

points out what is for me a great truth of the Christian faith. She says, "How can you believe in Jesus Christ and let things stay as they are?" The spiritual truly must dictate to the physical.

FREEDOM IN EXILE:
The Autobiography of the Dalai Lama

New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990
xiv, 288 pages — \$22.95 hardcover

Reviewed by **Roger Corless**

"INCARNATION SPEAKS OWN MIND" — so one might subtitle this book, to get a theologian's attention. Since there is, perhaps, some sort of structural similarity between the human form (Sanskrit: *nirmanakaya*; Tibetan: *tulku*) of a Bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism, and the incarnation of the Son of God in Christianity, the Christologist, long frustrated by lack of direct evidence in a desire to know what Christ really did and what he really thought of himself, might turn to the autobiography of a high Tibetan *tulku* with mingled excitement and apprehension. Will the deity prove himself? — or will he, as the rationalists claim, turn out to be merely human after all?

Well, His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, Dalai Lama XIV, is pretty cagey. He does not explicitly deny his exalted titles, yet he calls himself "a simple monk" (p. xiii). At the same time, he has "no difficulty accepting [a] spiritual connect[ion] both to the thirteen previous Dalai Lamas, to Chenrezig, and to the Buddha himself" (p. 11). He considers himself so different in character from the Thirteenth Dalai Lama that "it is not possible" that he could be his reincarnation, but then, on discovering that he shares with him a great interest in *watches and rosaries* (sic!), he realizes that "of course I must be!" (p. 186). Is he serious? The ball is thrown back into our court.

As a child, he admits to being "extremely naughty" (p. 50), and indeed his actions are more like those of the mischievous Jesus of the apocryphal gospels than the silently maturing Christ of the Canon. Yet, as an adult, he is a celibate monk who spends "at the very least, five and a half

hours per day in prayer, meditation and study" (p. 205), rising at 4 a.m., and skillfully running a government in exile. He is honored with the Nobel Prize for Peace, and is traditionally greeted by prostrations, but his story is full of earthy comments, such as his preference (*mirabile dictu!*) for English over Tibetan tea. He makes shrewd, balanced observations on the many world leaders he has met. He admires Mao Tse-tung, for example, as spellbinding and tireless, yet comes to realize that he cannot be trusted.

If an incarnation is one who can function with equal brilliance on the spiritual and the physical levels, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama is a strong candidate for such a title. And yet there is nothing grim and solemn here. Despite the immense and continuing tragedy of the destruction of his people, which he faces squarely (and, be it noted, with astonishingly little support from the international community), a sense of fun and zest for living keeps bubbling from him.

But, the reader of the *Annual* cries, what about his meeting with Merton? Yes, there is a page on that (p. 189) and a few more on Buddhist-Catholic relations (p. 196 and pp. 201-202). He says that Merton (who is identified as an "American Benedictine monk") "introduced [him] to the real meaning of the word 'Christian,'" although he was surprised to find "that Christian practitioners of meditation do not adopt any particular physical positions when they meditate." He feels that Christians could learn meditation techniques from Buddhism while Buddhists could learn from the Christians how to run charitable organizations. St. Peter's Basilica, he says, was grand and ancient enough to remind him of the Potala, but the Swiss guards struck him as comical.

On other points of dialogue, he sees value in Marxism, which he thinks is complementary to Buddhism, so long as its ideology is taken seriously and not, as he regrets so often happens, used as a cloak for nationalism. But politically he is, at bottom, an Environmentalist, concerned for the earth because ". . . we will not survive if we go against nature" (p. 269). Science and Buddhism interest him equally, as both are based on experiential evidence: "Both science and the teachings of the Buddha tell us of the fundamental unity of all things" (p. 270).

But, all in all, I think the most powerful feature of this book is its curious style. It is rambling, chatty and episodic, not at all the kind of ordered presentation of a life, centering on a single essential theme, which an editor would instruct a westerner to write. The title is taken from a sentence on page 242 — "I have freedom in exile" — but it hardly seems to be the *theme* of the book, for indeed I could discern no theme at all.

Chapter 12, Of 'Magic and Mystery', comes closest to being a unity, discussing Tibetan medicine and psychology, but throughout the rest of the book, things occur as they occur, we learn a little about this and something about that — eating customs, the calendar, festivals — we are plunged into the horrors of war and entertained by the eccentricities of a dog called Sangye (which, it is not explained, means Buddha in Tibetan!) — and as soon as we think we have understood who the Dalai Lama is, he has changed again.

Tibetans read the lives of their high lamas as *rnam thar* — an expression of the Buddha's teaching in the acts of the body, speech and mind of a particular person. By reading and meditating on such, they move away from diseased mind and towards liberation. Now, what is the West's most pernicious disease? Might it not be "an inclination for people to think in terms of "black and white" and "either, or," which ignores the facts of interdependence and relativity" (p. 199)? If so, then an autobiography which takes interdependent arising as its structure, and does not allow us to decide for sure who the "real" Dalai Lama is, would be very good medicine.

The book was first published in England and has not been adapted for the American market. Not only does it retain "quaint" British spellings, it also refers to such things as Meccano which, although commonplace in the United Kingdom, is mystifying to Americans. (Meccano is a sort of metal Lego that can be bolted together into improbable shapes: because of the holes, I used to find that cranes were about the only satisfactory structures.) Many foreign and technical terms appear in non-standard romanizations, and with misprints. Otherwise, the volume is beautifully produced.