

**Thesis Title:**

**Towards a Christian Pastoral Approach  
to Cambodian Culture**

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# **Towards a Christian Pastoral Approach to Cambodian Culture**

## **Chapter 1**

### **1.0 Introduction**

#### **1.1 The world we live in**

We live in a time of Globalization, where we find ourselves rubbing shoulders, working together and living with all kinds of people belonging to different races and different creeds. This could have been a fulfillment of that Biblical passage: “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!” (Ps 133)

Unfortunately we see a stark contrast to this passage happening before our very eyes. Our world is enveloped in deep global conflicts including those which many attribute to religious fanaticism. Misunderstanding of another’s culture or creed often leads to conflict. If we wish a peaceful co-existence to triumph in our world, our greatest challenge today would be to maintain that respect for each other’s beliefs without necessarily giving up ours.

#### **1.2 The particular world we live in**

For those of us who live far from our own native land and live with people of another culture, understanding their cultural context and milieu will certainly help us understand the people of that place.

Jesus Christ was born in a particular time and place. He spoke a particular language and mingled in a particular culture. The Bible speaks about him using a language which communicates that particular time’s way of living. We know that we can understand more the message of the Bible when we can understand better the

world of Jesus. We can better understand Him when we understand the very milieu He lived in.

### **1.3 Our target location: Cambodia**

This brings us to our target location – Cambodia. Cambodia is a country in Southeast Asia and is also known as “*Kampuchea*.”<sup>1</sup> This country lies at the heart of Indochina, bordered by Thailand to the west, Laos and Thailand to the north and Vietnam to the east. It is a fascinating place that, despite its tiny size and its large, powerful neighbors, it has managed to remain uniquely Khmer.<sup>2</sup> Its cultural traditions predate those of Thailand, and unlike Vietnam, which was always influenced by China, its dominant influences stem from the Indian subcontinent.

At least 85 percent of Cambodia’s inhabitants adhere to Theravada Buddhism, which is the dominant religion in most Southeast Asian nations. Buddhism arrived in Cambodia during the first centuries AD. At first Mahayana Buddhism predominated, but after the 14th century Theravada gradually replaced the older school as the primary religion. Christianity and Islam are also practiced by a minority.<sup>3</sup>

In a country where a Buddhist philosophy is dominant, how does one go about introducing his own culture and creed? In the words of Pope John Paul II to the Pontifical Council for Culture: “You must help the Church to respond to these fundamental questions for the cultures of today: how is the message of the Church accessible to the old and new cultures, to contemporary forms of understanding and of sensitivity?”<sup>4</sup>

### **1.4 Our Particular Challenge: Cambodian Culture**

Our challenge then is the process known as inculturation. Umoren offers the following definition: “Inculturation refers to the missiological process in which the Gospel is rooted in a particular culture and the latter is transformed by its introduction to Christianity.”<sup>5</sup>

People of different places and cultures think differently. Jesus Christ lived as a Jew – his language, way of thinking and doing is definitely different from the Cambodian people. If we want the Cambodians to know Jesus, we have to present

him in a language they can understand and in a manner attuned to their thinking. The Pontifical Council for Culture asserts:

For all culture is an effort to ponder the mystery of the world and in particular of the human person: it is a way of giving expression to the transcendent dimension of human life. The heart of every culture is its approach to the greatest mystery: the mystery of God. The decisive challenge of a pastoral approach to culture, for a faith that does not become culture is a faith not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived.<sup>6</sup>

### **1.5 An Invitation to Inculturation**

Pope John Paul II in a special Synod which he had with the Asian Bishops and produced the document *Ecclesia in Asia* tells us why knowing the culture of the people we live with (in our case, Cambodia) is of paramount importance for us:

Culture is the vital space within which the human person comes face to face with the Gospel. Just as a culture is the result of the life and activity of a human group, so the persons belonging to that group are shaped to a large extent by the culture in which they live. As persons and societies change, so too does the culture change with them. As a culture is transformed, so too are persons and societies transformed by it. From this perspective, it becomes clearer why evangelization and inculturation are naturally and intimately related to each other. The Gospel and evangelization are certainly not identical with culture; they are independent of it. Yet the Kingdom of God comes to people who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building of the Kingdom cannot avoid borrowing elements from human culture.<sup>7</sup>

Christians in Cambodia should therefore take upon themselves this challenge of striving to understand their culture, to know the minds and hearts of those they live with, their values and customs, their problems and difficulties, their hopes and their dreams. It is only when we immerse ourselves in this task of inculturation that the Khmers will see that the message we bring is one of universal value that does not take them away from their cultural upbringing but rather enriches it via a process of transformation. John Paul II further adds:

In the process of encountering the world's different cultures, the Church not only transmits her truths and values and renews cultures from within, but she also takes from the various cultures the positive elements already found in them. This is the obligatory path for evangelizers in presenting the Christian faith and making it part of a people's cultural heritage.<sup>8</sup>

Although this task of inculturation has been part of a Christian's pilgrimage throughout history, this challenge becomes all the more pressing for us here in Asia (and more specifically here in Cambodia) because of its multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural situation and where Christianity is still too often seen as foreign. In fact many Khmers, especially in the past, called Christianity the "religion of the enemy," since many of the Christians here are of Vietnamese origin; Cambodia was under the Vietnamese regime for many years after the Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge was defeated by them.

The task of inculturation is indeed great. But as a Chinese proverb says: "The journey of a hundred miles begins with the first step." Our paper then will try to make these first small steps which could lead us on to that long journey of sharing our faith with the Cambodian people.

## **1.6 My Personal Context**

I have been walking the roads of Cambodia these past four years. I am a Catholic priest belonging to the Salesians of Don Bosco. In our technical school here in Phnom Penh we help orphaned and poor out-of-school youth learn a trade they could use in order to find a place in the workforce. The students are mainly Buddhist. It is in my journeying with them that I encounter the difficulties of sharing what I hold dear, what I value and what I believe. This is not just because of the difficulty in expressing sophisticated ideas in a foreign tongue but also because of our differences in culture as well as in faith. It is in this context that I want to journey with you in this research.

### **1.6.1 My Objectives**

I would like to take you on a journey towards inculturation by working towards a Christian pastoral approach to Cambodian culture. This can be done if we can trace out the various religious influences the Cambodian culture has gone through and their extent. And from the understanding of these influences to the culture, we could create a practical roadmap towards a true dialogue with the Cambodian people.



### **1.6.2 My Limitations**

The many wars that have come and gone in this country have made theological and religious sources in the English language hard to come by. This is not only because few have been written, but also because Cambodia is still struggling past the mortal wounds dealt by a regime that wiped out its literature and systematically exterminated all its intellectuals just some twenty-five years ago. This explains the dearth of literary materials, which along with my location outside of the reach of academic libraries, limits my research.

### **1.6.3 My Methodology**

Thus in this short paper we shall try to attain my objectives through these steps:

- First I shall present a historical overview of Cambodia pinpointing out the origins and duration of her religious influences.
- Then I shall describe in detail each of the three pre-Christian religions having a great influence on Cambodian culture.
- After that I shall point out the particular influences of each of these religions to the Cambodian way of living.
- Finally I shall infer some insights on the observations made focusing on how to present the Christian perspective in a manner attuned to Cambodian thinking.

## Chapter 2

### 2.0 Religious Influences in Early Cambodian History

In this chapter, we shall go through Cambodia's early history and see how different religions came and influenced its culture. For the purpose of our study, the historical survey we shall undertake will focus on the formative period prior to the 16<sup>th</sup> century AD. From this period on, other religions will arrive including Christianity, but with a reduced impact on Cambodian present life styles, and a simple historical overview will suffice. But from this century however, we shall also include a short overview of the history of Christianity to see some trends of how it developed until the present.

### 2.1 The Beginnings of a People

Around 4200 BC, men were already living in the south of the Indochinese peninsula. They were a people of brown skin, of Melanesian type, close relatives of the aborigines living in the islands of the warm waters of Indonesia and Malaysia. Some of their tools dating from the neolithic period have been found around these areas.

Living in the forest, these men built cabins in the trees, a habit that their descendants transformed into building their houses on piles. Their principal food was fish but they already cultivated rice, and for this work had domesticated oxen and buffalo. They were relatively well adapted to this malaria-infested forest, thanks to the presence in their blood of hemoglobin "E" which partially immunized them against this fever.

Ponchaud best describes their belief:

These remote ancestors of Khmer people seemed to have already honored the dead souls. They worshiped the spirits of earth and water, the "*Neak Ta*", "the Ancient People", according to popular etymology. These spirits of the dead,

or mythic founders of their villages were the true masters of the soil. They assured protection of the villages, the health of the people, regular rains, therefore, it was proper to offer them fruit, food and alcohol. To forget them or to offend them made one sick or exposed one to accidents. The cobra was represented with three or seven heads; this “*Naga*” symbolized all divine forces, both beneficial and deadly, and it was essential to agree with it.<sup>1</sup>

## 2.2 Early Cambodian Kingdoms

By AD 400, the first Southeast Asian kingdoms appeared. Increased rice production freed some people to engage in other work, such as elaborate boat building, house decoration, bronze manufacture and making arrangements for feasting. Others were freed to be soldiers, and a few became priests and rulers. These men soon became the most honored people in society. Often they demonstrated their power by the size of their followings and the amount of their wealth.

In Cambodia, the present Khmers claimed that they were descended from the *Neak Ta* (ancestral spirits) who had been the first settlers in a given region. The ancestors, in turn, were seen as responsible for a community’s well-being, expressed in terms of agricultural production, peace, and good health. In short they were animists.

Seanglim Bit comments on this:

Folk religious beliefs in spirit worship and the supernatural existed in Cambodia long before the Hindu influences. An array of guardian spirits (both benign and malevolent) called “*Neak Ta*” inhabited the mountains, rice paddies, trees, etc. of the physical environment. Others were ancestral spirits, and still others are composites of mythological heroes from legends... The cults combined astrology, magic, animism, sorcery, talismanism, etc. in attempts to tap the spirit world for its magical powers to provide the protection urgently sought by believers to ward off evil. Spirit worship has centuries-old roots in Cambodia....<sup>2</sup>

Those Khmers who claimed high status demonstrated it by sponsoring feasts and by displaying their accumulated wealth which in the case of chieftains often included several wives, married to form alliances between families from different villages. There is no evidence, however, that these societies were literate or that they drew their inspiration from abroad.

It was at this stage ( around 1<sup>st</sup> -6<sup>th</sup> century AD) that Indian traders and missionaries little by little began to appear on the Southeast Asian mainland in search of spices, tropical birds, ivory, and other forest products. Another important export from Southeast Asia at this time was gold and precious stones. From the earliest times, this Mekong region was known in India as *Suvarnabhumi* (The Golden Land). Unfortunately, written records of these early visits have not survived.<sup>3</sup>

### **2.3 Funan**

The coastline of what is now southern Vietnam, then inhabited by Khmer, made an ideal stopping place, where traders turned the corner of Southeast Asia as they plied between the Roman Empire, India, and China, hugging the coasts where possible. Because of the monsoons, the Indian ships that reached Southeast Asia often had to stay for several months, waiting for the prevailing winds to change. It is likely that during these layovers, local chieftains became interested in certain Indian practices, such as those that measured the solar year and others that set priests and chieftains above and apart from the rest of society by means of a system of ranks, or castes. Chiefs were also interested in technology useful for the royal displays of grandeur that was made possible by gold working and silk weaving. From hence started India's influence over the Khmer kingdoms, especially through the Brahman traditions.

In fact the very legend of Cambodia's origin as told by Chandler proves this early influence:

... an Indian priest named Kaundinya, armed with a magical bow, appeared one day off the shore of Cambodia. The dragon princess in a dugout, paddled to meet him. The priest shot an arrow in her boat and frightened her into marrying him. Her father, the dragon king, enlarged the possessions of his son-in-law by drinking up the water that covered the country. He later built them a capital, and changed the name of the country to Cambodia.<sup>4</sup>

The dragon's action may be a reference to the drainage canals that were built in the Mekong Delta of southern Vietnam perhaps in the second century AD and are still visible from the air.

Chinese visitors in the third century AD first reported this legend but called the coastal kingdom “Funan.” Funan sent tributary gifts to China between AD 250 and 519, but there is no archaeological evidence of such a powerful, centralized kingdom anywhere in the region at this time. Probably Funan was a loose federation of coastal settlements, with several local chieftains, allied with inland groups of villages, who may have called themselves “kings” when writing to the Chinese court. Chandler documents a Chinese visitor in the fourth century AD who reported that:

The king’s dwelling has a double terrace on it. Palisades take the place of walls in fortified places. The houses are covered with leaves of a plant which grows on the edge of the sea. These leaves are six to seven feet long, and take the form of a fish. The king rides mounted on an elephant. His subjects are ugly and black; their hair is frizzy; they wear neither clothing nor shoes. For living, they cultivate the soil; they sow one year, and reap for three... These barbarians are not without their own history books; they even have archives for their texts.<sup>5</sup>

We have seen in the Kaundinya myth that drainage was attributed to the good offices of a dragon king; one of the few inscriptions from Funan mentions a king “rescuing” his territory from the mud. But the most important passage related to this innovation and to Indianization, is a Chinese one, which appears at first to be a garbled version of the original myth as documented by Briggs:

Then the kingdom was ruled by a Brahman named Kaundinya. A spirit announced to him that he would be called upon to govern Funan, so he traveled there... and the people of Funan came out to meet him, and proclaimed him king. He changed the institutions to follow Indian models. He wanted his subjects to stop digging wells, and to dig reservoirs in the future; several dozen families could then unite and use one of these in common.<sup>6</sup>

The process of Indianization continued for several centuries in Cambodia. Those most affected by it were members of the elite, who gave themselves Indian names, composed poetry in Indian languages, and followed the spiritual guidance of Indian Brahmins (priests). Indian religion, stressing the worship of such gods as Shiva and Vishnu, blended with local beliefs, particularly in ancestors and in spirits of the soil, believed to be responsible for the kingdom’s welfare and prosperity. Chandler aptly puts it:

The process of blending different religions meant that here and there local spirits received the names of Indian gods, just as localized Greek and Roman deities were renamed in the early years of Christianity. Hindu temples also were often built near sites favored by pre-Indian celebrations; there are Neolithic remains underneath the palace of the Angkor. What was stressed at times like this was the continuity of habitation and a continuity of sacredness – ideas in themselves with deeper roots in Cambodia than in most of India. If ancestors became Indian gods in times of centralization and prosperity, the gods became ancestors again when the rationale for Hinduism and its priestly supporters disappeared. Thus at Angkor, Indian images and temples were worshiped in quite recent times merely as mysterious products of the “*Neak Ta*.” This is partly because the literature of the Cham and Cambodian elites, which was used to explain and justify the images and temples, had disappeared or could no longer be deciphered, while the language which village people used in their religious lives remained to a large extent unchanged from the pre-Indian era to colonial times.<sup>7</sup>

Before long, local rulers were identifying themselves with Indian gods, and the gods themselves were seen as in some way linked with local ancestor spirits. Indian texts dealing with government organizations and kingship were understandably popular with these petty rulers.

It must be noted that Buddhist monks also passed through Southeast Asia at this time, en route from the centers of Buddhist learning in India to China, and local rulers often were impressed by Buddhist teachings.

## **2.4 Zhen-la**

It is difficult to trace the transition from what the Chinese called “Funan” to a second kingdom farther inland, to which they referred, beginning in the seventh century AD as “Zhen-la.” Archaeological evidence points to the existence of several small city-states in the Mekong River basin between the fifth and eighth centuries AD. These were located for the most part alongside navigable streams. In this period other Indianized kingdoms appeared along the coasts of Southeast Asia and on the island of Java in Indonesia. Indian priests, scholars, and merchants, and Southeast Asians, traveled between these kingdoms and pooled their knowledge.

The earliest Khmer-language inscriptions date from the 7th century AD. While those in Sanskrit, almost always in verse, praise the activities of priests and rulers, the Khmer-language inscriptions, written in prose, commemorate transactions

involving land, slaves, temples, and reservoirs. In the early seventh century, these reservoirs, or ponds, were controlled by people with the title “*pon*. ” But by the Eight century, these men had been replaced by the ruling elite of that time who used Sanskrit names, and sometimes used royal titles.

These men had control over specific regions, or more precisely over the people in those regions, because controlling labor to grow rice, rather than land by itself, was the key to a ruler’s power. The leaders frequently fought each other, hoping to take prisoners and loot, thereby proving to their own subjects that they were rulers worthy of their ancestors and capable of providing protection. Unfortunately, all wars had losers, and many of the small kingdoms known collectively as Zhen-la disappeared when their people were deported to serve the kings who had won.

The process of centralization meant more extensive public works, larger stone buildings, and more elaborate inscriptions especially for religious purposes. Of this Chandler gives us a hint:

The temples were usually dedicated to the Hindu deity Shiva and, more rarely, to Vishnu. They were relatively small, housing statues of the gods, embodying the potency of male ancestors on the one hand and insuring the fertility of the soil, perceived as female, on the other. Local kings also identified themselves with Shiva. Unlike Buddhist temples later on, these Hindu temples were accessible only to priests. On the surrounding land, subsistence farmers were required to work several days a month to serve the temples- growing food, making repairs, or preparing for the elaborate festivals conducted at various points in the agricultural year.<sup>8</sup>

Most inscriptions from the archaeological work on sites associated with Zhen-la commemorate the actions of the elite; those in Sanskrit, praising kings, portray them as supernatural figures. This yields a top-heavy view of early Cambodian society, which fails to note the contributions of low-born men and women. Their main obvious contribution was that they were the ancestors of today’s Khmer, and helped to transmit Cambodian culture, the Khmer language, and Cambodian responses to the landscape from one generation to the next.

Bit further makes us understand this transition of the Indian influence in this period of Cambodian history:

When Indian Brahmans traveled to the region from the second century A.D. till later, they came upon indigenous villages ruled by powerful tribal chiefs or war lords. The encounter proved to be advantageous to both cultures. The Hindu cosmology was similar to the indigenous belief systems already in place in Cambodia. The cultural contacts proceeded peacefully without the threat of military conquest or subjugation. In time the blending of the two cultural traditions will create the most Indianized and most powerful state in Southeast Asia.<sup>9</sup>

Bit here refers to the next and the greatest period of Khmer history - the Angkorean times.

## **2.5 The Founding of Angkor**

The Cambodian word “Angkor” derives from the Sanskrit word “*nagara*” meaning “holy city.” This is the name used for the Khmer civilization that flourished in Northwestern Cambodia and Northeastern Thailand between the beginning of the ninth century and the middle of the fifteenth century AD.

The founder of Angkor was a king named Jayavarman II (reigned 802-834). From the inscriptions carved, he seems to have been a regional chief, with claims, disputed by some, of royal ancestry. He seemed to have spent much of his early days somewhere in present day Indonesia. In 770 when he returned to Cambodia, he fought a series of campaigns to consolidate his control over different parts of the country.

In 802, on Kulen mountain to the north of the present-day Angkor, he participated in a ceremony that identified him with the Hindu god Shiva and entitled him to the name of *chakravartin* (universal monarch). The ceremony, which opened the “Angkorean” era was re-enacted by Cambodian kings for at least 250 years.

The rest of Jayavarman II’s career involved a series of military campaigns and the formation of alliances, through marriages and grants of land, with locally powerful people willing to transfer some of their allegiance to a newcomer claiming to be a universal monarch.

Chandler makes a fine evaluation of this political situation:



The assimilation of the Angkorean region into “Kambuja-desa” occupied more than twenty years. No inscriptions have survived from this period, and temples appear to have been small or made of perishable materials. These undocumented years are crucial all the same, for at this time the related notions of nationhood and kingship, remolded to fit the Cambodian scene, appear to have been gathering force. Both terms should be used with caution. “Nationhood” may have meant little more than having a name (Kambuja-desa) with which to contrast one’s fellows with outsiders. Cambodians were insiders, owing their allegiance to a particular “universal” king, whose relation to them resembled Shiva’s relationship with the other gods. Perhaps both these ideas came in from Java, but they were probably already known from the Indian literature of statecraft, familiar to Brahmans known to have been in Cambodia at this time.<sup>10</sup>

Whether or not Jayavarman II succeeded in the task he had in mind is open to question because of the obscurity that surrounds his reign. However it is clear that all the kings who came after him honored him as the founder of a kingdom and as the instigator of a particular way of looking at Cambodia that was different from what their own, more provincial ancestors had been able to achieve. Chandler evaluates:

Cambodian folk thinking has always placed great emphasis on the veneration of ancestors, or “*neak ta*”, associated with particular places. Once the royal capital of Cambodia came to be at Hariharalaya (present-day Roluos), where Jayavarman II finally settled, subsequent kings came to honor him as a kind of ancestral “founder-spirit” of the sort that every Cambodian village possessed until recently. Although it is no longer tenable to say that the cult of the *devarja* was in some way a ritual process by which a king became a god, or a “god-king”, the evidence of ritual and ideological connections between Cambodian kings and the god Shiva is extensive, even if the *devaraja* cult as such may not have played as large a part in the sacralization of Cambodian kingship.<sup>11</sup>

The next two kings Jayavarman III (834-877) and Indravarman (877-889) consolidated the process of centralization, and kept their capital at Roluos, where several brick temples, a large reservoir, and a “temple mountain” have survived. In 889, King Yasovarman I (889-910) transferred the capital to the site of present-day Angkor (he called his city Yasodharapura), centering his city around another temple-mountain, built on top of a hill, and known today as Phnom Bakheng (Mount Mighty Ancestor). This temple was much larger and more complicated than its predecessor at Roluos. To the east of the mountain, Yasovarman built a reservoir roughly four miles long and two miles wide (app. 6 sq. kms.). Alongside its southern shore he had monasteries built for sects that honored Shiva, Vishnu, and the Buddha. Elsewhere throughout his kingdom, he ordered temples built on natural hills, the most notable

being “*Preah Vihear*”, on the edge of the precipice that nowadays forms part of the frontier between Cambodia and Thailand. In one of his inscriptions, in fact, he claimed that his kingdom was bordered by the Chinese frontier and the sea. Yasovarman’s inscriptions reveal his courtiers’ talent for flattery, as well as the grand ideas that Cambodian kings had about themselves. Two stanzas from the long inscription at Lolei, at the temple dedicated to his parents, boast that: “He spread his favors on the world, without asking anything in exchange; has anyone seen the sun asking the lotus to open its flowers? In all the sciences and martial arts, in art, languages, and writing, in dancing, singing, and everything else, [Yasovarman] was as skilled as if he had created them.”<sup>12</sup>

One notable king after Yasovarman was Rajendravarman II (944-968) since the kings that preceded him moved their capital far from the Yasodharapura (Angkor area). Rajendravarman, in the words of a later inscription, “restored the holy city of Yasodharapura, long deserted and rendered it superb and charming by erecting houses there that were ornamented with shining gold, palaces glittering with precious stones, like the palace of Indra on earth.”<sup>13</sup>

His son, Jayavarman V (968-1001), who succeeded him upon his death, although a Shaivite like him, was tolerant of Buddhism, and Buddhist scholarship flourished during his reign. He instructed one of his ministers who was an ardent Buddhist to put back the old statues of Buddha which had fallen down and to erect new ones. He had numerous treatises and commentaries concerning Buddhism of the Great Vehicle (Mahayana) brought from other countries. In the 11th century, statues of Buddha protected by the Naga with seven heads appeared for the first time. Nevertheless the Brahmanist religion was not abolished.

Suryavarman I (1002-1050), whose name means “protected by the sun”, was an outsider who reached the throne following a series of military campaigns and alliances with powerful local leaders. It was nine years before he took possession of Angkor itself. He claimed descent from a ninth-century Cambodian king, suggesting that his connections with the preceding monarch were remote. He differed from many Cambodian kings by being himself a patron of Buddhism rather than Hinduism.

One of the first actions he did upon reaching Yasodharapura was to arrange that an oath of loyalty be sworn to him publicly, by as many as four thousand officials at the newly constructed royal palace. The oath marks an intensification of royal power and also an imposition of a newly constituted elite connected to the control of the land.

Suryavarman I expanded the Angkorean empire. He was responsible for building temples in southwestern Cambodia and in what is now northeastern Thailand and southern Laos. He even annexed the Theravada Buddhist kingdom of Louvo, centered on present-day Lopburi in central Thailand.

He expanded the irrigation works at Angkor, in a move that suggests that his policies had increased the population of the city. One reservoir, the largest that has survived, covered approximately 10 square miles (26 sq. kms.) and held over 150 million gallons (570 million liters) of water. Suryavarman is noted for having centralized political and religious power at Angkor.

Suryavarman's successor, Utyadityavarman II (1050-1068) was a devotee of Shiva. Guided by a powerful guru, he revived interest in the devaraja cult and also revived the custom of building a massive temple-mountain (*Baphuon*) to house the lingam associated with his reign. As an inscription carved under his successor tells us: "Seeing that in the middle of Jambudvipa, the home of the gods, there rose up a golden mountain, he made a golden mountain in the center of his city, out of emulation. On the summit of this mountain, in a golden temple, shining with celestial brilliance, he set up a Sivalinga made of gold." <sup>14</sup>

## **2.6 Angkorean Kingship**

The last years of the eleventh century were ones of turmoil and fragmentation. At different times, two or even three monarchs contended for the title of absolute ruler.

Suryavarman II (1113- 1150) was the first king to rule over a unified Cambodian kingdom since Utyadityavarman II's death in 1068. Suryavarman II campaigned in the east, against Vietnam and Champa, using mercenaries drawn

primarily from tributary areas to the west. He established diplomatic relations with China – the first Angkorean king to do so. Suryavarman II chose to exhibit a devotion unusual for a Cambodian king, this time to Vishnu. Suryavarman II's devotion to Vishnu led him to commission the largest, perhaps the most beautiful, and one of the most mysterious of all the monuments of Angkor – the temple, the tomb, and the observatory now known as Angkor Wat.

What is so mysterious about the temple? First, it opens to the west, the only major building at Yasodharapura to do so. Then, its bas-reliefs, more than a mile of them around the outer galleries of the temple, are to be followed by moving in a counterclockwise direction, starting from the northwest quarter. Normally, the customary way of reading a bas-relief or of walking around a temple was to keep it all on one's right by moving in a clockwise direction, known by the Sanskrit term *pradaksina*. The reverse direction was usually associated with the dead; so was the west. That is why many argue that the Angkor Wat, unlike the other temples at Angkor, was primarily a tomb.

Chandler makes the following analysis based on Coedes' 1940 journals about Angkor Wat's unusual orientation:

... this must have been in honor of Vishnu, Suryavarman's patron-deity, often associated with the west; Angkor Wat is the only temple at Angkor that we know to have been dedicated to him. The twelfth century, in fact, saw a vigorous revival of Vaisnavism, associated with popular religion, on the Indian subcontinent; this revival, it seems, like earlier ones in Indian religion, had repercussions at Angkor.<sup>15</sup>

Between Suryavarman's death in 1150 and the accession of the last major Angkorean king, Jayavarman VII, thirty one years later, Angkorean armies were at war with Champa to the east (Vietnam, centered in Hanoi). Cham armies and a naval force invaded Angkor in 1177 and sacked the city. They carried away with them the protective divinities of the Khmer kingdom or they mutilated them, thus making them lose all their sacred power. This military reversal and the capture of the city, gave the grounds for questioning the idols' protective power.

In the following year, Cham armies were defeated elsewhere in Cambodia by a Cambodian prince who came to the throne in 1181 as Jayavarman VII. Jayavarman

came to power after he had spent many years in Champa, perhaps taking refuge there from Angkorean enemies or even forming alliances with the Chams.

Jayavarman VII was a fervent Buddhist and the last great builder-king of Angkor. He rebuilt the city's walls and redesigned the entire city, placing his own temple-mountain, the Bayon, at the center. Before building the Bayon in the 1190's, Jayavarman built two other temples honoring his parents and built or renovated over a hundred hospitals throughout the kingdom. These have disappeared, but identical inscriptions attached to sixteen of them have survived. These reveal that each of the hospitals was stocked with traditional medicines and food, staffed by over a hundred attendants. These hospitals supposedly reflected Jayavarman's caring nature: "He suffered the illnesses of his subjects more than from his own and the evil that afflicted men's bodies became, in him, an even more piercing spiritual pain."<sup>16</sup>

Some of Jayavarman's Buddhist-oriented ideas may have come from one of his wives, Inradevi, famous for her scholarly abilities. Others may have stemmed from his time in Champa, where Mahayana Buddhism was more widespread than it was at Angkor.

Jayavarman's most important work was his reconstruction of the city of Angkor itself. New walls were flung up to enclose the city. At two of the five newly designed gates he placed rows of stone giants, perhaps representing Cambodians and Chams or Buddhists and Hindus struggling in a tug of war. Above the gates, and also on the multiple towers of the Bayon (located at Angkor Thum), he had carved the enormous, mysterious faces, turned in four directions, that some scholars have associated with the Buddha, others with Hindu gods, and still others with Jayavarman VII himself or with lesser guardian spirits.

The Bayon is a celebration of Cambodia as well as a monument to an individual king and to the ancestors, Hindu gods, and Buddhas whom he honored. The presence of so many ordinary people in the carvings suggests that commoners, as well as the king, could earn religious merit.

Jayavarman's reign was a pinnacle and a turning point in Cambodian history. Following his death, around 1220, almost no more stone buildings were erected and very few Sanskrit inscriptions were carved at Angkor.

## **2.7 Theravada Buddhism and the Post Angkorean Crisis**

Tamalinda, the son of Jayavarman VII, lived in Ceylon (Sri-lanka), a center of important Buddhist reform which hoped to rediscover the purity of the origins of the Buddhism of the ancients. He introduced into Cambodia his preferred form of Buddhism, that of Theravada (Way of the Elders), or Singhalese Buddhism.

Two centuries following the glorious Angkor period were marked by leaps and bounds as much political as religious and about which historians know very little. One of the successors of king Jayavarman VII was reported to have tried to restore Shaivite orthodoxy. During his reign Buddhist images were destroyed and Hindu gods replaced them at the Bayon. Yet, the people as well as numerous court members for the most part adopted Buddhism. The people preferred the doctrine of Buddhist compassion which was more accessible than the metaphysical Hinduism, reserved for elite priests and warriors. Amidst all these popular unrest, a high dignitary of the court seized power under the name of Indravarman II (1295-1307) and reestablished Theravada Buddhism introduced by Tamalinda. In official inscriptions engraved on steles, he substituted the Pali language, the sacred language of Buddhists, for Sanskrit, the language of the Brahmins.<sup>17</sup>

In conclusion, probably the most important change to note in Cambodia between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries was the conversion of its people to Theravada Buddhism (the way of the Elders) which has been the religion of nearly all Cambodians ever since. From this point of Khmer history to the present, a lot of changes occurred; Cambodia was forced to move its capital from Angkor to Phnom Penh. Different cultures influenced the Khmer way of life; different political forces ruled her (Thailand, France, Vietnam). And it is in this context that Christianity found its way to her shores.

## 2.8 An overview of Christianity

The origins of Christianity can be traced back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century with the coming of Fr. Gaspar Cruz, a Portuguese Dominican, in 1555. He stayed for sometime at the Royal court of Longvek. In 1574, Fr. Sylvestre D’Azevedo, another Portuguese Dominican arrived and stayed for twenty two years. He learned to speak the local language, built a church and wrote a book on the Christian religion in the Khmer language.

At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century a certain number of Japanese Catholics emigrated to Cambodia and settled down at Ponhea Lu. In 1660, Christians from Indonesia took refuge in Phnom Penh and in Ponhea Lu. It must be noted that all the invasions from Vietnam and Siam (Thailand) during this period proved disastrous for the Cambodian Church.

Between 1768 and 1777, Fr. Levasseur, a French priest, wrote books in the Khmer language including a Cambodian-Latin Dictionary. He also established some religious communities. In 1784, a Vietnamese invasion destroyed the Church and drove the Khmer Christians towards the south of Cambodia. In 1785, a Siamese invasion deported a big number of Khmer Christians to Bangkok. Some escaped and regrouped themselves as one community in Battambang in 1790.

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Kingdom of Cambodia was destroyed by a civil war and the Christian communities were almost annihilated. In 1866, King Norodom had the Khmer Christians leave Ponhea Lu and had them stay at the capital, Phnom Penh, where they were given land to build their Church in the Prek Luong district. During the French Protectorate, many Catholics from Vietnam came and settled down in Cambodia.

In 1923, Rev. Arthur L. Hammond and his wife, both Americans of the Evangelical Church left Saigon and settled in Phnom Penh. Reverend Hammond was charged with translating the Scriptures and Reverend D.W. Ellison with opening a biblical school. With the help of a Catholic from Battambang, a translation of the New Testament was completed in 1934, and the entire Bible in 1940. It would not be published in its present form until 1954 by the British and Foreign Bible Society, after

several revisions by a committee of translators. However at this time, the French authorities took offense at Ellison's Bible School which trained new pastors. In 1930 King Monivong issued a decree prohibiting all religions with the exception of Buddhism and Catholicism.

In 1957, after some 400 years since Christianity arrived, Simon Chhem Yen was ordained as the first Khmer Catholic priest. On April 14, 1975, Msgr. Joseph Chhmar Salas became the first Cambodian to be ordained Bishop the day after the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh. During their regime all Khmer priests and nuns and a great number of Khmer Christians lost their lives. During these years of genocide, all Church buildings and structures were destroyed. The Phnom Penh Cathedral was leveled to the ground. Later the Khmer Rouge was overrun by Communist Vietnam who forbade the freedom of religion. Finally on April 4, 1990, after the Vietnamese pullout, Christian communities were given government permission to worship freely.<sup>18</sup>

It is striking to note the pattern of these four centuries. Each time a Christian community gets established, there followed a period of disruption by war or political restrictions. For the Christian communities this has meant that they had to start their work from scratch after every period of disruption.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

In this chapter we saw when and how the different pre-Christian religions entered Cambodia. From the earliest dates of their history we saw the influences of Animism until the period of Indianization, where Brahmanism was introduced and became the popular choice of the early kings in general. However, throughout this time Buddhism too had entered but had not imposed itself and remained humbly at the background. Only at the time of Jayavarman VII did it make a stronger mark upon the Khmer civilization. It appears that the rulers may have imposed their religious beliefs but these do not appear to have been attended by religious persecutions until modern times. Probably this is what caused Animism, Brahmanism, and Buddhism to intermingle with each other and form a kind of a "Khmerization" of whatever the state



religion of the period was. Another thing to notice is the choice of Theravada Buddhism later as the state religion probably because the people found in it a gentler and less imposing way of spiritual nurture which does not exclude any of the other religions. In the next chapter we shall go deeper and find out what each of these religions entail and how they have influenced the Khmers' way of looking at and practicing Theravada Buddhism.

## Chapter 3

### 3.0 Religions that influenced Cambodian Culture

In the historical survey of the last chapter, we traced the history of the three formative religions namely Animism, Brahmanism, and Buddhism, in Cambodia's cultural patterns. In this chapter we shall discuss each religion in turn, so as to understand better the particular contribution each made to Cambodia's cultural context.

#### 3.1 Animism

Animism is derived from the Latin *anima*, which means "breath" or "soul." Animism refers to belief in spiritual beings in general. It is the doctrine or theory of the soul. Among biologists and psychologists, animism refers to the view that the human mind is a nonmaterial entity that interacts with the body through the brain and nervous system.

##### 3.1.1 Animism as a Philosophical Theory

As a philosophical theory, animism is usually called panpsychism. It is the doctrine that all objects in the world have an inner or psychological being. The 18th-century German physician and chemist Georg Ernst Stahl coined the word "animism" to describe his theory that the soul is the vital principle responsible for organic development. A more detailed philosophical explanation of animism is given in J.T. Driscoll's article:

So far as it is especially concerned with man, animism aims at a true knowledge of man's nature and dignity by establishing the existence and nature of the soul, its union with the body, its origin and duration. These problems are at the basis of our conscious existence and underlie all our studies in mental and moral life... In establishing the doctrine of animism the general line of reasoning is from effect to cause, from phenomena to their subject or agent. From the acts of mind and of will manifested in individual conscious life, we are forced to admit the existence of their source and

principle, which is the human soul; from the nature of the activity is inferred the nature of the agent. Scholastic philosophy, vindicates the true dignity of man by proclaiming the soul to be a substantial and spiritual principle endowed with immortality. <sup>1</sup>

However in our study we shall be more concerned with Animism in its ethnological and anthropological implications rather than its philosophical one.

### **3.1.2 Animism as an Anthropological Theory**

Since the late 19th century the term has been generally associated with anthropology and in this sense animism is the theory proposed by some evolutionists to account for the origin of religion. Evolution assumes that the higher civilized races are the outcome and development from an earlier, cruder state. In this early stage their religious belief is known as animism, which means belief in spiritual beings, and represents the minimum of the rudimentary definition of religion.

#### **3.1.2.1 Tylor's Theory**

A British anthropologist Sir Edward Burnett Tylor described the origin of religion and primitive beliefs in terms of animism.

In *Primitive Culture* (1871) Tylor defined animism as the general belief in spiritual beings and considered it “a minimum definition of religion.” He asserted that all religions, from the simplest to the most complex, involve some form of animism. According to Tylor, primitive peoples, defined as those without written traditions, believe that spirits or souls are the cause of life in human beings; they picture souls as phantoms, resembling vapors or shadows, which can transmigrate from person to person, from the dead to the living, and from and into plants, animals, and lifeless objects. In deriving his theory, Tylor assumed that an animistic philosophy developed in an attempt to explain the causes of sleep, dreams, trances, and death; the difference between a living body and a dead one; and the nature of the images that one sees in dreams and trances. <sup>2</sup>

Tylor felt that religion had its origin in early man's attribution of a soul like his own to every living being and physical object around him. Religion is man's establishment of a relationship between himself and the spirits he felt in all of nature. Although Tylor's theory has impressed anthropologists with its plausibility, his notions were widely criticized as too intellectualistic.

### 3.1.2.2 Counter Theories

Tylor's theories were criticized by the British anthropologist Robert R. Marett, who claimed that primitive people could not have been so intellectual and that religion must have had a more emotional, intuitional origin. He rejected Tylor's theory that all objects were regarded as being alive. Marett thought that primitive peoples must have recognized some objects as lifeless and probably regarded only those objects that had unusual qualities or behaved unpredictably in a mysterious way as being alive. Moreover he held that the ancient concept of aliveness was not sophisticated enough to include the notion of a soul or spirit residing in the object. Primitive peoples treated the objects they considered animate as if these things had life, feeling, and a will of their own, but did not make a distinction between the body of an object and a soul that could enter or leave it. R.R. Marett noted this in his book *The Threshold of Religion* (1914) and he called this view "animatism" or "preanimism," and he claimed that animism had to arise out of animatism, which may even continue to exist alongside more highly developed animistic beliefs.

Others like Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, in his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1915), held that religion originated in totemism, which in turn derived from the expectation of security in the bosom of society. Still other theorists, like Sir James G. Frazer in his *The Golden Bough* (1890-1915), argued that religion came about because of man's repeated attempts to control nature by means of his own crude magical science.<sup>3</sup>

### 3.1.2.3 An Animistic World View

A difficulty one may experience in both anthropology and history of religion, when animism is placed among other system of beliefs, is not from the early association of animism with a speculative theory of religious evolution but from the huge variety of animistic cults being so different from each other. However if we try to look at what is common to them, then we see a wider view of animism.

Park confirms this in his article:

Animistic creeds have in common an undertaking on the part of men to communicate with supernatural beings, not about metaphysics or the dilemmas

of the moral life but about urgent practicalities: about securing food, curing illness, and averting danger. It is characteristic that genuine worship of a supernatural hardly is found. Creator gods often appear in myth but not in cult. In ancestor cults the most recently dead are the most vividly conceived--the original clan ancestor, for all his symbolic importance, is remote both from men and from godhead. If animistic spirits anywhere exercise authority, they do so in particularistic, even egoistic fashion, sanctioning men for ritual neglect or breaking taboos, not for acts of moral neglect or secular offense... The view of all nature as animated by invisible spirits--be it shades, demons, fairies, or fates--with which men could cope in meaningful ways may belong to the past, but philosophies that attribute powers of initiative and responsiveness to nature have not gone out of currency. <sup>4</sup>

The lesson of the study of animism is perhaps that religion did not arise, as some of Tylor's successors believed, out of "primal ignorance" or delusions of magical power but out of humankind's awareness of a good life that they are unable, by earthly means, to grasp and to hold.

#### **3.1.2.4 Ancestor Veneration**

Related also to animism are ancestor veneration (also called ancestor worship) and some forms of nature veneration. The term ancestor veneration describes a variety of religious beliefs and practices concerned with the spirits of dead person regarded as relatives, some of whom may be mythical. Although far from universal, ancestor veneration exists or formerly existed in societies at every level of cultural development. The core of ancestor veneration is the belief in the continuing existence of the dead, who continue to influence the affairs of the living. Beliefs in a surviving element of the human person (e.g. the soul) and in an afterlife have been held in all kinds of societies. Attitudes toward the spirits of the dead vary from love, respect, trust, mingled with special feelings of reverence, to outright fear. These attitudes are sometimes ambivalent. The spirits of the dead are often thought to help the living, but they are also thought to harm them if they are not propitiated. Saliba adds:

Ancestor worship [or ancestor veneration] is a strong indication of the value placed on the household and of the strong ties that exist between the past and the present. The beliefs and practices connected with the cult help to integrate the family, to sanction the traditional political structure, and to encourage respect for living elders. Some scholars have also interpreted it as a source of individual well-being and of social harmony and stability. Because it is practiced by family groups, ancestor worship excludes proselytizing and rarely involves a separate priesthood. It has no formal doctrines and is ordinarily an aspect of some larger religious system. <sup>5</sup>

### 3.1.2.5 Shamanism

Another aspect of Animism more anthropologically renowned today is Shamanism. Encyclopaedia Britannica defines Shamanism as “a rather variable and highly stratified complex of practices and conceptions; characteristic among these are the use of ecstasy, the belief in guardian spirits (who are often in animal form, with the function of helping and guiding the dead on their voyage to the beyond), and beliefs concerning metamorphosis (change of form) and traveling to the beyond.”<sup>6</sup>

Although the shaman can achieve religious status by heredity, personal quest, or vocation, the recognition and call of the individual is always an essential part of that individual's elevation to the new status. The shaman is a kind of medium, a mouthpiece of the spirits. At his initiation, he frequently undergoes prolonged fasts, seclusion, and other ordeals leading to dreams and visions.

The main religious tasks of a shaman are healing and divination. Both are achieved either by spirit possession or by the departure of the shaman's soul to heaven or to the world of the dead. Shamans also predict or divine the whereabouts of things, the position of the enemy, and the best way of safeguarding and increasing the food supply. Some shamans occupy high social and economic status in society, especially if they are successful healers.

Attempts to explain the shamans and their cures have been numerous. Some scholars have drawn parallels between shamanistic healing and psychoanalytic cures and have concluded that both create efficacious and therapeutic symbols leading to psychological and physiological healing. Several anthropologists, rejecting a theory that shamans are basically neurotics or psychotics, have suggested that shamans possess certain abilities that are superior to those of the rest of the community. Other scholars simply explain shamanism as the precursor of a more organized religious system or as a technique for achieving ecstasy.<sup>7</sup>

At this point, we now see clearly that the term animism, in its contemporary anthropological sense denotes not just a single creed but rather a view of the world consistent with a certain range of religious beliefs. Many of these beliefs may survive in more complex religions as we shall see in our Cambodian context.

### 3.1.3 Animism in Cambodian Culture

Like other farmers all over the world, Khmer people are Animists in a way because they must appease the forces of nature in order to live and survive. These forces of nature or “spirits” are part of their everyday life.

#### 3.1.3.1 Spirits reside with us

All manner of location may be the abode of a “spirit” that is its master. The word “spirit” can be interpreted approximately as “Energy” or sometimes as what Western philosophy would call a “soul.” There is the “spirit of the forest”, the “spirit of the river”, the “spirit of Music” that musicians invoke before playing an instrument, “the spirit of dance” that is venerated before performing on stage, “ the spirit of the house” that rules over the destiny of the people living in it and so many others.<sup>8</sup>

The Spirits of the land (*neak ta* : literally “person grandfather”) are the founding spirits of the village or the initiators of the particular cult of a village. These “*Neak Ta*” are the real masters of the land. They assure protection to the villagers, health, fertility of the soil, and seasonal rains. They must be venerated or appeased by lighting incense sticks or candles or by offering liquor, bananas, sometimes a raw or cooked chicken or a pig head. These “spirits” have a miniature house usually at the entrance of the village or of the area they are supposed to control. In fact one can observe that almost all houses of Cambodians have a “spirit house” in front of them rather than a mailbox.

Other spirits are called “Protectors” (*areak* also spelled *arak*)<sup>9</sup>. While a rite dealing with possessions is performed with music, banging of a gong that gradually becomes very fast, a medium (shaman), in the middle of a cloud of smoke of many incense sticks, goes on stamping down the spirit (*banchoan areak*) until possessed by this spirit, he falls into a trance in which state, the will of the spirit will be revealed.

Chean Rithy Men describes this ritual in detail:

The *arak* ensemble begins to play. Appropriate pieces of music must be performed for specific spirits. While the music is playing, the medium sits in

a meditative posture, holding a bowl and turning it in a clockwise direction. In the *lieng arak* ritual, traditional music called *phleng arak* (arak music) plays a vital role. It functions to entice the spirits to attend the ceremonial performance by way of possessing the *mema* or *rup* (spirit medium). The musical elements serve as a symbolic and functional vehicle or pathway for the *arak* spirits to possess the *mema*. Music functions to socialize trance and as a means of communication, connecting the invisible world with the visible one. Thus the presence of *arak* music is as necessary as incense, flowers, and offerings.<sup>10</sup>

### 3.1.3.2 Spirits intervene in daily life

When expressing good wishes, the Cambodians invoke “the ten thousand efficacious things” without knowing very well what these things represent. These kinds of expressions indicate how many Cambodians believe spirits may intervene in their lives. Men illustrates:

According to native beliefs, supernatural entities govern aspects of Khmer social life. There are various categories of spirits in Khmer cosmology. In general, spirits are categorized into two types, benevolent and malevolent. These dual aspects of the supernatural spirits (*arak*) are linked to the context in which they reside, *arak sruk* (of the village) and *arak prei* (of the forest). In khmer society, the forest is considered to be a wild and dangerous place, and thus a source of disaster and illness. Sudden illness, misfortune, and epidemics occurring within the community are often attributed to malevolent forest spirits.<sup>11</sup>

For many Cambodians, disease is not thought of as coming from germs, but from the anger of some spirits who did not receive proper worship, or who are angered by misconduct of a member of some family. They do (*tweu*) evil to somebody by making him/her sick. Then the family must seek advice from the medium (*Kru tiey*) to find out who is the culprit and how to appease the spirit. Men further explains:

*Arak Sruk* are protective spirits and can include *neak ta* (local guardian spirit)... Being the protectors, offended *arak sruk* can exercise their power over the living by inflicting illness upon an individual family member. The illness and misfortune of any family member is believed to result from the disruption of the relationship between the living and the ancestral spirits or *arak sruk*, as well as from social breakdown among the living.... Once the relationship between the ancestral spirits and the family has been interrupted or disordered, a ritual must be performed to re-establish the cosmological order and the social reality and to reintegrate an ill person back into his/her normal state and into the social realm.<sup>12</sup>



The Cambodian language is filled with expressions that echo their beliefs in the spirits: malaria is called “*krun chanh*” literally: fever of the defeated. By moving from one area to another, a man is said to be “defeated” by the water and the land” and that means, by the owner of water and land - the spirit (*neak ta*) which was not properly worshiped.

In Khmer etiquette, we never call somebody by his/her name because that would “tear his/her flesh” (*dach sach*), but by the term indicating his/her position in society or by a nickname. Quite often, the name of a son or a daughter is changed when he or she is cured from a serious disease or when the child has been sick too often: the spirits must be deceived. When a child smiles during sleep, it is thought that the bad spirit has come to tease him/her or wants to blame him/her. Then the mother starts abusing the child by calling him/her the most insulting names such as “stupid”, “pig”, etc. to ward off the dangerous attempts of the bad spirit.

The bow of boats is always decorated with a pair of eyes, most probably to scare off the water spirits. On the steamers an altar is fixed on the bow. Before leaving the bank, incense sticks are lit, bananas are offered, and garlands of flowers are placed on it to appease the river deity. In fact, drowning accidents are attributed to the spirit of the river who is deemed to come and drag the unfortunate ones to the bottom.

### **3.1.3.3 Spirits’ power outside Cambodia**

The belief in spirits is in full force in Cambodia, but it is less important in countries that are more secularized and industrial where the powers of nature need not be appeased in order to survive. This is for them a cultural fact that resists changes of life and place.

Some Cambodians often comment that the “spirits” do not have power in foreign countries because the people there do not believe in them. Some others say that the “spirits” did not take the airplanes to follow the Cambodians to another country because the spirits’ territory is in Cambodia. Some researchers observed that the real separation for the family is not death, but exile, living in a place that is out of

the grasp of the Elders or the *Neak Ta*. However, this does not mean they have lost their belief in them when they go to another country “outside the spirits’ territory.”

Here are some interesting episodes Ponchaud shares with us about some recorded experiences of Cambodians away from their country:

Besides the universal fear for darkness, we might find in these beliefs in the Spirits an explanation why newly arrived Cambodians keep a lamp on all night in their rooms to ward off the spirits.

In 1988, a Khmer woman living in Belgium, stated that in Belgian cities there was no spirit because there was too much light and the spirits were afraid of light but, on the other hand in the countryside there were spirits as numerous as in Cambodia.

In 1987, a Cambodian lady tragically lost a child of 18 months, drowned in a lake near Strasbourg. As we were walking along the River III with a group of Khmers, she told me that she was frightened by the sight of water. She told me about the death of her child: “My husband and myself were out of the car whereas the children remained in it. The elder who was 5, heard the voice that said: ‘Come and drink the water,’ and he saw a sort of dark form. He was afraid and refused to obey the invitation, but the younger did not mistrust the voice and he went down to the lake. Then the ‘spirit’ of the lake pulled him to the bottom of the water.”

In 1985, at Macon, a Khmer baby choked to death in his crib, the parents quit a good job, and moved to another town to escape from the spirit who, they believed, had choked the baby.

Some Khmers ask to wear a cross as a pendant to ward off the bad spirits. In 1987, in Belgium, a Cambodian lady asked to be baptized to get the protection of Jesus, the “*Neak Ta*” of the Christian people.<sup>13</sup>

## **3.2 Brahmanism**

### **3.2.1 Brahmanism and Hinduism**

Brahmanism<sup>14</sup> is a complex religion and social system which grew out of the polytheistic nature-worship of the ancient Aryan conquerors of northern India. Through their dominance, Brahmanism’s influence extended over the whole country. It maintained itself down to the present day but not without profound modifications. However, in its intricate modern phases it is generally known as Hinduism. Encyclopaedia Britannica further adds:

Brahmanism [is the] religion of ancient India that evolved out of Vedism. It takes its name both from the predominant position of its priestly class, the Brahmins, and from the increasing speculation about, and importance given to, Brahma, the supreme power. Brahmanism is distinguished from the classical Hinduism that succeeded it by the enhanced significance given in classical Hinduism to individual deities, such as Shiva and Vishnu, and to devotional worship (bhakti).<sup>15</sup>

### 3.2.2 Brahmin Texts

Our knowledge of Brahmanism in its earlier stages is derived from its primitive sacred books, belonging to the period between 1500-400 BC. They are originally oral compositions.

First of all, there are four Vedas (*veda* means wisdom) dating from 1500 to 800 BC. The collections are called the Rig-Veda, the Sama-Veda, the Yajur-Veda, and the Atharva-Veda. They are known also as the *Samhitas* (roughly “collection”). Their contents are described by Microsoft Encarta as:

The first three *Samhitas* are primarily ritual handbooks that were used in the Vedic period by three classes of priests who officiated at ceremonial sacrifices. The Rig-Veda contains more than 1000 hymns (Sanskrit *rig*), composed in various poetic meters and arranged in ten books. It was used by the hotri, or reciters, who invoked the gods by reading its hymns aloud. The Sama-Veda contains verse portions taken mainly from the Rig-Veda. It was used by the udgatri, or chanters, who sang its hymns, or melodies (Sanskrit *sama*). The Yajur-Veda, which now consists of two recensions, both of them partly in prose and partly in verse and both containing roughly the same material (although differently arranged), contains sacrificial formulas (Sanskrit *yaja*, “sacrifices”). It was used by the *adhvaryu*, priests who recited appropriate formulas from the Yajur-Veda while actually performing the sacrificial actions. The fourth Veda, the Atharva-Veda (in part attributed by tradition to a rishi named Atharvan), consists almost exclusively of a wide variety of hymns, magical incantations, and magical spells.<sup>16</sup>

The next sacred texts are the Brahmanas (about 1000-600 BC). They are a series of miscellaneous explanations of the texts, rites, and customs found in each of the four Vedas, composed expressly for the use of the Brahmins, or priests. They are followed (800-500 BC) by the so-called Upanishads, concerned mainly with pantheistic speculations on the nature of deity and the end of man. Last are the Sutras (600-400 BC), which are guides to the proper observance of the rites and customs. The most important are the Grhya-Sutras, or house-guides, treating of domestic rites, and the Dharma-sutras, or law-guides, which are manuals of religious and social

customs. They are meant for laymen as well as priests and they reflect the popular and practical side of Brahmanism. The Brahmanas and Upanishads show us the religion on its priestly, speculative side. Closely related to the law-guides is the metrical treatise, *Manava-Dharma-Sastra*, known in English as the Laws of Manu. It belongs probably to the fifth century BC. These, together with the two sacred epics of a later age, the "Ramayana," and the "Mahabharata," deals with what is most important in sacred Brahman literature.<sup>17</sup>

### 3.2.3 Early Brahmanism or Vedism

The religion of the Vedic period proper was comparatively simple. It consisted in the worship of many deities, great and small, which are the personified forces of nature. Generally speaking, Vedic gods share many characteristics: several of them (Indra, Varuṇa, Vishnu) are said to have created the universe, set the Sun in the sky, and propped apart heaven and earth. Some major gods were clearly personifications of natural phenomena, and for these gods no clearly delineated divine personalities were perceived. The three most frequently invoked gods are Indra, Agni, and Soma. Indra, the foremost god of the Vedic pantheon, is a god of war and rain. Agni (a cognate of the Latin *ignis*) is the deified fire, particularly the fire of sacrifice, and Soma is the intoxicating or hallucinogenic drink of the sacrifice, or the plant from which it is pressed.

The principal focus of Vedic literature is the sacrifice, which in its simplest form can be viewed as a ritualized banquet to which a god is invited to partake of a meal shared by the one sacrificing and his priest. The invocations mention, often casually, the past exploits of the deity. The offered meal gives strength to the deity to repeat his feat and to aid the person sacrificing. Aiken vividly describes this:

There were no temples in this early period. On a small mound of earth or of stones the offering was made to the gods, often by the head of the family, but in the more important and complicated sacrifices by the priest, or Brahmin, in union with the householder. The object of every sacrifice was to supply strengthening food to the gods and to secure blessings in return. Animal victims were at this period in daily use. First in importance was the horse, then the ox or cow, the sheep, and the goat. Offerings of butter, rice, wheat, and other kinds of grain were also very common. But dearer to the gods than any of these gifts, and rivaling the horse-sacrifice in solemnity, was the offering of the inebriating juice of the Soma-plant, the so-called Soma-sacrifice. Hymns of praise and petitions... accompanied these sacrificial offerings.<sup>18</sup>

Besides the deity, reverence was given to ancestors as well as to nature.

Devotion to the *Pitris* (Fathers), or dead relatives, was also a prominent element in their religion. Although the *Pitris* mounted to the heavenly abode of bliss, their happiness was not altogether independent of the acts of devotion shown them by the living. It could be greatly increased by offerings of Soma, rice, and water; for like the gods they were thought to have bodies of air-like texture, and to enjoy the subtle essence of food. Hence, the surviving children felt it a sacred duty to make feast-offerings, called *Sraddhas*, at stated times to their departed *Pitris*. In return for these acts of filial piety, the grateful *Pitris* protected them from harm and promoted their welfare. Lower forms of nature-worship also obtained. The cow was held in reverence. Worship was given to trees and serpents. Formulae abounded for healing the diseased, driving off demons, and averting evil omens.<sup>19</sup>

### **3.2.4 Popular Brahmanism**

In the period that saw the production of the Brahmanas and the Upanishads, the Vedic religion underwent a twofold change. On the practical side there was a lively growth of religious rites and of social restrictions and duties which developed into popular Brahmanism. On the theoretical side, Vedic belief in the efficacy of personal deities was subordinated to a pantheistic scheme of salvation; this was the priestly, esoteric Brahmanism. The former is reflected in the Brahmanas and the Sutras and the latter in the Upanishads.

The transformation to popular Brahmanism was largely due to the influence of the Brahmins, or priests. Owing to their excessive fondness for mystical words and forms, the details of ritual became more and more complex, some assuming so intricate a character as to require the services of sixteen priests. Aiken adds:

The sacrifice partook of the nature of a sacramental rite, the due performance of which was sure to produce the desired end, and thus became an all-important center around which the visible and invisible world revolved. Hence it merited liberal fees to the officiating priests. Still it was not a mere perfunctory rite, for if performed by an unworthy priest it was accounted as both useless and sacrilegious. In keeping with this complicated liturgy was the multitude of prayers and rites which entered into the daily life of both priest and layman. The daily recitation of parts of the Vedas, now venerated as divine revelation, was of first importance, especially for the Brahmins. It was a sacred duty for every individual to recite, morning and evening, the *Savitri*, a short prayer in honor of the vivifying sun.<sup>20</sup>

In popular Brahmanism of this period the idea of retribution for sin was made to embrace the most rigorous and far-reaching consequences, from which, save by timely penance, there was no escape. As every good action was certain of future recompense, so every evil one was destined to bear its fruit of misery in time to come. This was the doctrine of *karma* (action) with which the new idea of rebirth was closely connected. The Encyclopaedia Britannica notes:

The doctrine of karma reflects the Hindu conviction that this life is but one in a chain of lives (*samsara*) and that it is determined by man's actions in a previous life. This is accepted as a law of nature, not open to further discussion. The moral energy of a particular act is preserved and fructifies automatically in the next life, where it shows up in one's class, nature, disposition, and character. Thus the law of karma explains the inequalities that are observed among creatures. In the course of the chain of lives, an individual can perfect himself, until he reaches the eminence of the god Brahma himself, or he can degrade himself in such an evil way that he is reborn as an animal. Not only do past acts influence the circumstances of the next life, they also determine one's happiness or unhappiness in the hereafter between lives, where he will spend a time in either one of the heavens or one of the hells until the fruits of his karma have been all but consumed and the remainder creates a new life for him.<sup>21</sup>

Intimately tied up in the religious teaching of Brahmanism was the division of society into rigidly defined castes. The Microsoft Encarta enumerates:

[The Priestly lawmakers placed] their own priestly class at the head of this caste system with the title of earthly gods, or Brahmans. Next in order of rank were the warriors, the Kshatriyas. Then came the Vaisyas, the farmers and merchants. The fourth of the original castes was the Sudras, the laborers, born to be servants to the other three castes, especially the Brahman. Far lower than the Sudras—in fact, entirely outside the social order and limited to doing the most menial and unappealing tasks—were those people of no caste, formerly known as Untouchables. The Untouchables were the Dravidians, the aboriginal inhabitants of India, to whose ranks from time to time were added the pariahs, or outcasts, people expelled for religious or social sins from the classes into which they had been born. Thus created by the priests, the caste system was made a part of Hindu religious law, rendered secure by the claim of divine revelation.<sup>22</sup>

As teachers of the sacred Vedas, and as priests of the all-important sacrifices, Brahmans professed to be the very representatives of the gods. No honor was too great for them, and to lay hands on them was a sacrilege. One of their chief sources of power and influence lay in their exclusive privilege to teach the youth of the three upper castes, for education then consisted largely in the acquisition of Vedic lore,

which only priests could teach. Thus the three upper castes alone had the right to learn the Vedas and to take part in the sacrifices. This makes Brahmanism an exclusive privilege of birth and not a religion open to all. It was a religion from which the despised caste of Sudras was excluded.

This period of Brahmanism was also marked by a strong tendency to asceticism. It found expression in the fasts, severe penances, and an austere life of privation. Increasing numbers of Brahmins, abandoned their homes and spent the rest of their lives as ascetics, living apart from the villages in crude huts, or under the shelter of trees, eating only the basic of food obtained by begging, and subjecting themselves to fasts. However, their severity of life was not so much meant to repent for past offenses, but for acquiring religious merits and superhuman powers. They would sit motionless with legs crossed, and, would concentrate on some abstract subject until they fell into a trance. In this state they saw themselves as united with the deity. The fruit of these contemplations was the pantheistic view of religion which found expression in the Upanishads, and which left an indelible mark on the Brahman mind.<sup>23</sup>

### **3.2.5 Pantheistic Brahmanism**

The monotheistic tendency in the later Vedic hymns had made itself more and more felt in the higher Brahman circles till it gave rise to a new deity which was a creation of Brahman priests. This was Prajapati, lord of creatures, omnipotent and supreme, later known as Brahmá,<sup>24</sup> the personal creator of all things. Their other gods were not repudiated, but were worshipped as various manifestations of Brahmá. Furthermore, “to the prevailing school of Brahmin ascetics, whose teachings are found in the Upanishads, the ultimate source of all things was not the personal Brahmá, but the formless, characterless, unconscious spirit known as Atman (self), or, more commonly Brahmâ. (Brahmâ is neuter, whereas Brahmá, personal god, is masculine.) The heavens and the earth, men and gods, even the personal deity, Brahmá, were but transitory emanations of Brahmâ, destined in time to lose their individuality and be absorbed into the great, all-pervading, impersonal spirit.”<sup>25</sup> In short, the outside world had no real existence but was only an illusion. It was Brahmâ alone who existed; it alone was eternal.

### 3.2.6 Early Hinduism (2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC – 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD)

The pantheistic concept of salvation just described, generally known as the Vedanta teaching, found great favor with the Brahmins and has been maintained as orthodox Brahmin doctrine until the present times. But it made little progress outside the Brahmin caste. The masses had little interest in an impersonal Brahmâ who was incapable of hearing their prayers.

The priestly caste was chiefly concerned with meditation on his identity with Brahmâ while the popular mind was bent on prayer, sacrifices, and other good works in honor of the Vedic deities. At the same time, their faith in the efficacy of these traditional gods were weakened by the Brahmin teaching that freedom from rebirth was not to be obtained by acts of worship to personal deities who were powerless to secure eternal bliss. The result was popular development of special cults of two of the old gods, now raised to the position of supreme deity, and attributed with the power to secure for them a lasting life of happiness in heaven.

Aiken reports:

One of these gods was the ancient storm-god Rudra, destructive in tempest and lightning, renewing life in the showers of rain, sweeping in lonely solitude over mountain and barren waste. As the destroyer, the reproducer, and the type of the lonely ascetic, this deity rapidly rose in popular esteem under the name of Siva, the blessed. The other was Vishnu, originally one of the forms of the son-god, a mild beneficent deity, whose genial rays brought gladness and growth to living creatures. His solar origin was lost sight of as he was raised to the position of supreme deity, but one of his symbols, the discus, points to his earlier character.<sup>26</sup>

It is worthwhile to note that neither the worship of Shiva nor of Vishnu did away with the honoring of the traditional gods and goddesses, and all other manifestations of nature. The pantheism in which the Hindu mind is molded saw in all these things emanations of the supreme deity, Shiva or Vishnu. In worshiping any or all of these gods, he was but honoring his own supreme guardian.

The rapid rise in popularity of these cults, tended more and more to thrust Brahminism proper in to the background. To quench these cults was out of the question. And so, in order to hold them at least nominally loyal to Brahminism, the supreme god Brahmâ was associated with Vishnu and Shiva as a triad of equal and



more or less interchangeable deities in which Brahmá held the office of creator, or rather evolver, Vishnu of preserver, and Siva of dissolver. This was how their so-called Tri-murti (tri-form), or trinity developed.<sup>27</sup>

### **3.2.7 Later, or Sectarian Hinduism**

The steady weakening of Brahmin influence made it possible for the religious preferences of the huge, yet heterogeneous population of India to assert themselves more strongly. Both Shaivism and Vaishnavism<sup>28</sup> departed more and more vigorously from traditional Brahmanism, and assumed a sectarian character towards the older religion and also towards each other. At this point, the Brahman-caste distinctions were broken down, and an equality of all men and women was asserted, at least during the ceremonies of public worship. Everywhere magnificent temples arose to Shiva and Vishnu; innumerable idols and phallic symbols filled the land; and each rival cult lauded its own special deity as supreme, subordinating all others to it, and looking down with contempt on forms of worship other than its own. Of the two hundred million adherents of Hinduism today, only a few hundred thousand can be called orthodox Brahmin worshipers. Shaivism<sup>29</sup> and Vaishnavism<sup>30</sup> have overshadowed the older religion.

### **3.2.8 Brahmanism in Cambodian Culture**

We saw earlier (Chapter 2) how the early Indian settlers and traders have influenced Khmer culture especially through the introduction of Hindu gods from the beginning of the Christian era. Bit asserts that “cultural and religious influences derived from India have indelibly shaped Cambodian society. Brahmanism, the earliest version, brought concepts of fixed social classes, status consciousness, aggressiveness and the importance of rituals in religious ceremonies.”<sup>31</sup>

#### **3.2.8.1 The more gods the better**

A clear influence of Brahmanistic tendencies to the Khmer way of life is that of having many gods to implore for protection. “*Tevoda*” are kinds of deities in the Brahmanist Pantheon and are regularly worshiped. The word “*tevoda*” has the same root as “*Theos*” in Greek, “*Deus*” in Latin, and “*Divine*” in English. This word is very much venerated that in fact the very first line of the Khmer National Anthem

implores their protection as the song starts with the “*Som Puak Tevoda*” (Please heavenly deities protect our king, etc.). Each year, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April, the Khmer people celebrate their New Year. As part of their celebration, they get ready to welcome the *Tevoda* of the New Year; they know his name and also the time of his coming. Even during the Pol Pot regime, many people credit their survival to the “god” (*Preah*) or the *Tevoda* probably in reference to Indra or Brahma. Curiously, many Cambodians think that the Western countries are prosperous ones because their gods are more powerful than the Cambodian gods. Many commented that it is impossible for the Western countries not to prosper because of the great number of Christian temples and churches there. With their thinking of the more gods the better, they possibly might have equated the number of temples and churches with the number of gods to be worshipped in them.<sup>32</sup>

In addition, we might attribute the Khmer people’s fondness of the fantastic, the magical and the supernatural to the influence of Hinduism. Many people hold to mythological tales concerning the origins of geographical locations (lakes, mountains, caves) and other such legends. And in these folk tales and myths we find the presence of the Indian gods who bring about the “*deus ex machina*” conclusion of the stories.<sup>33</sup>

### **3.2.8.2 The Sacred High Places**

The cities of the Indianized world are all built around a central hill, natural or artificial. Following this example are the cities of Phnom Penh, Luang Prabang (Laos), and Rangoon (Myanmar). Sometimes they would use an artificial mound or hill, like in the case of Bangkok (Thailand) and Vientiane (Laos). This hill represents Mount Meru and is considered as the way of communicating between heaven and earth and brings prosperity to the country. An incident in Phnom Penh as documented by Ponchaud illustrates their belief in this:

In the center of the City of Phnom Penh, the “*Phnom*” (the Hill) fulfills this supernatural role. In 1974, lightning hit the top of the Stupa (sort of conical tower used as Buddhist shrine for some relics). The reaction of the population of Phnom Penh was immediate: the gods being angry, the war would be lost. Actually this is what happened not so long afterward.<sup>34</sup>

In fact, Phnom Penh did fall into the hands of the Khmer Rouge in April 1975.

In Phnom Penh, inside the royal palace, one can see the conical shape of the royal throne or the royal crown. This may be some kind of survival of the Brahmanistic influence. Going back to the royal palace and in many pagodas, one can notice in the middle of the spire over the roof a likeness of Brahma with the four faces. The royal dances also are a manifestation of this Indian influence we speak of and often times these dances include a religious dimension.

### **3.2.8.3 The King's Divine Right**

The central tower of the Angkor temples represents the king who is endowed with divine prerogatives by virtue of his royal anointing. He is also considered as a medium of communication between heaven and earth and can secure the fertility of the soil. At the beginning of each rainy season, the King of Cambodia would plough the first furrow, the "sacred furrow", a gesture of defloration of the virgin soil and a necessary gesture to gain a fertile harvest.

Many anecdotes in political and social life bring to the fore the survival of these Brahmanistic beliefs on kingship associated with deity. King Sihanouk himself seemed to believe in his divine role as Master of the land and the rain. Ponchaud narrates to us:

At the beginning of September in 1966, in the middle of the rainy season, he welcomed General De Gaulle to Cambodia. As it is quite usual, in this period of the year, the rain would fall every day. He asked the Bakous, the Brahmanic priests of the royal palace, to recite the prayers and the weather became fine. Someday later, in a talk to the Khmer people, he declared that he stopped the rain and that the Cambodian deities were as powerful as the deities of the western world. As a matter of fact, like Brahma riding the sacred goose, he would drop rolls of fabric to his countrymen from his helicopter called "*Preah Angsa*" (named precisely for the month of Brahma).<sup>35</sup>

This belief was all the more verified when Sihanouk was deposed by the Khmer Rouge, the farmers were in a state of cosmic upheaval. Here is one account of this experience as found in Dupraz's handouts:

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 1979, the day after the overthrow of Prince Sihanouk, some terrified farmers were complaining: "How can we cultivate the paddy fields this year, because we do not have the King to bring rain down anymore?" On the 30<sup>th</sup> April 1980, starting a chat with a farmer, I mentioned to him that the rain was delayed that year. He answered immediately: "Since

the day they overthrew the King, the sky has been upside down.” Some days later, I asked some other Khmers, and they answered me: “When the Master comes back, the land will give its fruits.” Some others were reckoning the number of bad years from the year Sihanouk was overthrown in 1970; nobody had honored the gods, they said, and consequently the soil would not give any harvest.<sup>36</sup>

Through these reflections we can guess that the attachment of the farmers to Sihanouk was for an unconscious reason. He who is King is the Master, the tip of a great pyramid that forms the Cambodian family whose unity is guaranteed by him who brings the fertility to the land. In the Khmer mentality, the king did not get his legitimacy only from the dynastical succession but from his power of giving fertility to the land.

The Khmer language itself is full of Brahmanistic influences. For instance, the special vocabulary reserved for the deities is the same vocabulary used for addressing the king and other functions associated with his royalty.

#### **3.2.8.4 Literary Influence**

Hindu epics which relate the experiences of mythical figures served down through the centuries as a guide for moral character development in Cambodian society. In the most celebrated of the epic poems, the “Reamker,” the Cambodian version of the Ramayana, is depicted the eternal tale of the battle of good versus evil. The major characters of this epic, the hero Rama, his loyal brother Laka, the warrior servant Hannuman, and his faithful wife Sita, all give evidence to the basic concepts of helplessness to influence one’s destiny and the role of armed struggle to maintain one’s strength. Bit makes an analysis about this epic’s impact to Cambodian culture:

The themes of the Reamker are the inspiration for so much of the art forms in Cambodian society. Through the representation in dance and mural art, the general population is exposed to the cultural ideals of behavior which are accepted uncritically. Even in more formal study of the epic poem in Buddhist and secular schools, the emphasis is on memorization and emulating the qualities of the heroes rather than a search for a deeper analysis of the meaning of the conflict depicted.<sup>37</sup>

### **3.3 Buddhism**

#### **3.3.1 Buddhism – a breakaway from Brahmanistic thought**

We saw from the previous section that in about 500 BC, diverse ascetical and monastic systems sprang into being from Brahmanism. The speculations of the Vedanta school of thought starting already from the 700 BC onwards produced other schemes of gaining salvation. These movements started from the view that conscious life is burdensome and not worth living, and that true happiness is only to be had in a state free of desires and conscious action. They did borrow from the Upanishad doctrine of the endless chain of births, but they differed from pantheistic Brahmanism both in their way of seeing the Vedas and in their plan for securing freedom from this rebirth. Of these the one destined to become renowned was Buddhism.

#### **3.3.2 Buddha – the Founder**

The Buddha was born in the 6th century BC in the kingdom of the Sakyas, on the borders of present-day Nepal and India (Lumbini).<sup>38</sup> He was the son of Siddhodana, the king, and Mahamaya, the queen. The Buddha thus came from a Khattiya family, a Sakya warrior caste, with the private name of Siddhartha; in later life he was known also as Sakyamuni (Sage of the Sakyas). The name Gautama Buddha is a combination of the family name Gautama and the appellation Buddha, meaning “Enlightened One.”

In his early years, Buddha apparently showed an inclination to meditation and reflection, displeasing his father, who wanted him to be a warrior and ruler rather than a religious philosopher. Yielding to his father's wishes, he married at an early age and participated in the worldly life of the court. Buddha found his carefree, self-indulgent existence dull, and after a while he left home and began wandering in search of enlightenment. Reynolds narrates:

The turning point in the prince Siddhattha's life came when he was 29 years old. One day, while out driving with his charioteer, he saw "an aged man as bent as a roof gable, decrepit, leaning on a staff, tottering as he walked, afflicted and long past his prime." The charioteer, questioned by the prince as to what had happened to the man, explained that he was old and that all men were subject to old age. The prince, greatly perturbed by this sight, went back

to the palace and became absorbed in thought. Another day, again driving with his charioteer, he saw "a sick man, suffering and very ill, fallen and weltering in his own excreta." Because Siddhattha was perturbed, the charioteer explained, as before, that this was a sick man and that all men are subject to sickness. On a third occasion the prince saw a dead body and again the charioteer provided the explanation. Finally, Siddhattha saw "a shaven-headed man, a wanderer who has gone forth, wearing the yellow robe." Impressed with the man's peaceful demeanour, the prince decided to leave home and go out into the world to discover the reason for such a display of serenity in the midst of misery.<sup>39</sup>

This decision, known in Buddhism as the Great Renunciation, is celebrated by Buddhists as a turning point in history.

Wandering as a mendicant over northern India, Buddha first investigated Hinduism. He took instruction from some famous Brahman teachers, but he found the Hindu caste system repulsive and Hindu asceticism futile. He continued his search, attracting but later losing five followers. About 528, while sitting under a Bo tree near Gaya (in what is now Buddh Gaya in the state of Bihar), he experienced the Great Enlightenment, which revealed the way of salvation from suffering. Shortly afterward he preached his first sermon in the Deer Park near Benares (now Varanasi). This sermon, the text of which is preserved, contains the gist of Buddhism. Many scholars regard it as comparable, in its tone of moral elevation and historical importance, to Jesus Christ's Sermon on the Mount. The five disciples rejoined Buddha at Benares. Accompanied by them, he traveled through the valley of the Ganges River, teaching his doctrines, gathering followers, and establishing monastic communities that admitted anyone regardless of caste. He returned briefly to his native town and converted his father, his wife, and other members of his family to his beliefs. After 45 years of missionary activity Buddha died in Kusinagara, Nepal. He was about 80 years old.

### **3.3.3 Buddha's Teachings**

The Buddha was an oral teacher. He left no written body of thought. His beliefs were later on codified by his followers. At the core of Buddha's enlightenment was the realization of the Four Noble Truths which Reynolds enumerates:

(1) Life is suffering... human existence is essentially painful from the moment of birth to the moment of death. Even death brings no relief, for the Buddha

accepted the Hindu idea of life as cyclical, with death leading to further rebirth. (2) All suffering is caused by ignorance of the nature of reality and the craving, attachment, and grasping that result from such ignorance. (3) Suffering can be ended by overcoming ignorance and attachment. (4) The path to the suppression of suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path, which consists of right views, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right-mindedness, and right contemplation. These eight are usually divided into three categories that form the cornerstone of Buddhist faith: morality, wisdom, and *samadhi*, or concentration.<sup>40</sup>

The Buddha's doctrine was not one of despair. Living amid the ephemeral nature of everything, human beings search for the way of deliverance, for that which shines beyond the transitory nature of human existence--in short, for enlightenment.

Buddhism analyzes human existence as made up of five aggregates or "bundles" (*khandhas*): (1) corporeality or physical forms (*rupa*), (2) feelings or sensations (*vedana*), (3) ideations (*sañña*), (4) mental formations or dispositions (*sankhara*), and (5) consciousness (*viññana*). A person is only a temporary combination of these aggregates, which are subject to continual change. No one remains the same for any two consecutive moments. Thus Buddha taught the doctrine of *anatman*, or the denial of a permanent soul. The doctrine of *anatman* made it necessary for the Buddha to reinterpret the Indian idea of repeated rebirth in the cycle of phenomenal existence known as *samsara*. To this end he taught the doctrine of *paticca-samuppada*, or dependent origination. This 12-linked chain of causation shows how ignorance in a previous life creates the tendency for a combination of aggregates to develop. These in turn cause the mind and senses to operate. Sensations result, which lead to craving and a clinging to existence. This condition triggers the process of producing a renewed cycle of birth, old age, and death. Through this causal chain, a connection is made between one life and the next. What we have is a stream of renewed existences, rather than a permanent being that moves from life to life—in effect, a belief in rebirth without transmigration.<sup>41</sup>

The belief in rebirth, or *samsara*, as a potentially endless series of worldly existences in which every being is caught up was already associated with the doctrine of karma (Sanskrit: *karman*; literally "act," or "deed"). According to the doctrine of karma, "good conduct brings a pleasant and happy result and creates a tendency toward similar good acts, while bad conduct brings an evil result and creates a tendency toward repeated evil actions. This furnishes the basic context for the moral

life of the individual.”<sup>42</sup> This karmic process operates through a kind of natural moral law rather than through a system of divine judgment.

Although never actually denying the existence of the gods, Buddhism denies them any special role. Their lives in heaven are long and pleasurable, but they are in the same predicament as other creatures, being subject eventually to death and further rebirth in lower states of existence. They are not creators of the universe or in control of human destiny, and Buddhism denies the value of prayer and sacrifice to them. Of the possible modes of rebirth, human existence is preferable, because the deities are so engrossed in their own pleasures that they lose sight of the need for salvation. Enlightenment is possible only for humans.<sup>43</sup>

The ultimate goal of the Buddhist path is release from the round of rebirths with its inherent suffering. To achieve this goal is to attain *nirvana*, an enlightened state in which the fires of greed, hatred, and ignorance have been quenched. Aiken adds:

To obtain deliverance from birth, all forms of desire must be absolutely quenched, not only very wicked craving, but also the desire of such pleasures and comforts as are deemed innocent and lawful, the desire even to preserve one's conscious existence. It was through this extinction of every desire that cessation of misery was to be obtained. This state of absence of desire and pain was known as *Nirvana (Nibbana)*. This word was not coined by Buddha, but in his teaching, it assumed a new shade of meaning. Nirvana means primarily a "blowing out", and hence the extinction of the fire of desire, ill-will, delusion, of all, in short, that binds the individual to rebirth and misery. It was in the living Buddhist saint a state of calm repose, of indifference to life and death, to pleasure and pain, a state of imperturbable tranquility, where the sense of freedom from the bonds of rebirth caused the discomforts as well as the joys of life to sink into insignificance.<sup>44</sup>

The ethic that leads to nirvana is detached and inner-oriented. This involves cultivating four virtuous attitudes (Palaces of Brahma): loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. The ethic that leads to better rebirth, however, is centered on fulfilling one's duties to society. It involves acts of charity, especially support of the *sangha* (Buddhist monastic community), as well as observance of the five precepts that constitute the basic moral code of Buddhism. The precepts prohibit killing, stealing, harmful language, sexual misbehavior, and the use of intoxicants. By



observing these precepts, the three roots of evil—lust, hatred, and delusion—may be overcome.

### **3.3.4 Early Development**

Shortly before his death, the Buddha refused his disciples' request to appoint a successor, telling his followers to work out their own salvation with diligence. At that time Buddhist teachings existed only in oral traditions, and it soon became apparent that a new basis for maintaining the community's unity and purity was needed. Thus, the monastic order met periodically to reach agreement on matters of doctrine and practice. Four such meetings have been traditionally considered as major councils.

During this time when the early councils were reportedly held, a number of different schools took form and developed particular traditions regarding the Buddha's teaching and its proper interpretation. In addition to the schools that scholars have connected with particular councils and the controversies associated with them, many other schools appeared. According to later Buddhist tradition, 18 such schools emerged during the first few centuries of Buddhist history.

Later on the followers of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition in ancient India would refer to these 18 schools of ancient Buddhism as *Hīnayāna* (Sanskrit: "Lesser Vehicle"), the more orthodox, conservative schools of Buddhism. This name of course reflected the Mahayanists' evaluation of their own tradition as a superior method, surpassing the others in universality and compassion; but the name was not accepted by the conservative schools as referring to a common tradition.

Prominent among these 18 schools was the Theravada (Pali) "School of the Elders" (*Sthaviravāda* in Sanskrit). The Theravada school ultimately became and has remained the predominant Buddhist school in Sri Lanka and much of mainland Southeast Asia.

As regards the Mahayana, their most probable forerunners were the Mahasanghikas (Followers of the Great Assembly), a liberal branch of the Buddhist community that broke away from the more conservative mainstream some time before the reign of Indian king Ashoka in the 3rd century BC. Mahayana thinkers of later

periods categorized the Mahasanghikas as one of the 18 schools of Hinayana Buddhism, but when Mahayana first emerged, it resembled Mahasanghika in several areas of doctrinal interpretation. The most significant Mahayana innovation was the view of the Buddha as a supernatural being who assumed a transformation body (nirmana-kaya) to be born as the historical Buddha.

Mahayana's (The Greater Vehicle) origins can be traced to between the 2nd century BC and the 1st century AD. The early growth of Mahayana was promoted by Indian philosopher Nagarjuna, who founded the Madhyamika school. His influential writings provide some of the most persuasive early formulations of Mahayana. The Madhyamika school proliferated into a number of sects, and was carried to China in the early 5th century AD by Buddhist missionary Kumarajiva, who translated Nagarjuna's work into Chinese. By 625 Madhyamika had reached Japan by way of Korea, though everywhere it remained more influential among the scholarly elite than the common people.<sup>45</sup>

### 3.3.5 Buddhist Literature

For several centuries after the death of the Buddha, the scriptural traditions recited at the councils were transmitted orally. These were finally committed to writing about the 1st century BC. Some early schools used Sanskrit for their scriptural language. Although individual texts are extant, no complete canon has survived in Sanskrit. In contrast, the full canon of the Theravada school is written in Pali, which was apparently a popular dialect derived from Sanskrit.

The Buddhist canon is known in Pali as the *Tipitaka* (*Tripitaka* in Sanskrit), meaning "Three Baskets," because it consists of three collections of writings: the *Sutta Pitaka* (*Sutra Pitaka* in Sanskrit), a collection of discourses; the *Vinaya Pitaka*, the code of monastic discipline; and the *Abhidharma Pitaka*, which contains philosophical, psychological, and doctrinal discussions. McDermott further describes these three:

The *Sutta Pitaka* is primarily composed of dialogues between the Buddha and other people. It consists of five groups of texts: *Digha Nikaya* (Collection of Long Discourses), *Majjhima Nikaya* (Collection of Medium-Length Discourses), *Samyutta Nikaya* (Collection of Grouped Discourses), *Anguttara Nikaya* (Collection of Discourses on Numbered Topics), and *Khuddaka Nikaya* (Collection of Miscellaneous Texts). In the fifth group, the *Jatakas*,

comprising stories of former lives of the Buddha, and the *Dhammapada* (Religious Sentences), a summary of the Buddha's teachings on mental discipline and morality, are especially popular. The *Vinaya Pitaka* consists of more than 225 rules governing the conduct of Buddhist monks and nuns. Each is accompanied by a story explaining the original reason for the rule. The rules are arranged according to the seriousness of the offense resulting from their violation. The *Abhidharma Pitaka* consists of seven separate works. They include detailed classifications of psychological phenomena, metaphysical analysis, and a thesaurus of technical vocabulary. Although technically authoritative, the texts in this collection have little influence on the lay Buddhist. The complete canon, much expanded, also exists in Tibetan and Chinese versions.<sup>46</sup>

Two noncanonical texts that have great authority within Theravada Buddhism are the *Milindapanha* (Questions of King Milinda) and the *Visuddhimagga* (Path of Purification). The *Milindapanha* dates from about the 2nd century AD. This is a dialogue dealing with a series of fundamental problems in Buddhist thought. The *Visuddhimagga* is the masterpiece of the most famous of Buddhist commentators, Buddhaghosa (flourished early 5th century AD). It is a large compendium which summarizes Buddhist thought and meditative practice.

Theravada Buddhists have traditionally considered the Tipitaka to be the remembered words of Siddhartha Gautama. Mahayana Buddhists have not limited their scriptures to the teachings of this historical figure, however, nor has Mahayana ever bound itself to a closed canon of sacred writings. Various scriptures have thus been authoritative for different branches of Mahayana at various periods of history. Among the more important Mahayana scriptures are the following: the *Saddharmapundarika Sutra* (Lotus of the Good Law Sutra, popularly known as the Lotus Sutra), the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, the *Avatamsaka Sutra* (Garland Sutra), and the *Lankavatara Sutra* (The Buddha's Descent to Sri Lanka Sutra), as well as a group of writings known as the *Prajnaparamita* (Perfection of Wisdom).<sup>47</sup>

### **3.3.6 Spread of Buddhism**

King Ashoka's son Mahinda and daughter Sanghamitta are credited with the conversion of Sri Lanka (3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC). From the beginning of its history there, Theravada was the state religion of Sri Lanka. According to tradition, Theravada was carried to Myanmar from Sri Lanka during the reign of Ashoka, but no firm evidence of its presence there appears until the 5th century AD. From Myanmar, Theravada

spread to the area of modern Thailand in the 6th century. It was adopted by the Thai people when they finally entered the region from southwestern China between the 12th and 14th centuries. With the rise of the Thai Kingdom, it was adopted as the state religion. Theravada was adopted by the royal house in Laos during the 14th century. Both Mahayana and Hinduism had begun to influence Cambodia by the end of the 2nd century AD. After the 14th century, however, under Thai influence, Theravada gradually replaced the older establishment as the primary religion in Cambodia.

About the beginning of the Christian era, Buddhism was carried to Central Asia. From there it entered China along the trade routes by the early 1st century AD. Although opposed by the Confucian orthodoxy and subject to periods of persecution in 446, 574-77, and 845, Buddhism was able to take root, influencing Chinese culture and, in turn, adapting itself to Chinese ways.

From China, Buddhism continued its spread. Confucian authorities discouraged its expansion into Vietnam, but Mahayana's influence there was beginning to be felt as early as AD 189. According to traditional sources, Buddhism first arrived in Korea from China in 372 AD. From this date Korea was gradually converted through Chinese influence over a period of centuries.

Buddhism was carried into Japan from Korea. It was known to the Japanese earlier, but the official date for its introduction is usually given as 552 AD. It was proclaimed the state religion of Japan in 594 by Prince Shotoku.

Buddhism was first introduced into Tibet through the influence of foreign wives of the king, beginning in the 7th century AD. By the middle of the next century, it had become a significant force in Tibetan culture. A key figure in the development of Tibetan Buddhism was the Indian monk Padmasambhava, who arrived in Tibet in 747 AD. His main interest was the spread of Tantric Buddhism, which became the primary form of Buddhism in Tibet. Indian and Chinese Buddhists vied for influence, and the Chinese were finally defeated and expelled from Tibet near the end of the 8th century.<sup>48</sup>

### **3.3.7 Buddhism in Cambodian Culture**

Buddhism arrived in Cambodia even before the Christian era, under the form of Mahayana (the Greater Vehicle) and also under the form of Hinayana (the Lesser Vehicle) or specifically the traditional Theravada Buddhism. This latter form of Buddhism from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards is responsible for shaping the minds of the Khmer people to this present time.

#### **3.3.7.1 Buddhism instead of Brahmanism**

The spread of Theravada Buddhism “added new and more numerous ‘gods’ to the belief systems” (enhanced their existing belief system) to offset the perceived declining power of the traditional gods and engender new possible sources of protection. For the Khmers, Buddhism offered a more gentle religion with an explanation of the human condition and prescription for a humble life, in contrast to an elitism associated with Brahmanism. Rather than a priestly class with their supernatural powers and access to supernatural sanctions, the teachers of Buddhism (the “*Sangha*” or coming together of monks) lived simple lives exemplifying the moral values of the religion and were supported solely by the voluntary contributions of the laity.

#### **3.3.7.2 Buddhism as a way of viewing society**

Buddhism is described as “a system of thought, a way of understanding life, an analysis of mental processes, and a series of well constructed arguments which point towards the adoption of certain attitudes and values and practices which may create the conditions for a new vision of human life and purpose.”<sup>49</sup>

Buddhist doctrines speak about the role of sadness and suffering in life (*dukkha*), acceptance of proper relationships between groups in society, the effect of past actions (good and bad) as determinant of the current life circumstances (*karma*), and proper behavior, humble attitude and merit-making to improve one’s path through reincarnation. Human life is explained as essentially social in character, connected through these interlocking and reciprocal relationships.

In a way, social inequalities in Cambodia are accepted as the consequences of the “load of merits or demerits” of previous lives. One was born poor because of the bad deeds he or she committed in a previous life; others are rich and powerful because of the merits in his or her previous life. As Bit comments: “Life in the present incarnation cannot be changed but the measure of man’s emotional development is his reaction to his circumstances. Such an attitude stifles the desire to succeed at the expense of another and encourages the Cambodian to accept his situation, whatever that may be.”<sup>50</sup> Because of this somewhat passive resignation, Buddhism in Cambodia has become very tolerant of all other religions.

### **3.3.7.3 Buddhism mixed with Animism and Brahmanism**

Buddhism in Cambodia has most of its followers in rural areas. These people easily merge classical Buddhist thought with animistic and Brahmanist traditions. Because of this, cultural patterns are produced through the centuries which are not typical of Buddhism as practiced elsewhere. Bit gives depth to this argument:

Cambodian society is inherently conservative, reflecting its historical position as an agricultural based folk society and its religious heritage. The constant theme that runs throughout its cultural history has been a search to mitigate the fear of unseen powerful threats to the sense of security of peasants which stemmed from: (1) the unrestrained authority of personal cults (embodied in the role of the elite) to determine the fate of their subjects, (2) and the constellation of numerous spiritual gods with awesome power to inflict retribution should they be ignored.<sup>51</sup>

A by-product of the many gods which are present in the belief system has been a diffused reliance of any one (god) as the unfailing agent to relieve fear. When allegiance and devotion to one does not bring about the desired effect they long, another god can be tried. The consequence for the Cambodian believer is a kind of endless search for spiritual protection with conflicting cultural norms guiding the search. This effect overflows too in the Khmer society. What results is a society characterized by a system of reciprocal relationships between patron and client, which offers another source of implied protection for them.

### 3.3.7.4 Buddhist View of the Divine

Buddha distinguished two orders of the universe: the “world” (*laukei*) and the “other world” (*baralauk*). In the “world” there are three levels: the “lower or nether world” (*sthan kraom*) which is a world of ghosts, the “middle world” (*satvalauk*) which is the world of human beings and animals, and the “upper world or heavens” (*sthan sour*) which is the world of the gods of Hinduism. So Buddha actually never denied the existence of the gods, he just emphasized that these divinities are not in a more enviable situation than men. They are also under the law of suffering. And when their load of merits become exhausted, they will have a new existence filled with sufferings until their final purification.

From a Buddhist viewpoint then, the “God” in whom the Christians believe is located in “the heavens” like Indra and the rest of the Hindu gods. Sometimes you might get into an argument with Buddhist monks when they say: “Buddha is not a god, he is superior to any god!” But do remember that for them, Buddha is not of this world, he is already of the “next world” (nirvana). He has already reached the liberation from the cycle of reincarnation whereas the gods have not.<sup>52</sup>

### 3.4 Conclusion

We have seen in this chapter that the religious world of the Cambodian people is an accumulation of different strata of religious beliefs piled up one after another. And in the process each early pre-Christian religion was assimilated, cultivated and interpreted again and again down through history. To put it simply, the Cambodians are officially Theravada Buddhists and yet Animism and Brahmanism have been interwoven in the way they live their Buddhist faith.

With hindsight, let us take a look back at the history of Christianity here in Cambodia. A question that could baffle many is: How come after more than four centuries, Christianity was never assimilated culturally in the Khmer way of living unlike Animism, Brahmanism and Buddhism? Would it be perhaps because of

Christianity's very exclusive doctrinal ways or because it was plainly not considered Khmer? The hypothetical possibilities for an answer could be endless. For our part, the challenge of the next chapter then would be to find routes that could bring Christian concepts into the heart and mind of our Khmer friends in order to trigger this assimilation.



## **Chapter 4**

### **4.0 In Search for Possible Routes to Pastoral Action**

#### **4.1 The Christian Re-entry**

After taking over from the Khmer Rouge for 10 years, and after much international pressure, the Vietnamese finally pulled out in 1989. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, Prime Minister Hun Sen promulgated a new constitution declaring Buddhism as the state religion and allowed practice of other religions that conformed to constitutional requirements. In June, the Council of Ministers forbade the spreading (proselytizing) of the Christian religion to the Khmers in the Kingdom of Cambodia. However, reception of Bibles, various religious books as well as material gifts by Christian Humanitarian organizations were tolerated. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of April 1990, Easter Sunday, more than fifteen hundred Christians, Catholics and Evangelical, Khmer and Vietnamese or foreigners, were for the first time after fifteen years reunited to celebrate the Eucharist publicly in Phnom Penh (the capital). The 90's saw many other Christian dominations and communities coming in. Though proselytizing is strictly prohibited by the government, public worship and conversions of willing Khmers are tolerated. This is the situation we face right now. It might sound ironic but a further understanding of Cambodian culture explains this.

#### **4.2 An Intertwining of Religions**

From the previous chapters, we have seen down through Cambodian history, Animism, Brahmanism and Buddhism cross paths with each other. But far from working towards exclusivity, we have seen that they intermingled and emerged into a particular Khmer way of practicing Buddhism. Thus we find a certain kind of religious tolerance of Cambodian culture towards religion. This however has a negative side effect on its people. Seanglim Bit illustrates this:

The constellation of Cambodian religious beliefs effectively replaces inner sources of awareness and orientation with powerful outside forces believed to determine events related to human experience. Concepts of individuality which would affirm the uniqueness of the individual as the principle actor in his/her own life scenario are not supported in their belief systems. For the individual in society, pro-active personal involvement in assessing one's choices in life, understanding the consequences of actions, setting goals and taking responsibility for the outcomes, are to be reconciled against a doctrine which holds resignation and passive acceptance to be the proper course of human existence.<sup>1</sup>

Their brand of tolerance could develop in them a further passive resignation towards any religion. This could prove negative in the sense of their lack of deep reflection towards a religion that they could encounter in the future. Pastorally for Christianity, this could mean that there could be a danger of having Khmer neophytes receiving baptism not because of a total commitment towards Christ but because of peer or family pressure, or even because of financial or social gains they perceive as coupled to the acceptance of Christianity.

#### **4.3 A Danger of Assimilation**

From this pattern of religious tolerance overflowing to the people's passive acceptance of a religion, there could be the danger of Christianity being accepted and later assimilated as "one" of the many religions they would turn to because of convenience. This utilitarian use of Christianity could find a way through the Khmer way of thinking and be included and integrated subconsciously into their existing belief system. Chean Rithy Men has this report on Khmer refugees who became Christians in the US:

The Khmer certainly did not make a conscious decision to use Christianity as an alternative explanation of karma in order to explain their suffering during the Khmer Rouge period. Rather, the Khmer turned to Christianity both as a belief system and social network since there were no temples for people to go to... By the 1990's, there were as many as fifty Khmer temples and one hundred fifty monks in the United States... Many Cambodian families I knew who went to church in the 80's have now stopped attending church and have returned to the practice of Buddhism. Although Khmer refugees return to Buddhism, they retain Christian elements... Most Khmer see the two religions as compatible... Christianity is used as a tool for moral teaching... Unlike Hinduism, Buddhism and spirit cults, which are already deeply rooted in Khmer culture and society, the Christian stratum has only recently been added to the existing religious system.<sup>2</sup>

This simply means that Christian educators should always be aware of this tendency of Christianity's absorption into Khmer culture's multi-faceted belief system. In order to avoid this pitfall, knowledge and the understanding then of Khmer culture and its intricacies are indispensable for a Christian who wishes to live with the Khmer people.

#### **4.4 A Difficulty of Proclamation**

Being immersed in understanding the Khmer culture however does not relieve us Christians from the task of proclamation of the Gospel because deep down in us we know that there already exists in the individuals and peoples we encounter an expectation, though at times unconscious, of knowing the truth about God, about humankind, and how we are set free from sin and death. But then this proclamation should not be prompted by a sectarian urge or a spirit of proselytism or a sense of superiority. This poses for us a great dilemma. This same difficulty is attested to by the Synod Fathers in *Ecclesia in Asia*:

Yet even during the consultations before the Synod many Asian Bishops referred to difficulties in proclaiming Jesus as the only Saviour. During the Assembly, the situation was described in this way: "Some of the followers of the great religions of Asia have no problem in accepting Jesus as a manifestation of the Divine or the Absolute, or as an 'enlightened one'. But it is difficult for them to see Him as the only manifestation of the Divine". In fact, the effort to share the gift of faith in Jesus as the only Saviour is fraught with philosophical, cultural and theological difficulties, especially in light of the beliefs of Asia's great religions, deeply intertwined with cultural values and specific world views.<sup>3</sup>

Deeply aware of this situational complexity Christians are tasked with "speaking the truth in love" (Eph 4:15), of proclaiming the Good News with loving respect and esteem for the Khmer listeners. The Christian's Proclamation must be that which respects the rights of consciences and does not violate freedom, since we know that faith always demands a free response on the part of the individual. This respect is twofold: "respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man" <sup>4</sup>

Christians, in obedience to Christ's command, are urged on to this task of proclamation: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Mt 28:19-20) Every Christian then knows that every person has the right to hear this Good News of God who reveals and gives himself in Christ.

#### **4.5 Bridges across the Two Worlds**

Our task of Proclamation can only be done in a spirit of true dialogue with our Khmer Buddhist friends. Incidentally in the Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council's *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* have mentioned "Buddhism" among those religious traditions worthy of high regard. The Secretariat for Non-Christians have issued a two volume set *Towards the Meeting with Buddhism* in 1970 which published articles on the background and the contemporary situation of Buddhist traditions as well as suggested topics for dialogue. However, on our part we shall try to extract from our paper how we could achieve such dialogue.

##### **4.5.1 The Theological Bridge**

A helpful starting point for sincere dialogue is to look for what unites rather than what divides. St Paul becomes a model for us in our search for common platforms for a theological discussion and exchange. Once, the Apostle Paul was brought to the Areopagus and asked what new teaching he had to present because the Athenians spent a lot of their time in discussions of new topics.

So Paul, standing in the middle of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself

gives to all men life and breath and everything. And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.' (Acts 17:22-28)

Paul sought after what the Athenians already knew and believed implicitly. From these points as departure, Paul presented his own concepts and beliefs. It is in this context that we present our theological bridges across the two worlds of Buddhism and Christianity.

#### **4.5.1.1 Buddha and Christ**

Our first theological bridge is the quest for “the” Religious Model: Buddha for the Buddhist and Christ for the Christian. Both received a mission: on the day of his enlightenment Gautama became “Buddha” who had the mission to save all living beings by proclaiming the truth about all things and his disciples saw in him as their way towards their “salvation” (nirvana). Jesus on the day of his baptism saw his mission as the “Christ” – the savior, He who proclaims: “I am the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6).

Although both Buddha and Christ lead a life of detachment from their own self and from the world, they are nevertheless filled with compassion towards the people of the world. And this legacy of compassion they left for their followers to emulate.

Those who wrote the story of Buddha and those who wrote the one of Christ describe them both as fulfilling the hope of humankind. The Buddhists wrote the history of their master by relying on his teachings; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote the Gospels through the eyes of those who heard the teachings of Jesus and witnessed his deeds. The only difference would be that the latter (the evangelists) wrote the Gospels in the light of the resurrection of Jesus.

Both Buddhist and Christian writings are in view of a fulfillment of a future expectation.

When Buddha comes again, there will be a light over the whole world, the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the mute will speak, the bent ones will stand upright, the lame will walk, those bound by chains or in jail will be liberated, the fire of hell will be extinguished, the evil spirits will no more starve, closed doors and windows will be opened... wild beasts will be no more afraid, all diseases will be healed, the animals that hate one another will be full of mercy towards one another....<sup>5</sup>

Is this Buddhist text not similar to that of Isaiah's future messianic expectation which is always referred back to in Matthew and Luke? (cf. Is 42:1ff; Mt 11:1ff; Lk 4:16 ff.)

#### **4.5.1.2 Eightfold Path and Ten Commandments**

Our second theological bridge is the quest for harmony between human beings. This is achieved through the prerogative of the Moral precepts: the Noble Eightfold Path for the Buddhist and the Ten Commandments for the Christian. For the Buddhist it is worded as right views, right aspirations, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditational attainment. For the Christian it is worded as "right" worship, honor for parents; do not kill, steal, lie, covet nor commit adultery (cf. Dt 5: 6-21). Both teach respect for fellowmen and the right to treat and be treated fairly and well. Both speak about the value of doing good to others as embodied in their ethical principles. In short it is in living righteously that harmony is brought about within a given community of persons.

#### **4.5.1.3 Buddhist Compassion and Christian Love**

Our third theological bridge is the quest for the "perfection" of the law: Compassion for the Buddhist and Love for the Christian. Both are encouraged by these virtues to do more than just sticking to the minimum. Both are asked to pay attention to others, to refrain from harming or even saddening others, from upsetting them even sometimes to the point of not showing our own feelings (e.g. anger, disappointment, discontent). Both take pity on beggars, on the poor and the unfortunate. The difference would lie of course in the fact that for the Buddhist, the poor are companions of pain and because giving alms makes one acquire merits. Nevertheless for a Christian the motivation is that each man is a "likeness" of God and as Jesus would say, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." (Mt 25: 40)

## 4.5.2 The Catechetical Bridge

Suffice it to say, that in our study of the three Pre-Christian religions, we could find certain catechetical bridges that could be useful in helping interested Cambodians or neophyte Khmer Christians make that crossing from an Animistic, Brahmanistic or Buddhist conceptual framework to a Christian one.

### 4.5.2.1 From the Spirits to the Christ

In the previous chapter we saw the Khmer animistic tendencies especially in their strong belief in the spirits (be they good or bad). But these concepts too exist in our Christian thinking though in a different way. For example, the Christian gospels are filled with stories of exorcisms of the devil that possess people and make them mute, bent or sick. These stories puzzle the people with scientific education in our present century who must interpret the biblical texts in a symbolic manner. However, it is in this same animistic context that Jesus Christ brought the Good News of liberation in his own time. It must be remembered that even in the Christian Church now there are still exorcisms.

To expect to destroy this cultural given in the Khmer people is unrealistic. It will reappear as long as the people are not deeply liberated of their fears. On the other hand, what could be done is to affirm that the risen Jesus is Master of all these spirits and that he is the Victor and that he lives with those who believe in him.

I do not cease to give thanks for you, ... that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in *Christ* when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, *far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.* (Eph 1:16-23)

This message could help liberate people interiorly and enable them to progress towards a genuine conversion. This is the orientation of the Christian Church here in Cambodia. It is one of following the example of St. Paul who proclaimed the universal sovereignty of Christ over all visible and invisible beings.

*He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities--all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Col 1:16)*

Therefore, we present to Khmers a Jesus, who rose from the dead, and is the Master of all these spirits and that he is above and over all the good and bad spirits alike.

#### **4.5.2.2 From the Hindu gods to the Christian God**

The vocabulary used by Christians here in Cambodia concerning God and anything related to divinity is drawn from the vocabulary the Brahmins used in reference to their divinity. This Brahmanistic vocabulary seems to be relatively close to the categories of Biblical Theology in the Old Testament.

The word “*Preah*” (without modifier) as used by many Cambodians and in the Christian translation of the Bible, corresponds to one of the many deities of Brahmanic literature. For centuries, the Catholic Khmers were accustomed to use the word “*Preah Mochas Suor*” (the Master of Heaven) which was a translation of the word used for God in China and Vietnam. This corresponds relatively well to Brahma or Indra. In the same way, we can say that omniscience, omnipotence, love of human beings are divine attributes that have some correspondence with Brahmanism.

In the sixties, the Catholics started using the word “*Preah Atitep*” (the First God) but rather rapidly the word was discarded, even if it is the word found in the French-Khmer Dictionary. It is the word that designated the divinity as Creator and Providence. But in Cambodian popular literature this god is often depicted as a cruel and wicked god who always picks a quarrel with humans when he interferes in their



lives. Now Catholics and other Christian churches prefer to use the word “*Preah Jia Os Mochas*” (God who owns everything) in the Bible translations.

All the terminologies concerning God and anything about God is drawn from the royal vocabulary of the country’s language. The Christians chose this vocabulary because the Old Testament speaks of the kingship of God and his kingdom. One case in point is when Christians pray daily; Christians use this royal vocabulary to pray to God. But because this royal vocabulary is not always well known to ordinary people, the intimacy of expression of the prayer is lost. Also since Christians must address God as their Father (“Abba”, Father) in a tender manner as Jesus and St. Paul suggested, it is not always convenient to use the royal vocabulary which is too formal to address God. So, the new Christian prayers use the royal vocabulary mixed with ordinary language.<sup>6</sup>

This dilemma of language use is further discussed by Ponchaud in reference to Jesus Christ’s humanity and divinity:

When we speak of Jesus of Nazareth, the son of the carpenter, which vocabulary should we use? In their faith, after the Resurrection, the Evangelists present Jesus as “Christ” (the anointed one) and as “Lord” (eminently royal term) from the time Jesus was conceived. There is a risk, if we used only the royal vocabulary to speak about Jesus, that the Cambodians will understand that Jesus is an “avatar” (that means a reincarnation of Indra) and will be unable to consider Jesus in his human condition. But, on the contrary, if we use only ordinary vocabulary, we go against the rules of the Cambodian literature, we “offend” the ears of the Khmer people and Jesus will be perceived only as an ordinary man. The first Protestant translation [of the Bible] used the royal vocabulary. The new ecumenical translation has chosen a median solution: in the stories of the Gospels, the narrator uses the royal vocabulary when he speaks about Jesus. When people address Jesus, respectful words of the ordinary language are used except when the text intends to express the post-paschal faith to the risen Christ; when Jesus prays to his Father, we opted for royal vocabulary.<sup>7</sup>

Until recently, Christians here in Cambodia used to employ the word “*Tevoda*” (divinity) to designate the Angels. That appeared to be the normal translation for the heavenly beings who were the messengers of God. But one day, some Catechumens showed difficulties in making a comparison between the birth of Jesus and the one of Buddha. They seemed to understand that all the divinities were present surrounding the child as an “avatar” of Indra. In the new translation, the word

“*Tevatut*” (messenger or delegate of the divinities) is now used because this word seems to be more in line with the Biblical “angel”.

#### 4.5.2.3 From Buddhist “divinity” to Christian Divinity

If one understands well the Buddhist cosmology, then one will realize that no Khmer child will want to go to the “heaven” (*Sthan Suor*). Instead, the child would prefer to go to the Nirvana. That is why in the new ecumenical translation of the Khmer Bible, an intermediary word had to be chosen for Heaven – “*Sthan Baramasokh*” which means “a place of great bliss.”

For a Buddhist, there is no “creation,” the “nature” (*thommacheat*) was born by itself (*kaeut aeng*). This is the definition given to students at secondary schools or at the pagodas and is something which is a matter of fact for them. For a well educated Buddhist then, the idea of creation in Christian doctrine is a figurative and fictional story only. And so for a Buddhist, to declare God as “creator” means to put Him at the same level of Brahma, Indra and Shiva residing in the heavens - the upper world. Consequently this means for them that the Christian God is neither eternal nor infinite. Thus it might not be convenient to start introducing the God of the Christians by speaking about creation as we are wont to do. Maybe it would be better to speak first about the desire for infinity that is in the heart of every man that would lead to a certain spiritual experience.

In this regard, if we say: God loves (*sralanh* = to tie or *snehar* = sexual union) us, the Khmer Buddhists would draw the conclusion that this particular god lacks something because he needs to link himself with men. It is suggested not to use immediately the expression “love of God” which is analogical and could be easily misinterpreted by them. Instead the Buddhist language has a beautiful expression we could use for God. We could introduce God as “*Metta-karuna*” that means bounty, pity, and mercy – an expression denoting the attitude of the one who loves without knowing the troubles of the passions, without expecting anything from the one he loves. After all in the Christian theology, we often say mercy is God’s weakness, it is love demonstrated in its most excellent form. Although this term appears nearer to the

Biblical “mercy,” it is still does not express the gift of the self to the other nor that mutual involvement in the covenant, nor the solidarity of God with men via the incarnation.

#### 4.5.2.4 From Buddha to Christ

For a Khmer Buddhist, Jesus is not the only man who was born in an exceptional way:

Buddha also was born from a virginal conception after the dream of his mother who saw a white elephant. When Buddha was born, his mother was standing, the child Buddha walked seven steps and under his foot, at each step, a flower of lotus opened and then the new-born declared: ‘I am the top of the World, I am the most illustrious man of the world, I am the first-born of all humankind and this is my last generation.’ A multitude of deities (*tevodas*) were watching this marvelous birth.<sup>8</sup>

In Khmer translations, the vocabulary must be carefully chosen. When educated Khmers speak about the birth of Christ, they often use the word which is also used for the birth of Buddha – “*Chap pradesanthi*” (to take the renaissance). Buddha’s birth for him was a new birth which was his last life or last reincarnation. But for Jesus it was a real birth as man, a true incarnation.

This presentation of Buddha’s birth can help us be on guard when we present the birth of Jesus. It would be better to dwell upon the theological meaning without insisting upon the marvels because at this popular level, Buddhism is unequalled. After all they were ahead of Jesus chronologically.

However there are many commonalities between Buddha and Jesus. Both have known temptations. The themes of their temptations are similar even if their symbolic presentations are different: they are temptations of possessing, of power, and of domination to which both men emerge victors. For both it is the Devil who causes the temptations. “Devil” is now translated in the Khmer Bible as “*mear*” = one who stands in the way; “Satan” in Hebrew, “Diabolos” in Greek. Before this understanding, Christian translators used the word “*Areak*” (a spirit that protects) to translate “Devil” and it has caused some misinterpretations.

Ponchaud points out more striking similarities and contrasts between the two:

Both teach men to detach themselves from their own selves as the unique way to happiness even if the substance of that happiness is radically different in each teaching: extinction of desires for Buddha, plenitude of Life for Jesus. Both manifest a spiritual reaction against the formalism of Brahmanism or of the Jewish Pharisaism. Buddha makes his way alone through the use of reason only, Jesus is always making reference to his Father. Buddha entered into “nirvana” and Jesus rose from the dead. Life is not seen under the same aspect in the two religions: for a Buddhist “life” is evil, the fruit of “karma” or ignorance and, for the Christian life is a sharing of the Life of God. The resurrection is not a reincarnation... but a definitive liberation.<sup>9</sup>

In our pastoral action, it might be beneficial to present the resurrection as a kind of “perfect enlightenment,” a kind of victory over all the powers of evil even over death. A passage in Peter’s letter best describes this hope we long for and wish to share with them:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet: 3-7)

#### **4.5.2.5 From a Buddhist religion to a Christian Religion**

Buddhism as we have seen has always presented itself as a moral teaching that enables a man to have a correct understanding of the world he lives in. It leads him to a correct perception of the values that must be the principles for his actions. However in it is no idea of a personal relation with a god. In fact, the word used to designate “religion” in Khmer is “*Sassana*” which literally means “moral teaching.

And so in Buddhism, there is no personal faith that leads to personal union with God, in love and in trust, through Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit as Christians have. When a Khmer uses the expression “I believe” (*knyom jeu*) he means simply that: “I recognize that what you say or what your Jesus says is true. But it does not mean that I want to be united lovingly with him and the Holy Spirit.” Here is a difficult point for explanation of the Christian faith. Suffice it to say that

translators have not yet found a completely satisfying Khmer word for “faith” until the present.

When somebody has a Buddhist background, we can understand that a Cambodian neophyte to Christianity will feel the necessity of getting the right knowledge to be a good Christian. A true Buddhist is one who understands the world clearly, in the same way this new Christian wants to know; for many Cambodians, the true Christian is the one who knows because he has studied the Bible. Thus we must be aware of this tendency that might lead to a kind of Gnosticism – where salvation is merited only by right knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

### **4.5.3 The Practical Bridge**

Needless to say in spite of our differences of culture and religion, we all still hold our humanity as a common starting point. Thus any social attempt to work together with our Buddhist brothers and sisters could always be considered a practical bridge for these “two worlds.” Here in Cambodia there have been many efforts done towards this down through the centuries but they are more indispensable now at these present times.

#### **4.5.3.1 Intellectual Interchange**

Many missionaries, nay even Non-Government Organization volunteers from various International Humanitarian Organizations start their mission here by a seminar on Cambodian culture with a special emphasis on Buddhism and its implications in their social lives. Strikingly, Buddhist monks always are very accommodating to speak on behalf of their religion to other Christians without influencing them to give up Christianity and turn to Buddhism. This openness on both sides has opened up avenues for a common study of each others beliefs. Both sides are actively cooperating in common research especially as regards to the in-depth study of the Khmer language.

#### **4.5.3.2 Social Awareness Programs**

Another avenue worth following is the common concerns both Buddhist monks and Christian communities have for the benefit of people within their vicinity. This is actualized through social awareness programs both sectors launch though separately yet simultaneously. An example is a Non-smoking Campaign launched in the pagoda beside a Christian School. The Campaign not only prohibits smoking within the pagoda's compound but monks give occasional seminars to people who enter their premises about the dangers of smoking. This same program too is done just across the street in the Christian school. This Buddhist and Christians do also with many environmental programs (protecting the environment) as they launch them in parallel yet simultaneous ways.

#### **4.5.3.3 Education Programs**

Buddhist pagodas take care also of the general education of the young people within their area without expecting anything in return. This too is a goal for many Christian groups and organizations which come to stay here in Cambodia. A noticeable phenomenon in the city is pagodas now even offer English and computer lessons like their Christian counterparts as supplement to the general education children receive. Perhaps this common goal of education can be further enhanced later on in the future with a sharing of educative materials between the two.

#### **4.5.3.4 Common Heart for the Poor**

Helping the poor, the forsaken or the oppressed has always been at the heart of both Buddhists and Christians. Buddhist monks make it a point to help the needy in their day to day sojourn. In the same way, Christian communities have projects that provide for the basic needs of the poor people in their area. At Don Bosco School in Phnom Penh, where technical skills are taught to out-of-school youth to prepare them for the workforce, are housed a hundred boarders, many of whom are very poor and others orphaned. They come from different parts of the country and thus have nowhere to stay within the two years of their skills training. Unfortunately, Don Bosco (a Catholic NGO) could not house more than this number. Luckily, the Buddhist pagoda across their street helps by housing around a hundred more of their

students who come from far-flung provinces. Joint cooperation between Buddhist and Christians do exist in the common task of helping the poor.

#### **4.5.3.5 Occasions for Prayers that unite**

Christians and Buddhist like to pray. Though the manner of praying, the person to whom it is addressed, the purpose of prayers may be different from each other, the intention of praying in order to ask blessings is common. People go to Buddhist monks that their activities may be blessed, likewise Christians to their priests and pastors. Because of this there have been many occasions when Buddhist and Christians join together in common prayer and in common instances of asking blessings both from Buddhist monks and Christians priests or pastors upon embarking upon social activities that would benefit the community – activities like opening of schools, digging of ponds (water sources), or to mark the start of the plowing season. In connection with this, both Buddhist and Christians hold the spirit of their departed with reverence. In Cambodia, the feast of *Pchum Ben* is a week-long national feast when everyone goes to the pagoda in order to venerate and remember their departed loved ones. In Christian liturgy, we have the same feast on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of November when All Saint's and All Souls Day are celebrated. In Christian countries this is a time when people light candles and pray in cemeteries for their deceased friends and relatives. Here in Cambodia, Christians move this feast on the week of Pchum Ben to show their solidarity with their Cambodian brothers and sisters in praying for the dead.

#### **4.5.4 The Personal Bridge**

Finally, Christians must confront the fact that in the task of Inculturation and Evangelization, no amount of theoretical debate and discussion or complexity of catechetical methods of instruction can capture the ears and the hearts of Khmer listeners much more than the Christian's witnessing of one's own personal life lived in Christ.

In fact, the Cambodian perception of religion invites us to examine ourselves in the light of our own Christian faith. We have seen how the Khmer Buddhists give importance to a good moral life. When Cambodians see that Christians live a life according to their Christian moral precepts, then a Christian becomes a credible witness of his faith in their eyes. Of course the reasons for living a good moral life might be different with these two religions; nevertheless, the moral actions would speak more loudly to them than all the rationalizations we could ever think of.

Another thing which Khmer Buddhism holds in high esteem is asceticism and contemplation. This provides one with a mystical and spiritual experience which is more important for them rather than just the theory and knowledge of theological matters. We have this same thing in Christian spirituality. If we can only show to them through our way of living an asceticism that negates oneself in order to be nearer Christ and a spirit of prayer and contemplation that unites us with Jesus, then our Khmer listeners cannot but accept the message we bring.

Needless to say, to bear witness to Christ with one's life is the ultimate strategy for winning the hearts of the people we wish to share the Good News with. We conclude with the words of John Paul II in *Ecclesia in Asia*: "To bear witness to Jesus Christ is the supreme service which the Church can offer to the peoples of Asia, for it responds to their profound longing for the Absolute, and it unveils the truths and values which will ensure their integral human development."<sup>11</sup>

#### **4.6 A Hope for the Future**

Around the beginning of this millennium, along with many humanitarian NGO's, came other Christian denominations which saw Cambodia as a vast rice field ready for the harvesting. They saw the Khmers as people that had to be saved in the shortest time possible. Door to door attempts towards proselytization became their strategy targeting baptism by the hundreds. The government saw this as an insult to the Khmer laws previously established. The only problem was that the Khmer would tend to see any follower of Christ as a Christian without any distinction whether he be Catholic, Evangelical, Lutheran or Anglican. Thus the imprudence of any new



denomination arriving results in the others who have worked longer in the field being blamed for a fault that was not their own. This is the reason why Christians coming here should be in touch with the Khmer sensibilities for they too are persons equal to us in all respects – in short Christians who come here must act as servants not saviors.

Before I came to this country, my friends reminded me: “Before you set foot in that place, always remember that God was there before you.” Thus learning more and more the ways of the Khmer, their longings and aspirations, becomes an imperative for me and for those who wish to share their lives with this people. Only in this way will the Khmer people see us Christians as partners in search for the truth, partners in the quest of liberation from the social evils of the times, partners in molding the Khmer society, because they know we love them for who they are and not who they could be. This is my hope for the future; for in this way alone I think would I be able to discover that the God that had worked here in Cambodia before me for centuries is the same God I believe in. And knowing that just as God was there before I arrived He will continue to be there after I have left.

## END NOTES:

### End Notes to Chapter 1:

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, italicized words enclosed in quotation marks will refer to the phonetic spelling equivalent of the Cambodian word (script).

<sup>2</sup> The terms “Khmer” and “Cambodian” mean the same and shall be used interchangeably in the paper.

<sup>3</sup> Rooney, Dawn F., “Cambodia,” Microsoft Encarta 2004 (CD-ROM), Redmond: Microsoft Corp, 2003

<sup>4</sup> Pontifical Council for Culture, “Towards a Pastoral Approach to Culture” [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/cultr/documents/rc\\_pc\\_pc-cultr\\_doc\\_03061999\\_pastoral\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/cultr/documents/rc_pc_pc-cultr_doc_03061999_pastoral_en.html)

<sup>5</sup> Umoren, U.E., Enculturation and Inculturation: The Gospel of Liberation and the Culture of African Womanhood, <http://www.sedos.org/english/umorem.htm>  
cf. Umoren, U.E. "Inculturation and the Future of the Church in Africa" in Ukpong, J.S. et al (eds.) Evangelisation in Africa in the Third Millennium Challenges and Prospects, 1992, Port Harcourt: CIWA, pp. 63-65.

<sup>6</sup> Pontifical Council for Culture, Towards a Pastoral Approach to Culture, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/cultr/documents/rc\\_pc\\_pc-cultr\\_doc\\_03061999\\_pastoral\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/cultr/documents/rc_pc_pc-cultr_doc_03061999_pastoral_en.html)  
accessed on 01 December, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> John Paul II. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 06 November 1999, n.21, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_06111999\\_ecclesia-in-asia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_06111999_ecclesia-in-asia_en.html)  
Accessed on 15 December, 2003

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem.

## End Notes on Chapter 2:

- <sup>1</sup> Ponchaud, Francois, *The Cathedral of the Rice Paddy*, Paris: Fayard, 1990, p.13.
- <sup>2</sup> Bit, Seanglim, *The Warrior Heritage*, California, USA: Seanglim Bit, 1991, p.16.
- <sup>3</sup> Paraphrased from: Chandler, David, *The Land and People of Cambodia*, NY, USA: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991, pp. 42-43.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 44.
- <sup>5</sup> Chandler, David, *A History of Cambodia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 1998, p. 15. (cited from L.P. Briggs, *The Ancient Khmer Empire*, Philadelphia, 1951, p.29.)
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 16. (cited from L.P. Briggs, *The Ancient Khmer Empire*, Philadelphia, 1951, p.28.)
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 20.
- <sup>8</sup> Chandler, David, *The Land and People of Cambodia*, p. 50.
- <sup>9</sup> Bit, Seanglim, *The Warrior Heritage*, pp.4-5.
- <sup>10</sup> Chandler, David, *A History of Cambodia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., p.35.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 36.
- <sup>12</sup> Chandler, David, *The Land and People of Cambodia*, p. 54.
- <sup>13</sup> Chandler, David, *A History of Cambodia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., p.41.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 44.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 50.
- <sup>16</sup> Chandler, David, *The Land and People of Cambodia*, p. 68.
- <sup>17</sup> Paraphrased from: Ponchaud, Francois, *The Cathedral of the Rice Paddy*, pp. 18-19.
- <sup>18</sup> Details (names and dates) taken from: *Directory of the Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Cambodia*, pp. 106-107.

### Endnotes to Chapter 3:

<sup>1</sup> Driscoll, J.T., *Catholic Encyclopedia: Animism*,  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01526a.htm>  
Accessed on 02 December, 2003

<sup>2</sup> *Animism*, Microsoft Encarta 2004 (CD-ROM), Redmond: Microsoft Corp, 2003

<sup>3</sup> Details from: *Animism*, Encyclopaedia Britannica 99 (CD-ROM), Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Park, George Kerlin, *Systems of Religious and Spiritual Beliefs: Animism*, Encyclopaedia Britannica 99 (CD-ROM), Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Saliba, John A., *Ancestor Worship*, Microsoft Encarta 2004 (CD-ROM), Redmond: Microsoft Corp, 2003

<sup>6</sup> *Shamanism*, Encyclopaedia Britannica 99 (CD-ROM), Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>8</sup> Common everyday beliefs of Cambodians.

<sup>9</sup> The italicized words in parenthesis are words in the Khmer language in Romanized form. It must be noted that Cambodia has no standard way (until the present) of Romanizing Khmer words. Thus spelling of a Romanized Khmer word would vary from person to person. In this paper, for consistency we shall follow the rules used by the Catholic Mission.

<sup>10</sup> Men, Chean Rithy, "The Changing Religious Beliefs and Ritual Practices among Cambodians in Diaspora," *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol. 15, No.2, (2002): p. 225.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 224-225.

<sup>13</sup> Ponchaud, Francois, *The Cathedral of the Rice Paddy*, Paris: Fayard, 1990, pp. 194-195.

<sup>14</sup> "Brahmanism" is also spelled "Brahminism."

<sup>15</sup> *Brahmanism*, Encyclopaedia Britannica 99 (CD-ROM), Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1999.

<sup>16</sup> *Veda*, Microsoft Encarta 2004 (CD-ROM), Redmond: Microsoft Corp, 2003

<sup>17</sup> Details from: Aiken, Charles F. *Catholic Encyclopedia: Brahminism*,  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02730a.htm>

Accessed on 02 December, 2003

<sup>18</sup> Aiken, Charles F. *Catholic Encyclopedia: Brahminism*,  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02730a.htm>

Accessed on 02 December, 2003

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>21</sup> *Karma*, Encyclopaedia Britannica 99 (CD-ROM), Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1999.

<sup>22</sup> *Caste (social)*, Microsoft Encarta 2004 (CD-ROM), Redmond: Microsoft Corp, 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Around 500 BC asceticism became widespread, and increasing numbers of intelligent young men "gave up the world" to search for release from transmigration by achieving a state of psychic security. This resulted in the rise of breakaway sects of ascetics who denied the authority of the Vedas and Brahmans. By far the most important of these were Siddhartha Gautama, called the Buddha and Vardhamana, called Mahavira (Great Hero), the great teacher of Jainism. The orthodox Brahmanical teachers reacted to these tendencies by devising other doctrines. (*Hinduism*, Encyclopaedia Britannica 99 (CD-ROM), Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1999.)

<sup>24</sup> Though a variety of views are expressed in the Upanishads, they concur in the definition of Brahma as eternal, conscious, irreducible, infinite, omnipresent, spiritual source of the universe of finiteness and change. Marked differences in interpretation of Brahma characterize the various subschools of Vedānta, the orthodox system of Hindu philosophy based on the writings of the Upanishads. (*Brahma*, Encyclopaedia Britannica 99 (CD-ROM), Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1999.)

<sup>25</sup> Aiken, Charles F. *Catholic Encyclopedia: Brahminism*,  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02730a.htm>

Accessed on 02 December, 2003

<sup>26</sup> Aiken, Charles F. *Catholic Encyclopedia: Brahminism, V. Early Hinduism*,  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02730a.htm>

Accessed on 02 December, 2003.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>28</sup> Also spelled Sivaism and Vishnuism, Visnuism or Vaisnavism.

<sup>29</sup> The *Shvetashvatara Upanisad* treats Shiva as the paramount deity, but it is not until sometime between the 2nd century BC and the 2nd century AD and the rise of the Pashupata sect that organized sectarian worship developed. There are several schools of modern Shaiva thought, ranging from pluralistic realism to absolute monism, but they all agree in recognizing three principles: *pati*, Shiva, the Lord; *pashu*, the

individual soul; and *pasha*, the bonds that confine the soul to earthly existence. Shaivism, like some of the other forms of Hinduism, spread in the past to other parts of Southeast Asia, including Java, Bali, and parts of Indochina and Cambodia. (*Shaivism*, Encyclopaedia Britannica 99 (CD-ROM), Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1999.)

<sup>30</sup> Sectarian Vaishnavism had its beginnings in the cult of Vasudeva-Krishna, who may have been a Yadava tribal leader (c. 7th-6th century BC). The Vasudeva cult coalesced with others worshipping the deified sage Narayana so that by about the 2nd century AD Vasudeva, Krishna, and Narayana appeared in the celebrated religious poem the *Bhagavadgita* as interchangeable names of Lord Vishnu. The cult of the pastoral Krishna was soon added. The philosophical schools of Vaishnavism differ in their interpretation of the relationship between individual souls and God. (*Vaishnavism*, Encyclopaedia Britannica 99 (CD-ROM), Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1999.)

<sup>31</sup> Bit, Seanglim, *The Warrior Heritage*, California, USA: Seanglim Bit, 1991, pp. 16-17.

<sup>32</sup> Dupraz, Bernard, Jean-Marie Birsens, and Francois Pouchad. *Insights into the Religious Background of the Khmers*, Annandale, VA: Bishop Salas Center, 1990. (Handout: no page numberings)

<sup>33</sup> One of the few sources available for Cambodian legends and folk tales in English is Carrison, Muriel Paskin. *Cambodian Folk Stories from the Gatiloke*, Singapore: Tuttle Publishing, 1987. Most are either passed on by oral tradition or as Khmer written sources kept inside the Monk's temples.

<sup>34</sup> Ponchaud, Francois, *The Cathedral of the Rice Paddy*, Paris: Fayard, 1990, p. 197.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>36</sup> Dupraz, Bernard, Jean-Marie Birsens, and Francois Pouchad. *Insights into the Religious Background of the Khmers*, Annandale, VA: Bishop Salas Center, 1990.

<sup>37</sup> Bit, Seanglim, *The Warrior Heritage*, California, USA: Seanglim Bit, 1991, p. 17.

<sup>38</sup> No complete biography of the Buddha was compiled until centuries after his death. Western scholars, however generally agree on 563 BC as the year of his birth.

<sup>39</sup> Reynolds, Frank E. *The Buddha and Buddhism: The Four Signs*, Encyclopaedia Britannica 99 (CD-ROM), Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1999.

<sup>40</sup> Reynolds, Frank E. *The Buddha and Buddhism: The Four Noble Truths*, Encyclopaedia Britannica 99 (CD-ROM), Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1999.

<sup>41</sup> Details from: Reynolds, Frank E. *The Buddha and Buddhism: The Buddha's Message*, Encyclopaedia Britannica 99 (CD-ROM), Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1999.

<sup>42</sup> Reynolds, Frank E. *The Buddha and Buddhism: Karma*, Encyclopaedia Britannica 99 (CD-ROM), Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1999.

<sup>43</sup> Details from: Reynolds, Frank E. *The Buddha and Buddhism*, Encyclopaedia Britannica 99 (CD-ROM), Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1999.

<sup>44</sup> Aiken, Charles F. *Catholic Encyclopedia: Buddhism*,  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03028b.htm>  
Accessed on 02 December, 2003

<sup>45</sup> Details from: McDermott, James Paul. *Buddhism: Conflict and New Groupings*, Microsoft Encarta 2004 (CD-ROM), Redmond: Microsoft Corp, 2003.

<sup>46</sup> McDermott, James Paul. *Buddhism: Formation of Buddhist Literature*, Microsoft Encarta 2004 (CD-ROM), Redmond: Microsoft Corp, 2003.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>48</sup> Details from: McDermott, James Paul. *Buddhism: Asian Expansion*, Microsoft Encarta 2004 (CD-ROM), Redmond: Microsoft Corp, 2003.

<sup>49</sup> Bit, Seanglim, *The Warrior Heritage*, California, USA: Seanglim Bit, 1991, p. 19.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>52</sup> Details taken from: Dupraz, Bernard, Jean-Marie Birsens, and Francois Pouchad. *Insights into the Religious Background of the Khmers*, Annandale, VA: Bishop Salas Center, 1990. (Handout: no page numberings)

## End Notes to Chapter 4:

<sup>1</sup> Bit, Seanglim. *The Warrior Heritage*, California, USA: Seanglim Bit, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Men, Chean Rithy. “The Changing Religious Beliefs and Ritual Practices among Cambodians in Diaspora,” *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol. 15, No.2, (2002): 228.

<sup>3</sup> John Paul II. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 06 November 1999, n.20.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>5</sup> Taken from the handouts of: Dupraz, Bernard, Jean-Marie Birsens, and Francois Pouchad. *Insights into the Religious Background of the Khmers*, Annandale, VA: Bishop Salas Center, 1990. This information is originally contained in the book of Samanakaudom Savadar, p. 46-47 (published by the Buddhist Pagoda of Creteil in 1978).

<sup>6</sup> A discussion on this can be found in: Dupraz, Bernard, Jean-Marie Birsens, and Francois Pouchad. *Insights into the Religious Background of the Khmers*, Annandale, VA: Bishop Salas Center, 1990.

<sup>7</sup> Ponchaud, Francois, *The Cathedral of the Rice Paddy*, Paris: Fayard, 1990, p. 199-200.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 207.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.208.

<sup>10</sup> Details taken from: Dupraz, Bernard, Jean-Marie Birsens, and Francois Pouchad. *Insights into the Religious Background of the Khmers*, Annandale, VA: Bishop Salas Center, 1990. (Handout: no page numberings)

<sup>11</sup> John Paul II. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 06 November 1999, n.20.



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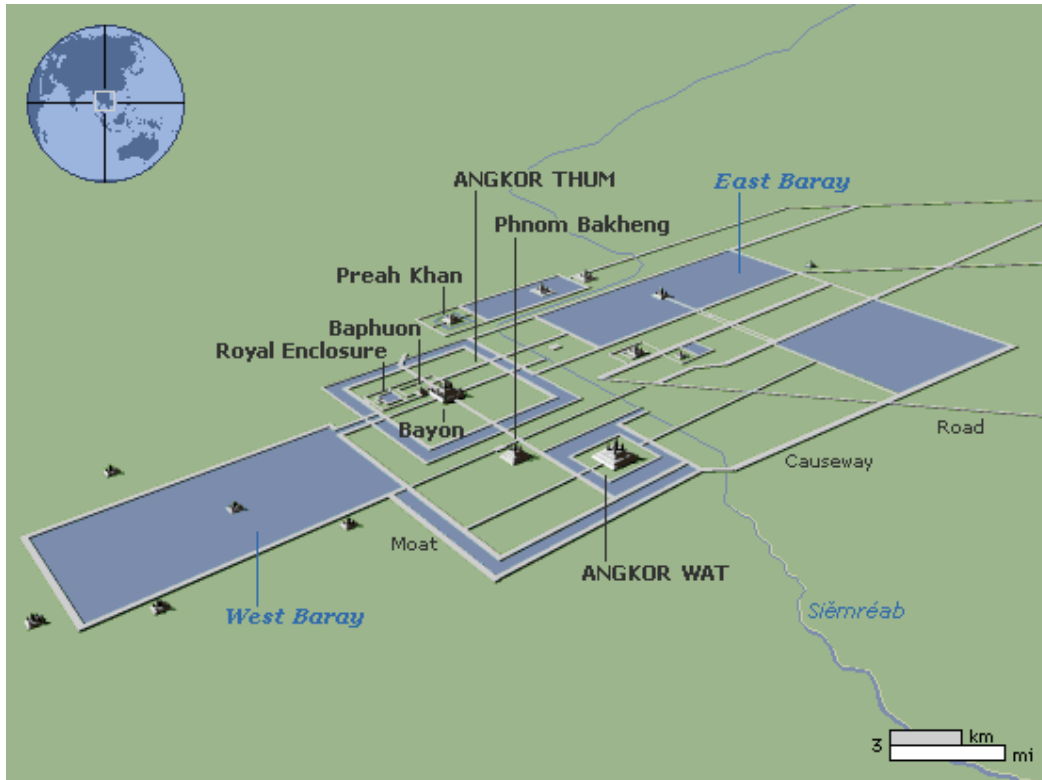
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## Appendix A - Modern Map of Cambodia



## Appendix B - Ancient City of Angkor



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This map shows the layout of the ancient city of Angkor, capital of the Cambodian Khmer kingdom from the 9th century to the 15th century. The city's huge stone temples were both civic centers and religious symbols of the Hindu cosmos. Historians believe that Angkor's network of canals and *barays* (reservoirs) were used for irrigation.

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Appendix C -

The Angkor Kingdom and What Became of It

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