

## **Buddhist Thinking in the UK – Challenges and Opportunities for the Church**

On Thursday 17 October 2013, sixteen delegates from several agencies and churches gathered in London for a consultation and workshop to consider this topic. There were three main sessions, all with opportunity for questions and discussion:

Hugh Kemp

### **An overview of Buddhism in Britain: mapping the contours**

This is a plenary presentation which will be an overview of Buddhism in Britain. It will look at questions like how many Buddhists are there in Britain (and does it really matter?). What sorts of Buddhists are here? How do we recognise Buddhists? How do Buddhists in Britain (or British Buddhists) talk about themselves? What sorts of missional engagement have there been with Buddhists in Britain? Have they been successful? Should the Christian church spend time and resources engaging with Buddhists in Britain and if so, with whom and why? What in the Gospel might resonate with Buddhists in Britain?

Sue Burt

### **Returning Home a Christian**

What might be the journey for a student from Buddhism to Christ? What might they understand about their conversion? What issues are then faced by new Christians returning to their Buddhist families? How can we prepare them in the UK for these challenges? What does discipleship look like for a student from a Buddhist background? Sue will lead us as we examine these serious issues.

Hugh Kemp

### **Missional engagement with Buddhists in Britain (and British Buddhists): a practical workshop**

This will be a workshop/discussion/Q&A time to explore the practical aspects of engaging with Buddhists in Britain. Both individuals and churches not only need the conceptual framework for Buddhism in Britain, but practical strategies for conversational engagement. For example, how could you talk with your neighbour from Cambodia? How should your church respond to the Dalai Lama's visit to your city? As a Christian leader, how can you motivate your congregation to even conceptualise Buddhism as an entity, when perhaps Islam is more in the news? What are the challenges and opportunities for Christian mission amongst Buddhists? Where could I start? Why should I start?

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### **About our speakers:**

#### **Sue Burt**

Sue was the Friends International Staff Worker in Bournemouth for 14 years where she sought to encourage churches to engage with international students. During that time many of the students she encountered were from wholly or partly Buddhist backgrounds. A growing realisation of the struggles many encounter on return home led Sue to study for an MA at All Nations Christian College where she wrote her dissertation on Returnee Issues faced by Taiwanese students converting to Christianity while in the UK. For the last 6 years Sue has been Head of Returnee Ministry for Friends International.

#### **Dr. Hugh Kemp**

Hugh is Head of Mission and Academic Dean at Redcliffe College, Gloucester. He has responsibility for Redcliffe's MA programme in Asian studies, as well as teaching on religions of Asia. Hugh's PhD is on Western Buddhism (particularly conversion and identity formation), and his MTh is on Christian history amongst the Mongols. Hugh's connection with Buddhism has involved growing up in north India, following the movements and teaching of the Dalai Lama, living for three years in Mongolia, and more recently engaging particularly with Buddhists in New Zealand. He is a Kiwi, but has lived in Gloucestershire since May, 2011. He has published two books – one on the history of Christianity amongst the Mongols, and in 2013, the One Stop Guide to World Religions (Lion). He has also written various articles on missional engagement with Buddhism, and conducted workshops on missional engagement with Buddhists in New Zealand, Mongolia, Philippines, Thailand, and England.

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Faith to Faith meeting, 17 October 2013

### **Strategic issues and challenges**

After the sessions presented by Hugh and Sue, we considered our own responses.

#### **What can we take back to our churches?**

- 1) Make sure we do report back to our churches and individuals
- 2) Accept the challenge to be able to say something about Jesus to those influenced by Buddhism
  - a. He came and was always enlightened
  - b. What happens when Christians die?
  - c. Who is God?
- 3) Jane will talk to church leaders in York – will give information but is looking for a practical outcome as well
- 4) Look at Christian meditation on the Bible in our churches, perhaps with Buddhists / inviting Buddhists but keep it strictly Christian.
- 5) Develop Fresh Expressions for Buddhist Background Believers
- 6) Concentrate on being salt and light, developing disciples and engaging theologically
- 7) Be alert to the spiritual dimension and be prayerful.
- 8) Remind former Christians what they left behind when they left the Church
- 9) Help returnees by giving them a greater understanding / discipleship and advice about what they will face when returning home

**Resources:** there were some recommendations of books – all to think about this and send resource suggestions to Ann Bower: [abower@globalconnections.co.uk](mailto:abower@globalconnections.co.uk)

**Evangelicals Now:** Roger Stevens (OMF) sent in a short article about the day, for the December 2013 issue.

**Grove Booklet:** Hugh Kemp is endeavouring to write his edited talk into a Grove Booklet in the next few months, after doing some further research. (He has returned to New Zealand to live.)

We now pray that God will continue to work in those who came along, will remind them of what they suggested they might do and encourage them to see it through in their churches and communities.

*Mrs Ann Bower  
9 December 2013*