

Francis Gibbons
RELG 181
Extra Credit Site Visit

For my extra credit site visit I attended the Faith Meets Faith, Buddhist-Christian dialogue on the meaning of compassion, one of the comparative religion seminar series'. This event was hosted by the Lorain County Sacred Landmarks Initiative and the Lorain County Community College Honors Institute, Division of Arts and Humanities. This dialogue was held in the Stocker Center Cinema Hall of Lorain County Community College, 1005 N. Abbe Rd. Elyria, Ohio, on April 30th 2014 at 7 P.M. The venue consisted of a 230 seat amphitheater with tiered comfortable seating, sound amplifying equipment and climate control. In attendance were approximately 200 attendees varying in age from late teens to elderly adults, with the dress code swinging from business casual to gym attire.

The dialogue participants include; Venerable Shih Ying Fa, Abbot of CloudWater Zendo, dressed in a black undergarment and a bright red robe over his left shoulder fastened with an ornate gold clasp, sandals and a shaved head. From the Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church was Pastor Nicholas Rachford, wearing an all-black cassock with a silver crucifix and chain around his neck. The event moderator was Professor Young Ko, Director of the Sacred Landmarks Initiative, wearing a two piece tan suit and tie.

The dialogue opened with a comprehensive introduction of the participants by Professor Ko, highlights include an in-depth look at both speaker's educational backgrounds as well as their religious achievements and other community service positions. Following the introductions the Venerable Ying Fa was the first to speak, opening with a gong (bell) and delivering a Buddhist chant. His discourse included the statement that "compassion is always in high demand and low supply", and that it was compassion for all phenomena that compelled Siddhartha Buddha to rise after his enlightenment. With a

belief that all phenomena are interrelated and there is no such thing as a discreet self or existence, the Venerable Ying Fa tied compassion to the Four Noble Truths through the belief that suffering is woven into life and it is through a state of detachment that one is able to see and comprehend this suffering. It is the practice of the Noble Eight Fold Path that turns the Buddhists three poisons of ill will, delusion and craving into compassion, knowledge and goodwill in ones journey toward enlightenment.

The second speaker was Pastor Rachford who opened with the statement “I am struck by the similarities” after listening to the Venerable Ying Fa speak on Buddhist compassion. Pastor Rachford identified compassion found in the bible by Isiah 10:21, Ezekiel 37:1-14, Luke 19:14 and Matthew 11:5. Pastor Rachford went on to identify that Jesus was continuing the Old Testament Prophets mission of compassion. From a historical perspective Pastor Rachford spoke of the compassionate works of the Catholic Church in the form of the first hospitals in Constantinople to Christmas mercy and Byzantine Benevolent Organizations of the middle ages to current day orphanages and monasteries. Pastor Rachford concluded with compassion expressed as a right, this right is in the form of the individual’s right to work, sexuality choices, education and religion, and that God gave the goods of the earth to all in compassion and that private property is not an absolute but that these goods of the earth are meant for all. In closing Pastor Rachford stated “unbridled capitalism is not the practice of compassion”.

The dialogue concluded with Professor Ko providing closing points of both presenters, this was not a comparison of the dissimulate but highlights of the individuals presentation.

My take away from this seminar was in the closing when the Venerable Ying Fa stated that the end of suffering by way of compassion is the goal of all Buddhists, where as Pastor Rachford stated that to end all human suffering would be impossible.