

## Book Review

**Steve Cioccolanti**, *From Buddha to Jesus, an Insider's View of Buddhism and Christianity*  
(Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 2007. ISBN: 978-1-85424-956-2 (UK))

This is an important book from a unique perspective of a person who converted from Buddhism to Christianity. This book is also a useful tool to dialogue with Buddhists, as well as to enlighten those who are confused regarding Buddhism.

Steve Cioccolanti (B.A., M.Ed.) is senior pastor of Discover Church in Melbourne, Australia. Born in Thailand to a family of Catholics, Buddhists, Methodists and Muslims. Cioccolanti has a unique perspective on the Bible and world religions. The main aim of his book is to help Christians understand Buddhism the way it is actually lived, not the way it is taught in textbooks. In his book, he explains aspects of Buddhism in a way that native Buddhists would easily understand, but in a way that people are not likely to ever hear in a Western classroom.

Cioccolanti points out the misunderstanding from the West regarding Buddhist teachings. Throughout the book, he emphasizes many unrecognized similarities between Buddhism and Christianity, which can serve as a starting point for cross-cultural communication. He suggested that doctrine is not as important to a Buddhist as practice. Buddhist is mainly preoccupied with traditional practices and as such, the average Buddhist is not always consistent in his or her beliefs.

Interestingly enough, he suggests that one reason Buddhist do not agree on theology and practice is that they do not have one agreed text and the existing texts are voluminous. All of this diversity makes it very difficult to pin-point exactly what Buddhism is, or to make universal statements about what every single Buddhist believes. There are so many different ways people practice it.

Commenting on Buddha's teachings, he suggests that Buddha was not against the pursuit of truth, even if it meant changing one's religion. Buddha never said you cannot change your religion. Buddha was simply searching for a way out of the cycle of life.

A main strength of the book is his explanation about reincarnation. According to him what reincarnation teaches is that because our sin is so bad, we will have to pay for it all throughout this life. Even after the death of a person, it is not over. It is not enough. People will come back and pay for it again. That is how sinful sin is. In other words, the persons are in an absolutely hopeless and vicious cycle, according to Buddha.

Cioccolanti has made a very important contribution for establishing bridges of understanding between Buddhism and Christianity. Although his thinking has certain philosophical presuppositions regarding Hell, his approach to other biblical teachings is closer to an Asian hermeneutic perspective. I recommend this book as part of inter faith dialogue among religions as well as an important introduction for understanding Buddhist context before sharing the gospel with Buddhist seekers. I recommend this book to anyone who is interested in eastern Asia religions.

### About the Reviewer

Miguel Luna, PhD, is Dean of the Faculty of Religious Studies at Asia-Pacific International University, Thailand