

More Than 500 Witnesses – All False
Buddhist sources of 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Christian Lindtner, “News Bulletin”: December 29, 2009

Absolutely fundamental to any sort of Christianity is the belief in the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead. If the dead are not raised and if Christ has not been raised, then the Christian faith is a delusion and Christians are lost in their sins.

Such is the view of Paul. Such is the faith of Christians. But as historians we must ask: What is the evidence or proof of the resurrection of Christ and of the dead?

The common opinion of Christian theologians and believers is that “the oldest and most reliable” evidence or proof of the resurrection of Christ is provided by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. There may be a few other witnesses, mainly women, but they cannot be considered very reliable. But how can we be sure that Paul is reliable, and that 1 Cor. 15:1-11 provides the oldest and best evidence?

The mere fact that a given witness makes a claim does not make him reliable. One must ask for his sources. He may be wrong, he may be a liar. Now Paul does in fact refer to certain sources, for he says that he has his information from certain scriptures. Unfortunately, these scriptures cannot be identified. All theologians agree that there are no scriptures in Greek or Hebrew that can be identified as the sources of Paul’s claims concerning resurrection. At this point, therefore, we cannot decide the value or validity of the testimony provided by Paul. Is he, as a witness, reliable or is he not reliable? If we want to be honest, we cannot decide. The case must be left *sub judice*.

Now, fortunately, help is on its way – not to Paul, but to historians. In this case, as in so many other cases, the source of Paul can be traced back to the **Mahā-Parinirvāṇa-Sūtra (MPS)**, which is available in Sanskrit and in Pāli. Anyone familiar with the MPS can easily see that Paul has combined two chapters from that text, namely chapters 9 and 48 (in the edition of Waldschmidt, Berlin 1951, pp. 162-171 & 420-425).

Here are the main points:

MPS 9: In the village of Nādikā a large number of brothers and sisters have passed away. What will become of them? It is explicitly said that “more than 500 brothers have passed away”. This sentence is available in the Sanskrit (9:15) and in the Pāli (Waldschmidt, p. 166). The Pāli has been translated into English, e.g. by Trevor Ling: “More than five hundred devout men of Nādikā who have died” (*The Buddha’s Philosophy of Man*, London 1981, p. 159). This accounts for the “more than five hundred brothers . . . of whom some have died”, in 1 Cor. 15:6, a statement that has always caused the greatest embarrassment to theologians. The more than 500 brothers are never mentioned in any other ancient Christian sources – with one exception, a Coptic source that says that the more than 500 were Indian priests (see R. Garbe, *Indien und das Christentum*, Süderbrarup 2004, p. 292). There is, as we have just seen, some truth in this. There was an Indian source for the 500.

The Buddhist text then explains that some of those who have passed away will never return again, whereas others will return “once”, Sanskrit *sakṛd*. This accounts for the Greek *ephapax*, “at once” in 1 Cor 15:6. Greek *ephapax* simply translates the Sanskrit synonym *sakṛd* – once, at once. Immediately before he mentions the “more than five hundred brothers, Paul mentions *Kēphas* and “all twelve” (some translators add “apostles”, but the Greek does not mention apostles at all). The twelve were not “apostles” at all – they were Buddhists: Again, Paul follows the MPS, which, as said, has been transmitted to us in several versions. One of these, now only in Chinese, explicitly speaks of exactly 12 brothers who have been reborn among the gods (this is the *Dīrghāgama*, translated by Waldschmidt, *Überlieferung* . . ., Göttingen 1944, p. 71).

Other versions give different numbers here (one Chinese version gives the number 10), and it is quite remarkable that the Latin *Vulgata* speaks of eleven, not twelve, 1 Cor. 15:6.

Paul also mentions *Kēphas* and *Iakōbos*, and here one must pay attention to the spelling: There are three consonants in both cases: *k-b(ph)-s*. Both names translate the Sanskrit name of *Kāśyapa(s) – k-p-ś*. Chapter 48 of the same MPS provides us with the second source of Paul. Here we meet *Kāśyapas* who, along with five hundred monks, finally arrive and become witnesses to the cremation of the physical body of the Lord. His “jewel body” goes up to the world of Brahmā, i.e. in flames. The Sanskrit verb for “went up”, *agaman*, MPS 49:23, corresponds to the Greek for “raised”.

To summarize: Paul refers to scriptures that are not available in Greek or Hebrew. But they are available in Sanskrit and Pāli. These scriptures are, therefore, Buddhist scriptures.

It is quite true, as Paul says, that more than five hundred brothers, along with *Kāśyapas*, were witnesses to the “resurrection”, i.e. cremation of the Lord. The Lord was a *kṣatriyas*, a nobleman, and Sanskrit *kṣatriyas* becomes Greek *ho Khristos*, in the usual way. Hence, Paul is careful not to speak of Jesus, but of *Khristos*. When Paul combines two different chapters, and two different episodes from the Buddhist original, he does so not entirely at random but according to certain rules. According to rabbinical hermeneutics, it is allowed to combine two otherwise different scriptural passages provided they have a significant number in common. This rule, in Hebrew, is called *Neged*, “corresponding significant number”. An example is provided by the Old Testament, when Numbers 13:25 mentions 40 days, and Numbers 14:34 mentions 40 years. The two otherwise unrelated passages have a corresponding significant number, viz. 40. In exactly the same way, Paul combines two passages in the same Buddhist text, the MPS, where one chapter mentions more than 500 brothers, and another mentions 500 monks.

All this means, of course, that the “proof” or “evidence” provided in support of the faith in the historical resurrection of Christ, and the dead in general, is purely fictitious. Paul refers to scriptures, i.e. Buddhist scriptures, that describe some events that took place – or did not take place – far away in Magadha [in India] a long time ago. (Magadha, it will be recalled, was mentioned only by Matthew 15:39 [Greek spelling: ‘*Magadan*’ – Aśoka was king of Magadha, the Indian state in which his capital city, Pāṭaliputra, the modern city of Patna, was located! – ML].) He, Paul, then combined events from that Buddhist text into a new unit. He then transferred this piece of literary fiction to another place, to another time, to another person. How can, for example, events said to have taken place in India centuries ago, prove the historicity of events said to have taken place in, say, New York quite recently! Paul cannot have been unaware of what he was doing. Paul cannot have been unaware that he was a falsifier of history [a meta-fier of history? – ML]. Paul cannot have been unaware that he was himself a false witness [a meta-witness? – ML]. Once we recognize this to be so, we also understand why Paul compares [his meta-experience] to a “miscarriage” [a birth out of time: 1st century CE vs. 5th century BCE – ML], an *ektrōma*, as it were, in 1 Cor. 15:8. Paul justifies himself by stating that he is what he is – that is: a false witness [a meta-witness – ML] – thanks to the grace of God.

What is that supposed to mean? What does “grace of God” mean in this context? It can only mean that deliberate deceit is a good thing provided it can bring about some desirable result. There is no evidence at all to suggest that Jesus existed or had been raised from the dead, but if people could feel happy when fooled into believing so – fine and good. The same fundamental attitude is reflected well in Romans 3:7, which in plain words simply says that untruth is fully acceptable provided it serves the greater glory of God. Such a Jesuitic attitude is also typically Buddhist. In the Lotus Sūtra, Buddhist missionaries are advised to employ tricks, white lies etc. for the greater glory of the Buddhas.^[1]

If people like to be deceived – let them be deceived! And in our modern world we speak of propaganda, or, to use a euphemism, mass communication. Thus, Paul, when it comes to the evidence for resurrection of Christ and of the dead, proves to be a prominent false witness. That he himself, however, may have believed in the resurrection of the dead, need not be doubted.

This belief is typically Buddhist. Due to their bad karma, people may go down with the dead in hell. After some time, they may come back to this world. The “dead” in hell are not really dead. They can come back to normal life and suffering. They have thus been raised from the world of the dead.

The Buddhist background of Paul is thus clear. When he presents himself as a Christian, however, and fails to acknowledge his Buddhist sources explicitly, he then can be described as, well, an *ektrōma* (to use his own term).

^[1]Lindtner is, I think, being unnecessarily confrontational here: the early “doctors” of the Church were all allegorists – warning enough that they would interpret the scriptures as being only meta-historical, and that they would understand the evangelists and “Paul” as being allegorists, too! What the ancient clergy (and modern scholars) have done with the scriptures, is another matter.