the Thai people as had his parents. In 2006, he and his wife, Mary Kay, moved back to the land of his birth and now make their home in Chiangmai, Thailand.



The main focus of his ministry is to be a resource to national believers in SE Asia so they can become more effective disciples of Jesus Christ. The ultimate goal is to mobilize nationals to spread the Gospel in their own countries and surrounding regions. Being fluent in both Thai and English allows Dwight the ability to effectively serve in this important work.

One way Dwight has been able to help the Thai Church is in using his technology skills and knowledge of the Thai language to develop a digital library containing over 4,000 resources which have been placed on a free website. For Thai Christians who don't have access to the internet, Dwight makes available for purchase a flash drive containing the digital library and 18 other useful programs including an interactive Bible program (with 4 versions of the Thai Bible) and portable Skype.

Dwight's ultimate desire is to make the ministry to Asia self-funded. With this objective he started a for-profit business, Pactec Asia that provides business process outsourcing and other data services. Not only does the business help fund the ministry but provides an opportunity for Dwight to hire Buddhists to work in a Christian environment with the goal that they would become believers.



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ENGAGING THE CULTURE

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**In the News**

There was no "In the News" this month so we could share about this new work we are beginning in Thailand.



For additional information on this or other topics contact us for a free information packet.