

## PART TWO.

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

As Desideri's manuscript is continuous and lacks headings I have divided Part Two into the following chapters:

- (1) The Intrinsically Existent Triune God. (UTS pages 12-18). Questions: 1-10.
- (2) Desideri's Creed. (UTS pages 18-28). Questions: 11-28.
- (3) A translation of Desideri's Tibetan Catechism: (UTS pages 1-35). Question 12 begins on UTS page 12 and Question 46 ends on UTS page 35.
- (4) A translation of Desideri's Tibetan Catechism continued: (UTS pages 35-52). Questions: 47-82.
- (5) Conclusion.

The transition from Part One, Laying the Foundation, to Part Two, Questions and Answers about the Christian Faith, is a smooth one.<sup>1</sup> Desideri's reference is to a seeker (or an enquirer) who asks to know the essence or core of wisdom.<sup>2</sup> The learned one who responds to 'The Seeker's' questions is referred to as 'the Pandit'.<sup>3</sup> He is introduced as the one who has the ability to generate an unmistakable power of mental ability that can differentiate truth from

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<sup>1</sup> As a natural break occurs in the flow of the Tibetan text here the introduction of a 'seeker after wisdom' could be viewed as marking the beginning of Desideri's catechism. However since his entry also provides a smooth closure to Laying the Foundation I have introduced him on the final page of Part One C.

<sup>2</sup> UTS page 12: (*yang shes rab kyi snying po zhu ba pos [...] zhes zhus pas so*). This could also be understood to mean a seeker after additional wisdom (i.e. over and above what he already knows).

<sup>3</sup> 'Pandita' is the spelling Desideri uses when writing in Tibetan. Throughout this thesis I will use 'Pandit'.

falsehood and that which is good from that which is evil'.<sup>4</sup> The Seeker's first question begins with a comment: 'But oh! If the Dharma system of us [Tibetans] and [its] path is without firm foundation and incorrect, then will not those who enter a path like that only experience suffering [and] torment after death?' Desideri, having laid his foundation for the necessity of an intrinsically existent entity, now seeks to define the particular Entity he wants his Tibetan reader to relate to.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **THE INTRINSICALLY EXISTENT TRIUNE GOD**

The first part of Desideri's catechism begins with the enquirer, i.e. the seeker after the heart of wisdom, requesting clarification from the Pandit concerning the term 'Christian'. Desideri, using the Pandit's words as a medium to express his own thoughts, explains that the central focus of those who are called Christians is the most excellent, supreme, unrivalled leader, Jesus Christ. He explains that Christians are people who (1) have not only have put their faith in Jesus Christ but who also (2) live their daily lives in accordance with his spoken teachings. (3) And they hold his words 'as a jewel on the crown of the head'. This particular phrase would have been familiar to his Tibetan readers and its inclusion here demonstrates Desideri's strong commitment to present his arguments and explanations in a highly contextualized manner in order to communicate more effectively with Tibetans who would one day read his manuscript.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The initial mention of such a claim is found on the first page of Desideri's introduction 'Laying the Foundation' (UTS page 1).

<sup>5</sup> Kelsang Gyatso (1997: 47-52) has some helpful comments on the significance of this. He describes Tsong kha pa as being the 'crown ornament' of all the scholars of the Land of the Snows (ibid: 31). He states: "Just as crown ornaments are unequalled among ornaments, so Je Tsongkhapa is unequalled among all Tibetan scholars." (Ibid: 47). Such a statement serves to show that not only is

The seeker's next question centres on how a follower of Jesus Christ actually puts his faith into practice. Desideri refers to Christian teachings as, 'the stainless system of faith and doctrine' and continues his discussion by referring to three different aspects or dimensions of faith. They are: (1) The aspect of faith that is able to generate trusting belief, (2) faith that is able to build expectation (i.e. hope), and (3) a loving or charitable faith.<sup>6</sup>

The seeker asks for clarification as to how a faith of trusting belief may be generated.<sup>7</sup> The reply is easily understood in the context of Tibetan meditation, where a practitioner chooses an object to serve as a mental focus. Desideri continues the discussion (using the Pandit's voice) and gives two mental distinctive precious objects for the practitioner to focus upon during meditation. They are (1) the intrinsically existent precious *dkon mchog* 'God' who is the unrivalled and unique Lord and who being three is miraculously established as one, and (2) the most excellent leader or deliverer Jesus Christ - who came into this world, was born as a human being, and later died for the benefit of all mankind.

The scene is now set for Desideri to discuss the nature of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* 'God'. He reminds the reader that evidence for the existence of such an Entity was clearly laid out in the introduction.<sup>8</sup> Now he re-emphasises that all people and phenomena are dependent and have the nature of destructibility. Consequently, they are not established

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Tsong kha pa unequalled among all Tibetan scholars but that his teachings also have no equal in Tibet. Desideri is keen to point out to his readers that the *chos* (Dharma) he is about to explain - namely the teachings of Jesus Christ - are without parallel. By using such an analogy he is emphasizing the uniqueness of the Christian Faith and its doctrines.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:13. "And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love" (New Revised Standard Version Bible 1989).

<sup>7</sup> The words Desideri uses to describe three different aspects of faith are: (1) *yid ches kyi dad pa* - which carries the meaning of having a faith that is characterized by trust (in God). It is a strong believing faith and is associated with a definite sense of conviction. Hopkins (2011: 1853) comments that it is the type of faith that is said to be induced by valid cognition. I have translated *yid ches kyi dad pa* as 'the faith of trusting belief'. (2) The faith that is able to build expectation that is filled with hope is *re bltos 'cha' nus pa'i dad pa*. (3) And the aspect of faith which is loving or charitable is associated with an accurate and unclouded mind (*dri med yid kyis*) *dga' bar gyur pa'i dad pa*.

<sup>8</sup> Part One: Laying the Foundation.

intrinsically. He refers to his earlier illustration of the moon's reflection in a clear lake, and points out that without an actual moon, there can be no reflection of it. He reminds the reader that all phenomena - including ourselves - are like the emptiness or non-substantiality of the appearance of that reflection. He explains that since we who are destructible exist - by this he means in a conventional or relative sense - then necessarily there has to exist one who is established intrinsically and who is permanent and indestructible. Desideri firmly believed that if there was no such entity we would be non-existent - in other words, without God there would be nothing.<sup>9</sup> Referring to his earlier analogy of the moon,<sup>10</sup> he points out that in the absence of the actual or real moon there could be no illusory reflective appearance of it in the water. The moon's reflection exists as a reflection but the moon one sees in the lake is non-existent. By likening us to the *appearance* he is implying that in the absence of an intrinsic existent entity we too would be non-existent.

Desideri continues and makes it clear that if a person decides to embark on the correct path of the pure, stainless system of the Christian Faith, then one must meditate frequently and focus all one's thoughts on the One who is established as intrinsically existent'.<sup>11</sup> He explains that the consequence will be that faith will necessarily arise (i.e. be generated) and directed towards that One who is inconceivable. The challenge Desideri sets for his reader is not an easy one. A superficial or premature assertion of faith would be useless. He is looking for a faith that is generated in the heart of the seeker and which is marked by a sense of real conviction.

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<sup>9</sup> It does not appear that Desideri's discussion here is related to the dGe lugs (Buddhist) concept of emptiness insofar as it pertains to things, but rather he is referring to something being non-occurring if the thing on which it depends does not exist.

<sup>10</sup> Part One A, Section 4.

<sup>11</sup> UTS page 13.

The seeker's response is positive. He explains that as a result of considering the various proofs for the existence of an intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* he now realises that previously his mind had been overshadowed by very thick darkness. He points out that the darkness was the result of having trusted an incorrect and untrustworthy system [of assertions].<sup>12</sup> The Seeker declares his commitment and illustrates it with an analogy of the dawn. He points out that as the sun slowly rises in the cloudless sky the night's darkness dissipates. He then likens this to his own experience and declares his previous darkness has now gone and that he has no more doubts - his mind is satisfied [is at peace] and he is filled with joy.<sup>13</sup>

The Seeker asks the Pandit three further questions. He wants to know (1) The meaning of the word *dkon mchog*, (2) why the Pandit states the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* is the unrivalled unique Lord, and (3) how is it possible for the three persons [of the Godhead] to be established as one.

Having heard the explanations, the Seeker's response becomes even more committed. Elaborating on his earlier illustration, he explains that now that the sun has risen it is impossible to see all the shining stars which had been clearly visible in the night sky. Similarly, he had (as a consequence of having previously been the victim of a 'totally deceived and clouded mentality'), failed to perceive the unequalled and immeasurably great qualities of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* 'God'. This was because his attention had been entirely focused on deceiving objects that were like false impressions of *dkon mchog* 'God'.<sup>14</sup> He declares that from now on he will meditate with an unshakable faith, and from

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<sup>12</sup> I am paraphrasing the text here and the square brackets indicate additional word(s) not in the Tibetan text that have been added to facilitate ease of understanding.

<sup>13</sup> See the last line of UTS page 13.

<sup>14</sup> The seeker seems to be saying that what he focused on previously (when following dGe lugs philosophical thinking) caused him to think in an erroneous manner. (One presumes this would also

the depths of his heart, (only on) the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* ‘God’, who is unquestionably and without contention unrivalled and worthy to take refuge in. The Seeker declares that only *rang grub dkon mchog* (‘God’) is worthy of veneration and there is absolutely no other [like him].<sup>15</sup>

Initially Desideri explains that the meaning of the term *dkon mchog + rin po che* from a Buddhist standpoint.<sup>16</sup> He points out that the term *dkon mchog* is understood by Tibetans to refer to an object (*yul*) that is (1) worthy of veneration and (2) worthy of taking refuge in.<sup>17</sup> However, to avoid confusion, Desideri usually puts *rang grub* before *dkon mchog* when he is referring to the intrinsically existent Entity that is revealed in the Bible.<sup>18</sup>

Desideri continues and emphasizes that God is definitely not an illusion. He is not referring to some imaginary entity or to a mere cultural belief. The God he is referring to is One whose character consists of unsurpassed qualities and greatness, and who, by virtue of his immeasurable power and authority, has established and ordered the past, present and the

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include his thinking about the buddhas.) Thus, what he previously admired so much, he now sees as misleading and false impressions of God.

<sup>15</sup> UTS page 14.

<sup>16</sup> The word *dkon mchog* is usually followed by *gsum* meaning ‘triple’. The term *dkon mchog gsum* in Tibetan Buddhism refers to the three precious jewels. These are: Buddha (but not necessarily the historical Buddha. It may be an expression of the ultimate nature), the Dharma and the sangha. According to Jinpa and Dorjie (1993: 397) the three precious jewels “are regarded as perfect objects in which refuge can be sought from the unsatisfactory nature of life in cyclic existence in general, and particularly from the potential suffering of unfavourable future existences.” Hopkins (2011: 523) points out that the syllable *dkon* means ‘precious’, ‘rare’, ‘hard to get’ (find or reach). The word *mchog* is ‘supreme’, ‘best’ or ‘superior’. Other meanings are: ‘most excellent’, ‘foremost’, ‘highest’, ‘unsurpassed’, ‘utmost’, and ‘outshines them all’. The term *rin po che* means ‘precious’ (*rin che* is ‘great price’) and is generally used as a title of great respect for a lama, and in particular for one who is considered to be a reincarnation of an earlier distinguished Dharma practitioner – a *sprul sku*.

<sup>17</sup> UTS page 14. For an explanation of ‘taking refuge’ from a Buddhist perspective see Gyatso 2001: 51-56.

<sup>18</sup> The word *rin po che* means ‘precious’ and *rang grub* is used for intrinsic existence.

future. Desideri declares that this One is eminently worthy of total homage, worship, and for mankind to approach and take refuge in.<sup>19</sup>

In regard to the seeker's next question as to why God is called the 'unrivalled and unique Lord', Desideri explains that on account of his being intrinsically existent he necessarily is established in all aspects with limitless good qualities and greatness, i.e. he is perfection itself. And since there can be no other who exceeds his qualities and greatness, he necessarily has to be the 'unrivalled and unique Lord.'<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Previously, Desideri had stated on UTS page 14: 'He is definitely (most certainly) *dkon mchog* and not an illusion (*'khrul pa + med pa*). The Tibetan expression used to express total homage and worship involves the *lus* ('body'), *ngag* ('speech'), and *yid* ('mind'). This expression (*lus ngag yid kyi phyag 'tshal dang mchod pa*) was first used by Desideri in his prologue (UTS page 1).

<sup>20</sup> Desideri was concerned that his readers understood that taking refuge in the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* was not the same as taking refuge in the Three Jewels. Although he does not discuss the difference in this particular manuscript, he did so in an earlier one entitled *The Highest Good and the Ultimate End*. (OT4 1989: 222-3). It is also referred to as *The Final Goal*. Here he explains in considerable detail why the buddhas cannot be the cause of the continuity of things. "In the empirical world it is necessary to maintain a clear distinction between the various causes that give rise to things (i.e. the so called secondary causes) and the force that maintains them. If continuity were to depend upon the cause that produced the object, then if the cause was to finish, then the object would cease too. But it is not like this. In fact the child does not disappear when his parents are no longer living. So it is with contingent things. Even if the (secondary) causes that produced them cease, they remain in a state of continuity. This is because they are under the influence of a force which maintains them in their state of continuity. If you say that this force is that of the Buddhas who have overcome fear and destruction, you say something illogical because it is not they who are the Independent and possess true nature. Even if the Buddhas have attained immortality, they are not intrinsically immortal. One cannot confuse the two things, i.e. attaining immortality and being intrinsically immortal".

[Nel mondo empirico bisogna tener ben distinte le varie cause che producono le cose (cioè le cosiddette cause secondarie) e la forza che le fa continuare. Se la continuità dipendesse dalla causa che ha prodotto la cosa, cessata la causa cesserebbe anche la cosa.

Ma non è così: infatti, cessati i genitori non cessa il figlio. Così nelle cose contingenti anche se vengono meno le cause (secondarie) che le hanno prodotte, esse si mantengono nella continuità: ciò perchè esse sono sotto l'influenza di una forza che le sostiene nella loro continuità.

Se voi dite che questa forza sono i Buddha che hanno oltrepassato i timori e la distruzione, dite una cosa illogica perchè essi non sono l'Indipendente che possiede natura-propria. Anche se i Buddha hanno raggiunto l'immortalità essi non sono immortali per loro natura. Non si possono confondere le due cose: aver raggiunta l'immortalità ed essere immortali per natura.

Così, benchè dotati di immortalità i Buddha che hanno superato i timori e la morte, hanno raggiunto quello stato, ma non l'hanno come caratteristica, cioè per loro natura.]

The next question relates to the nature of the Trinity and the Seeker asks: ‘And how three can be established as one?’<sup>21</sup> Desideri points out that the Trinity is too profound for him, and by implication all other people, to grasp in its entirety. I think the challenge he faced was twofold, namely, (1) the impossibility of actually explaining such a profound spiritual mystery.<sup>22</sup> (2) The difficulty of discussing this fundamental Christian doctrine with dGe lugs pa Tibetan Buddhists, whose religious beliefs categorically deny the very existence of an uncaused independent Entity and whose vocabulary was entirely unsuited to a discussion of three distinct persons in a single Godhead. Desideri explains that if he considered himself able to explain the immeasurable, inconceivable nature of the intrinsically existent unique Lord, then he would be no different from an immature, undiscerning child who imagines that all the waters of a great ocean could be poured into a very small hole or pit.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Pomplun (2009: 121) states: “[Desideri’s] mature discussion of the Trinity occupies 12 folio sides of *chos lugs kyi nying po* which he wrote just before leaving Tibet in 1721.” The title for Pomplun’s article on the Trinity (ibid: 117) is: ‘The Holy Trinity in Ippolito Desideri’s *Ke ri se ste an kyi chos lugs kyi snying po*’ (*The Essence of Christian Doctrine*). Desideri transliterates Christian as *Ke ri se ste an*. The words *chos + lugs* have several meanings. They can be translated as ‘doctrine’, which is Pomplun’s preferred choice. It can also mean ‘faith’, in the sense of ‘The Christian Faith’. In my thesis I have chosen to use the latter.

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed study of the doctrine of the Trinity from a theological perspective see *The Summa Theologica of St Thomas Aquinas* Part 1 (1912) Second number QQXXV11-LXXIV: 1-207. McDermott, the editor of the *Summa Theologiae: a Concise Translation*: 1989: 64, comments, “It [the Trinity] is not a doctrine Thomas thinks men can prove.” Summarizing Aquinas’ point (ibid: 71) McDermott adds: “Natural reason cannot discover the Trinity of persons in God; it learns about God from his causing of creatures, and knows only what characterizes him as the source of everything that exists. [...] But the power to create is shared by the whole Trinity; so though natural reason can learn things about God’s nature and unity it knows nothing about the distinction of God’s persons. Trying to prove the Trinity by reason would injure the faith by denying the surpassing dignity of its subject matter, and making it a laughing-stock to unbelievers, who would think our belief relied on such unconvincing arguments”. According to McDermott (ibid., 72): “The primary truths revealed by God are direct matters of faith, and obstinately to deny them leads to heresy”. Desideri’s explanation would seem to fit in with such a view.

<sup>23</sup> (UTS page 15). This analogy, according to Pomplun (2009: 122), alludes to a well-known legend about St. Augustine told in a letter to St. Cyril of Jerusalem. One day, when walking along the seashore and meditating on the mystery of the Trinity, the saint encountered a child fetching water in a cup and dumping it into a little hole he had dug in the sand. When asked what he was doing, the child answered that he planned to fit the entire ocean into the hole. “Impossible!” exclaimed St. Augustine. “No more impossible,” the child answered, “than for thee, O Augustine, to solve the mystery of the Trinity”.



Desideri's illustrations were usually ones his Tibetan readers were already familiar with. For example in his subsequent discussion he uses a Buddhist illustration of looking at an image such as a reflection of oneself in a mirror.<sup>24</sup> A very young child who looks in a mirror is not able to grasp that what he sees is merely a reflection that lacks substantiality.<sup>25</sup> Desideri points out that the reflection of a person in a mirror cannot be compared to God's reflection of himself as the two types of 'reflection' are entirely different.

- (1) Man's reflection: because man is a cognizable object his reflection has no substantiality, individuality or personality of its own.
- (2) God's reflection: however God's reflection of himself cannot be classified in the same way since he is not a cognizable object.

The two points above are significant but Desideri does not expand upon them in this manuscript.

In Mādhyamika if something is a cognizable object (for example, a person) then as a cognizable object it *depends* upon the one who cognizes it. Therefore, there can be no such thing as an intrinsically existent cognizable and when a person looks at himself in the mirror his reflection cannot be intrinsically existent. Desideri's dGe lugs reader would understand the cognizer, cognition and the cognizable object as lacking in intrinsic existence because they are inter-dependent. The man who looks at his reflection is a normal, relative, phenomenal object. However, the same cannot be said about his reflection, which is only a mere appearance of the real man. It is not itself a person in the way that a man is.

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<sup>24</sup> Tsong kha pa (GT3: 305) points out, "When young, pre-verbal children see reflections of their faces, they play with them and so forth: hence they do apprehend them as truly being faces".

<sup>25</sup> (UTS page15) I am using the word 'substantial' here in the conventional sense of existence and not as the technical term 'substance' (which is a synonym for intrinsic existence) and which Buddhists sometimes use when seeking to negate the concept of intrinsic existence.

Desideri continues to refer to God using terms he has introduced previously, for example, ‘the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*’ and ‘the unique Lord who is unrivalled’. He adds: (1) [God’s] omniscient person is without obstruction and limit and he has always, i.e. from eternity, been cognisant of himself. (2) He knowingly produced a reflection of incomparable wisdom that is identical to himself and which is without beginning. In discussing the phrase ‘God’s reflection of himself’, Desideri points out that the intrinsically existent God, and the reflection of himself, are inseparable, i.e. they are established as one. But it is impossible for a man and his reflected appearance to change into a single person with one nature. A man and his reflection will, in that sense, always be separate. However, God is not the same as a man and what we can say about normal objects might not be applicable to God. He is not a normal phenomenal object, and therefore he and his reflection are different from the case of a normal empirical object. Perhaps Desideri was anxious to clarify this point, since by using the word ‘reflection’ (*gzugs brnyan*) his reader might immediately discount the reflection as being less than fully real.

He explains that (1) the reflection begotten by the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* is without beginning. (2) The (‘begotten’) one is called the Son and (3) the Son (*sras*) is similar to the ‘begetter’, who is named the Father (*yab*). Their nature is inseparable and essence indivisible. Desideri makes it clear that he is not talking about two separately existing *dkon mchog* but a single Entity - consisting of two distinct sublime or incomparable persons (*bla na med pa’i bdag nyid*) who take unbounded delight in one another’s great, limitless and sublime qualities. The incomparable qualities of the Father and the Son are identical and they are two divine persons established as one. Having sought to clearly explain the first two persons of the Trinity, Desideri then introduces the third person *bla med nam dag yid* which translates as the ‘Incomparable [or] Sublime Pure Mind’. In conformity with the formulation found in the creeds of the western Church, Desideri would like to explain that this third person

*proceeds* from the Father and the Son. However, his choice of words (*las + grub pa*) would be understood by a Tibetan to mean ‘produced or established from’ and the reader would probably assume that the produced third person was therefore a ‘product’ of the Father. Desideri emphasises that although the third person is a distinct person, nevertheless he is one with the Father and the Son, and the nature and essence of all three are inseparable and cannot be divided. To avoid any confusion in the minds of the readers Desideri states that although: (1) the Father is *dkon mchog* (2) the Son is *dkon mchog* and (3) the Incomparable or Sublime Pure Mind is *dkon mchog*, their nature is inseparable and essence is indivisible. He explains that these three are not three intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* but are established as One. He then emphasises the need to generate a faith of trusting belief in the one intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*. The word Desideri coined for the ‘Holy Spirit’ (*bla med rnam dag yid*) is unusual and not without problems. I discuss this in more detail below.

Desideri uses the word incomparable (*bla na med pa* shortened to *bla med*) meaning ‘none higher’ for all three persons of the Trinity because all three are One entity. However, it is likely that his Tibetan readers may have wondered, if they had not fully grasped Desideri’s point about a single Godhead, how all three separate persons can all be declared as incomparable. Desideri’s first attempt to write about the Trinity in the Tibetan took place soon after he arrived in Lhasa in 1716. This was prior to his deep immersion in the study of Buddhist doctrine.<sup>26</sup> Pomplun translates a short passage from the second page of *The Sunrise Dispelling Dawn’s Darkness* as:<sup>27</sup> ‘God is without birth or death, cause or condition: He is thoroughly perfect, always without origin or end: He is perfectly self originating, self producing and self achieving; He cannot change or be clothed with sin; He is one and He is

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<sup>26</sup> He entitled this manuscript, (which he composed at the request the royal ruler of Tibet Lhazang (*Lha bzang*) Khan: *The Sunrise Dispelling Dawn’s Darkness* (*Tho rangs mun sel nyi ma shar ba’i brda*). It is also referred to as *The Allegory of the Dawn that Dispels Darkness*.

<sup>27</sup> See Pomplun (2009: 121).

three; these very three being without separation and yet truly separate; this nature is one, without being distinguished, and the essence is perfectly one.’<sup>28</sup> Desideri continues this particular description of the Trinity; however, some of his subsequent sentences are far from clear. I have translated and commented on these in the footnote.<sup>29</sup> When Desideri wrote *The Sunrise Dispelling Dawn’s Darkness* in 1716 he was still in the very early stages of learning Tibetan, so it is not surprising that his written explanations are not always easy to grasp. Apart from this fleeting mention, Desideri does not attempt to explain the Trinity further but merely states that it is not possible for man to understand these words on his own.<sup>30</sup> He follows a similar pattern in *The Essence of the Christian Faith*, where he emphasizes the impossibility of grasping the immeasurable and inconceivable nature of the intrinsically

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<sup>28</sup> *The Sunrise Dispelling Dawn’s Darkness* (OT1: 90). Pomplun (2009: 128n20) comments that “Desideri’s Tibetan is admittedly obscure.”

<sup>29</sup> *The Sunrise Dispelling Dawn’s Darkness* (OT1: 90). Desideri continues his discussion on the Trinity and points out that: (1) their nature is not distinct and the essence is a perfect whole (*brgyud rigs bral med snying po rdzogs par gcig*). (2) Each one of the Three Persons is gifted with omnipotence (*gsum nyid re re thams cad thub pa can*). (3) Each one of the Three Persons is gifted with omniscience (*gsum nyid re re thams cad theg pa can*). (4) The Trinity possesses supreme and complete perfection (*gsum nyid yon tan bla med rdzogs par ldan*). However, the following sentences are less straightforward. The Tibetan implies that only one of the three is omnipotent (*gsum gyi gcig tsam thams cad thub pa’i bcud*). The same construction is used for omniscient and for (possessing) incomparable and complete attributes or virtues. This seems contradictory as previously it was stated that each one is gifted with omnipotence and here it is saying that only one of the three is omnipotent etc. It would make more sense therefore to add ‘not only’. Then one could say, ‘Not only is one of the three is omnipotent - all three are omnipotent etc. The Athanasian Creed states: “Nevertheless, there are not three eternal beings, but one eternal being. So there are not three uncreated beings, nor three boundless beings, but one uncreated being and one boundless being. Likewise, the Father is omnipotent, the Son is omnipotent, and the Holy Spirit is omnipotent. Yet there are not three omnipotent beings, but one omnipotent being. Thus the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. However, there are not three gods, but one God. The Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, and the Holy Spirit is Lord. However, there are not three lords, but one Lord.” Perhaps Desideri is trying to say: ‘Even though there are three persons [because they are constituted as one] there is only one that is omnipotent’.

<sup>30</sup> Desideri’s point is that without God’s help it is impossible for mankind to understand the ‘words of truth’ [concerning the Trinity] by merely depending on himself - on his own wisdom (*mi yang bden pa’i skad ’di rang mi shes*).

existent Lord and likens himself to an undiscerning child if he thought he could explain [the Trinity] to his reader.<sup>31</sup>

I will now look briefly at five terms Desideri used when seeking to explain the Trinity. I will also draw attention to some of the problems and limitations he faced.

### **(1) Desideri's choice of word for 'person' (bdag nyid).**

When describing the nature of the two (divine) persons, namely, the Father and the Son, Desideri explains they are established as one (*gcig tu grub pa*). He wants his reader to grasp that God and his reflection are inseparable and thus, in effect, constitute a single Godhead. His point is that although they are two distinct persons, in their nature (*rgyud*) they are nevertheless established as One. Desideri qualifies the word *dkon mchog* 'God' by adding the honorific term for 'father' (*yab*). Hence the first person of the Trinity is referred to as *yab dkon mchog* - God the Father - and the intrinsically existent reflection as God the Son (*sras dkon mchog*).<sup>32</sup>

Desideri faced huge challenges regarding his choice of Tibetan vocabulary to introduce the Trinity and often had no option but to use words with specific Buddhist connotations. Two everyday words commonly used for person(s) in the Tibetan language and which (one assumes) Desideri deliberately avoided using are: (1) *gang zag*. This word refers to any person, man or creature imputed upon any of the five aggregates.<sup>33</sup> (2) *mi*. This is a general term for a human being, a person or man/mankind. Conventionally the word *bdag* (or *bdag nyid*) is commonly used to refer to: 'I', 'me', 'myself', 'himself'; 'they', 'themselves', 'it',

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<sup>31</sup> UTS pages 14-15.

<sup>32</sup> The word *sras* is honorific for 'son'.

<sup>33</sup> Rigzin (1993: 35). The problem with the word *gang zag* would be that the reader would assume that the three divine persons were merely conventionally existent and dependent upon 'divine aggregates'.

‘itself’, etcetera. The addition of *nyid* sometimes acts as an intensifier. It is used to draw attention to something, for example (the thing) itself; self (in and of itself); the same (one and the same as opposed to the other person); in fact or as such.<sup>34</sup> However, sometimes *nyid* is placed after other words to produce abstract nouns.<sup>35</sup> Some of these words may indicate an ultimate reality or nature, for example *stong pa* (sometimes spelt as *stongs pa*) means ‘empty’ whereas the word for ‘empty+ness’ is *stong pa + nyid* (i.e. *stong pa nyid*) which means ‘emptiness’. From a dGe lugs pa perspective emptiness is considered to be the ultimate nature of all phenomena.<sup>36</sup>

Desideri is consistent in using *bdag nyid* when referring to the persons of the Godhead and never uses *nyid* on its own.<sup>37</sup> In a dGe lugs philosophical context, *bdag* or *bdag + nyid* are used to refer to a concept of an intrinsically existent self that is considered to be false and which therefore must be negated.<sup>38</sup> But the terms *bdag + med pa* (without/not) or *bdag nyid + med pa* have positive connotations, since these terms refer to the selflessness of person(s) and phenomena. Wilson comments that Buddhism preaches a doctrine of selflessness and the most important non-existent is the self (*bdag*).<sup>39</sup> One problem that Desideri faced in using

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<sup>34</sup> Chandra Das 1970 (1902): 482.

<sup>35</sup> Hopkins 2011: 613.

<sup>36</sup> Some Buddhist philosophers (but not the dGe lugs pa) use *sems + nyid* to refer to the very nature or essence of mind which they consider to be an *absolute* unchanging ultimate reality. The dGe lugs pa would happily accept a quality of ‘mindness’ (*sems nyid*) that is said to be untainted, un-changing and non-conceptual but they would firmly deny it has intrinsic existence.

<sup>37</sup> The word *nyid* is sometimes used in conversation as an honorific term for ‘you’ (*khyod*). Pomplun (2009: 121) wonders if perhaps Desideri could have used the single word *nyid* for the persons of the Godhead. But I think this would be confusing and therefore consider Desideri’s choice of *bdag + nyid* to be more appropriate.

<sup>38</sup> Jaschke (1975: 268) points out that ‘the thing itself’ (*bdag nyid*) is also understood to mean ‘the substance’ or ‘the essence’ but dGe lugs philosophers would still deny its independence in the sense of being intrinsically existent.

<sup>39</sup> Wilson 1992: 142-4. However, it should be noted that some non dGe lugs pa view *bdag nyid* in a positive way; e.g. when they refer to buddha nature. See Williams 2009: 104.

*bdag nyid* without the addition of the negative *med pa* was that dGe lugs pa reader(s) would perceive it in a negative way and would naturally feel wary of what he was saying.

Did Desideri choose a suitable word for ‘person’ when seeking to introduce the Trinity? I think he really had no other choice. It would have been extremely confusing if he had tried to coin a completely new term for ‘person’, which he then applied only to God and not to the phenomenal world. Although Desideri would have been aware of the confusion arising from his using *bdag nyid* it appears that he was prepared to take the risk. He was happy to accept its conventional meaning with the addition of the negative (*bdag med*) when used by Tibetans to refer to casually produced inter-dependent phenomena. But a negation of the divine personhood in the intrinsically existent Trinity would be a contradiction in terms and he could never agree with this. Although Desideri wrote his ideas on paper, one may assume that his most effective form of communication was when he was able to combine his spoken words with his written explanations.<sup>40</sup>

## **(2) Desideri used the word *ngo bo* for essence.**

In Tibetan, *ngo bo* has a number of meanings such as: ‘essence’; ‘substance’; ‘intrinsic nature’; and the phrase *rang gi ngo bos* equates to: ‘in itself’; ‘according to its own nature’; ‘by nature’ or ‘naturally’. The word *rang bzhin* is a synonym and can mean ‘essential nature’; it is also used to refer to intrinsic existence (Sanskrit: *svabhāva*). Because *ngo bo* has

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<sup>40</sup> See Desideri’s *An Account of Tibet* edited by Filippi 1937: 104. Pomplun (2009: 125) comments “Of course, the phrase *bdag nyid* could hardly be free of similar connotations, and we must assume that Desideri intended to explain away any of his interlocutors’ difficulties”.

definite connotations, but not exclusively, with intrinsic nature I think Desideri made a wise choice to use it when seeking to explain the Trinity.<sup>41</sup>

### **(3) The Father ‘begat’ the Son.**

When Desideri wrote about the Father producing a reflection of himself he used the word *skrun pa* (spelt *bskrun* in the past tense).<sup>42</sup> In my translation I have used words such as ‘beget’ and ‘begotten’ in statements such as ‘the Father begat the Son’ and ‘the only begotten Son’ but have placed them in brackets. However in a Tibetan context - because the words *skrun par* means produce and *mdzad pa* is the honorific form of ‘to make, construct, or produce something’<sup>43</sup> - the reader would naturally think in terms of the Father constructing the Son etcetera. The dGe lugs pa use the above Tibetan words within the context of causally produced, dependent arising phenomena and firmly refute any concept of independent or intrinsic existence. Consequently, an initial reading of Desideri’s description of the Trinity must have been extremely difficult for his reader to fathom.

### **(4) Desideri’s term for the ‘Holy Spirit’ (*bla med rnam dag yid*).**

As I have already discussed, Desideri’s choice of word for the third person of the Trinity (*bla med rnam dag yid*) is interesting and problematic. He coined the term *bla med* + *rnam dag* + *yid*, which means an incomparable or unsurpassed (*bla med*), pure (*rnam dag*) mind (*yid*).

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<sup>41</sup> According to Das 1970 [1902]: 356 *ngo bo* refers to essence, substance and intrinsic nature. In the Glossary of *The Great Treatise* (GT2 2004: 246) the word *rang bzhin* is a synonym and means essential nature. However Jaschke (1881: 129) defines *ngo bo nyid* as an entity and comments that if ‘one’ (*gcig*) is added the meaning becomes ‘one entity’ (or the same entity). *The Great Treatise* (GT3 2002: 384) states that *ngo bo nyid* and *ngo bo* both refer to essence.

<sup>42</sup> UTS page 15.

<sup>43</sup> The example Goldstein gives in his modern dictionary (2001: 83) is: ‘Those artisans produced (*bskrun*) statues from gold.’



(1) Desideri chose the word *nam dag* (pure) for the Latin word *sanctitas* (i.e. holy in English). In dGe lugs thought, *nam dag* relates to someone or something that is pure or has been purified, and the reader would naturally understand this word to refer to purity. But they would never think of this as an intrinsic purity but one that is attained by a process of purification over many aeons.<sup>44</sup>

(2) Perfection and its attainment is a pivotal Buddhist doctrine. The term for enlightenment (*byang chub*) is made up of two words: (1) *byang* relates to the sense of purification of obscurations (*sgrib pa*) and (2) *chub* relates to the perfection of omniscience. A bodhisattva progressing along the path to enlightenment practices six (or sometimes ten) perfections. These perfections or qualities are said to be developed and perfected over many aeons as a Buddhist practitioner very gradually attains total purity (i.e. perfection). However, progress depends not only on the practitioner's own efforts but also on the guidance of a suitably qualified lama, and submission to various ritualistic impartations of power. Although the reader does not have an understanding of holiness in a Christian sense, I think Desideri's choice of *nam dag* is another example where, out of necessity, he had to choose a mismatched word to describe a concept that was outside the realm of Tibetan discourse.

(3) Desideri translates Spirit (i.e., the Holy Spirit) as *gid* (mind). *Gid* is commonly used to refer to a conventional conceptual mind, (i.e. a person's intellectual facility or mentality) which is involved in the process of (dualistic) perception. It therefore seems strange to apply this term to the (Holy) Spirit. Pomplun considers that Desideri wrote *The Essence of the Christian Faith* prior to leaving Tibet in 1721.<sup>45</sup> This being the case, he would have already

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<sup>44</sup> The same word is also used refer to purity in the sense of having been dirty and then physically cleansed or purified (e.g. washed free from dirt).

<sup>45</sup> Pomplun 2010: 77.

written extensively about mind in earlier manuscripts.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, he would have been aware of the complexity of the subject from a Buddhist perspective and known that enlightened omniscient buddhas no longer think in a conceptual manner.<sup>47</sup>

In continuing his discussion on the Trinity, Desideri makes it clear that:

- (1) The Trinity is one.
- (2) The three divine persons are really distinct from one another.
- (3) The three divine persons relate to one another. The Father is related to the Son, the Son to the Father, and the Pure Mind to both the Father and the Son.<sup>48</sup>

Pomplun suggests<sup>49</sup> that “Desideri’s vocabulary might also be fruitfully compared to that learned by Antonio Giorgi from the Capuchin fathers”.<sup>50</sup> He states that Giorgi’s term for the Holy Spirit is: “*sangs rgyas rnam dag* or *sang rgyas rnam dag sems*”.<sup>51</sup>

I think we should investigate Giorgi’s addition of the word *sang rgyas*, which is the Tibetan word for Buddha.<sup>52</sup> Prior to the attainment of buddhahood, a person is considered to be

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<sup>46</sup> *The Final Goal*. OT4: 145-158.

<sup>47</sup> The term which I am more familiar with for the Holy Spirit was produced by Yoseb Gergan and his team and used in the first edition of the Tibetan Bible (published in 1948 in Lahore, by the Rev. Chandu Ray, the secretary of the Bible Society in Pakistan). Since then the term *dam pa'i thugs nyid* has been used in all Protestant Christian literature when referring to the third person of the Trinity. In Buddhism *thugs nyid* is an honorific form of *sems nyid* and can be used to refer to the ultimate nature of mind. According to Hopkins (2011: 1850) *yid* refers to the mind as the main perceiver or the intellectual faculty. The term *nyon yid* for example means ‘afflicted mentality’. It is surprising that Desideri chose the word *yid* for the Spirit and not the honorific word *thugs*, which is used to describe an ‘exalted mind’.

<sup>48</sup> UTS pages 15-16.

<sup>49</sup> Pomplun (2009:128n24).

<sup>50</sup> Giorgi brought together and finalised the compilation of an historical dictionary about Tibet entitled *Alpha-betum Tibetanum* which was published as four separate volumes in Rome in 1762. He based his work on reports sent back by missionaries in the Capuchin mission to Tibet. See introduction to Bogle and Manning 2010 [1881]: ix.

<sup>51</sup> Pomplun (2009:128) comments, “I am surprised that Giorgi uses the non-honorific term *sems* whereas *thugs* would have been more honouring”.

ignorant and unenlightened. Because the Holy Spirit's perfections are commensurate with his very being, there was never a time when the Spirit was unenlightened and suffered limitations as a consequence of being 'deceived by obscuration(s) (*sgrib pa*) and delusion(s) (*gti mug*)', limitations which he gradually would have overcome if he were becoming a buddha. In addition, any implication that the Holy Spirit had undergone a final awakening from 'a sleep of ignorance' would be totally inappropriate.

From a dGe lugs perspective, I think Giorgi's inclusion of the word 'buddha' (*sangs rgyas*) in his term for the Holy Spirit is confusing and therefore inappropriate. Although, perhaps one could concede that for some non dGe lugs traditions, which consider the innate 'buddha mind' to be permanently enlightened (*sangs rgyas pa*) at its most subtle level, perhaps it might have some relevance, but I would not use it myself.

### **(5) How three are constituted as one.**

In the previous section, we saw Desideri's term for the Holy Spirit was *bla med rnam dag yid*. Desideri consistently uses *bla na med pa* ('incomparable' or 'sublime') when describing both the unity of the Triune God and the individual persons of Godhead. The Athanasian Creed expresses it in this way: "For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit have one divinity, equal glory, and coeternal majesty. What the Father is, the Son is, and the Holy Spirit is". It will be helpful to briefly look at the two illustrations Desideri used when writing about the unity in the Trinity.

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<sup>52</sup> Buddhahood is the term used to refer to an enlightened or awakened being. That is someone who has been perfected or purified (i.e. eradicated all obscurations) and so is able to see reality as it really is. Hopkins explains (2011: 2152) that, "the etymology of the word *sangs rgyas* ['awakened – spread'] is: "one who has awakened (from the sleep of ignorance) and spread (his intellect to all objects of knowledge)".

(1) In his first analogy, which has been briefly mentioned,<sup>53</sup> Desideri points out that a spring of water forms a river and from it a lake arises. Although these three, the spring, the river and the lake are separate entities, the water of all three is the same, i.e. it is without differentiation.<sup>54</sup> Desideri explains that the Father ‘begat’ (*skrun par mdzad pa*) the Son and the Son is ‘begotten’ of the Father (*bskrun pa'i sras yin*). He likens the Son to the river which issues from the spring. However, it is unlikely that the Tibetan reader would have been able to grasp Desideri’s analogy, not only due to a lack of suitable vocabulary, but as a consequence of their world-view. The dGe lugs pa would have assumed he was saying that either something is producing itself, or that something is producing something else.<sup>55</sup> As mentioned above (Point 3 ‘The Father ‘begat’ the Son) they would most likely have assumed that the Son had been constructed by the Father.

Desideri’s next point concerns the Holy Spirit being established (*grub pa*) from both the Father and the Son. Desideri likens the Father to the spring, the Son to the river that arises from the spring, and the Incomparable Pure Mind (Holy Spirit) to the lake produced by or from both the spring and the river. In closing this section on the Trinity, Desideri emphasises that the indivisible water of the spring, the river, and the lake, flows as a single [entity] and is without any differentiation. He then states that the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are established as one entity whose nature is indistinguishable and their essence indivisible.

(2) Desideri’s second illustration is that of a finger with three joints but these three constitute one inseparable finger (i.e., there is only one finger – not three). Desideri wants to reinforce the unity of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* ‘God’ and declares that the unrivalled and

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<sup>53</sup> Pomplun (2009: 123) makes an unreferenced comment that this analogy is mentioned in Patristic writings on the Trinity.

<sup>54</sup> UTS page 16.

<sup>55</sup> The Mādhyamika would view as false any assertion that a produced thing can exist intrinsically. See Napper 2003: 63-4.

unique Lord is one. Desideri is not implying that the finger has intrinsic existence but for the Mādhyamika this analogy would simply suggest that God is also a collection of parts and therefore is a mentally fabricated imputation to which we give the name 'God'.

## CHAPTER TWO

### DESIDERI'S CREED FOR A TIBETAN BUDDHIST READER.<sup>56</sup>

This section begins with the seeker asking the Pandit to recite something so he can memorise the words (and presumably repeat them) as a means to strengthen, generate or increase his faith in the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* 'God'. The Pandit explains that the twelve statements he will recite were composed by the twelve famous disciples of the most excellent,<sup>57</sup> sublime and glorious leader Jesus Christ.<sup>58</sup> Desideri initially lists the various topics that constitute the Creed after which he comments on each statement in detail.<sup>59</sup>

(1) Creation: Desideri understood the need to highlight the fact that God created things *ex-nihilo*. In describing God's act of creation, Desideri clarified that everything ('the heavens and the earth, together with all pervading phenomena') were brought into existence 'out of nothing'.

(2) Conception: the miraculous conception of Jesus Christ.

(3) Mary the mother of Jesus: the doctrine taught by the Catholic Church which pertains to Mary's purity.

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<sup>56</sup> Sweet 2010: 573. Desideri wrote his catechism in Tibetan for those who were hearing about the Christian Faith for the first time.

<sup>57</sup> Since Tibetan does not have a word that directly translates 'holy' (in the Biblical sense), Desideri has chosen the word *dam pa*, which describes an excellent or worthy person.

<sup>58</sup> Lane (1984: 51): "There is an ancient tradition from the fourth century that the Apostles' Creed was composed by the twelve apostles." The view was generally abandoned in the sixteenth century.

<sup>59</sup> UTS pages: 18-19 and 19–28. See Part 2, chapter 3 (Section 2) of my translation entitled 'The Apostles' Creed'.

(4) The death of Jesus: Jesus Christ died a cruel death on a cross at the hands of the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate.<sup>60</sup>

(5) Jesus' descent into hell: having descended to the 'hell-realms' his executed body was raised to life (*sku lus slar nas gson por bzhangs pa*) despite his having been totally exposed to all the 'horrifying phenomena' there.

(6) His Ascension: having ascended to heaven (*nam mkha'i zhing khams*) Jesus sat down at the right hand of the 'all pervasive' intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* – God the Father.

(7) The end of the world: (*jig rten gyi dus tha mar*). Jesus will return and will encompass all people with his judgement – both the living and the dead.

(8) The Holy Spirit: The Incomparable Pure Mind (*bla med rnam dag yid*).

(9) The Catholic Church: The universality of the pure (Catholic) Church and the significance of the accumulated roots of virtue of the saints being for the common good.

(10) Transgressions: all wrong doing (*nyes byas*), if repented of 'from the heart' and renounced will be subdued and cleared away on account of (God's) great limitless compassion.

(11) Resurrection of the Living and the Dead: at the end of the world each individual person's mind (*sems*) will be rejoined with their resurrected body and they will never again be separated.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> A Buddhist would assume that if Jesus really suffered and died a horrible death he must have had extremely bad karma accrued as a result of evil actions he had done in this life or in previous ones. The alternative was to assume that that his death was a 'display of skilful means' and that his suffering and death were only an 'appearance' of suffering and death. A Buddha is said to have passed beyond suffering and any appearance of suffering for whatever reason would only apply to an emanated form. Williams 2009: 173 discusses emanated forms and points out that a Buddha is a master of magical transformations and can create 'mind-made' bodies of himself that are capable, not only of visiting other realms, but which can appear in more than one place simultaneously.

(12) Heaven: there is an ultimate, irreversible life of perfect enjoyment that is permanent and eternal.

I will now discuss Desideri's expanded comments in which he sought to make the following topics accessible to his reader. I will also examine the vocabulary he used to express these Christian concepts.<sup>62</sup>

- (1) God's Power as it relates to the Creation of the Heavens and the Earth (*ex-nihilo*).
- (2) The Incarnation of Jesus Christ.
- (3) The Life and Death of Jesus.
- (4) The second Coming of Christ and Future Judgement.
- (5) Transgressions and Forgiveness of sin.
- (6) Heaven.
- (7) The Universal Church.

In considering the things that Desideri commented upon in this manuscript, as well as those topics he mentions only in passing<sup>63</sup> or not at all,<sup>64</sup> I think it is reasonable to say that he was totally focused on his 'un-churched' audience. He was not producing a catechism for those preparing to take confirmation within the structure of the Catholic Church. Rather, his manuscript was to serve more as a teaching tool for people who knew very little about the

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<sup>61</sup> Within a Christian context, the word *sems* or *sems nyid* would refer to 'spirit' or 'soul' in this context and presumably this is what Desideri had in mind. However his reader would interpret the word *sems* as 'mind'.

<sup>62</sup> The list below does not necessarily follow the order in the Church Creeds.

<sup>63</sup> The Holy Spirit.

<sup>64</sup> Apostolic Succession.



Christian Faith. In fact it is probable that Desideri may have been the only Christian they had ever met.

**God's Power as it relates to Creation ex-nihilo.** (Article I)<sup>65</sup>

Desideri is uncompromising in his insistence that God's boundless power (*mthu nus*) and incomparable strength (*stobs*) is not only 'all pervasive' (*khyab pa*) but is unrivalled by any other.<sup>66</sup> In his discussion he makes the following three points:

- (1) God created the heavens and the earth *ex-nihilo* according to his own pleasure.
- (2) Not only is he able to create, he is also able, (should he so choose) to terminate (or) annihilate all that by his power he has created out of nothing (*ex-nihilo*).
- (3) There is no obstacle or opposition that can hinder or prevent him from carrying out his will.

Desideri's point is that just as God the creator brought all things into existence *ex-nihilo*, he could (if he wished) withdraw his sustaining power that holds all things together and thereby terminate the existence of everything. Obviously, such an action would not include himself, since he is a necessary being and therefore cannot not exist. Desideri makes it clear that God continually sustains all things and does not permit them to be annihilated. Tibetans are aware of the various philosophical discussions amongst Hindus that pertain to a Hindu view of

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<sup>65</sup> The inclusion of *Articles I-XII* relate to the creedal points listed in the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*. <<http://geocities.com/Athens/Rhodes/3543/trentc.htm>> (Downloaded 23-11-2003).

<sup>66</sup> UTS page: 18.

creation where things are said to be manifested out of pre-existing material.<sup>67</sup> What the Hindus and Tibetans would reject is any concept of creation *ex-nihilo*.

Desideri emphasises that all things are impermanent, dependent, and *not* without a beginning. All creation - the heavens and the earth; animate and inanimate phenomena are all subject to 'birth and destruction'. But the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* 'God' alone is unique, unrivalled and eternal; he is permanent and therefore cannot cease to exist.<sup>68</sup>

Having laid the above foundation, Desideri addresses the question of how things were made. He clarifies once more that at the beginning things did not exist. In stating this he is emphasising that when things were created by God, i.e. brought into existence, there was no existing previous matter from which those things were, or could be, formed.<sup>69</sup> He has already pointed out that it was by virtue of (God's) incomparable power and strength that they came into existence. Furthermore they were established by the power of God's infinite compassion.<sup>70</sup>

Desideri is concerned that his reader grasp the fundamental difference between *rang grub dkon mchog* (the intrinsically existent God) and *mi rtag dngos po rnams* (impermanent compounded things which are created and destroyed). He wants the reader to understand that

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<sup>67</sup> Gyatso (2007: 436-439).

<sup>68</sup> A Christian does not necessarily view dependency as a negative: e.g. Adam and Eve were both created as perfect and were dependent beings. It was the entrance of sin that compromised the situation of dependency and as a result our inter-dependent world became associated with negativity.

<sup>69</sup> *Ex-nihilo* (*ci yang med pa nas*)

<sup>70</sup> It is interesting to note that Desideri links the creation of the heavens and the earth not only to God's unlimited power but also to his infinite compassion. I think this is significant as it is important for his reader to grasp that not only did time and life itself have a beginning but God's creative activity was motivated by love. Desideri's main points are: (1) Creation was brought about by the power of infinite compassion (*rang grub dkon mchog gi thugs rje tshad med pa*). (2) God brought all things into existence (*mngon par grub tu 'jug par mdzad pas so*). (3) He caused all visible phenomena to be established out of absolutely nothing. God did not create dependent phenomena from his own being (substance) but when he created - things were manifested 'out of nothing' (*ex-nihilo*) – not out of himself nor out of any pre-existing material.

God is not like those dependent phenomena. (Created) things (which by nature are impermanent) come about in relative dependence upon one another and are unable (apart from relating to other causes and conditions) to reproduce themselves. Desideri gives an example of a craftsman builder who, when constructing a house, fashions and uses pre-existing materials such as stones, mud and wooden beams and planks to form his building.<sup>71</sup> He points out that even if the building is later demolished and the component parts are destroyed, nevertheless the fundamental elements, created by God, remain. God not only created everything *ex-nihilo*, he continually sustains that which he has created - he makes sure that they 'keep going' (i.e. within the constraints of cause and effect) and does not permit them to be annihilated.<sup>72</sup>

Desideri's creedal comments do not always seem very orderly. He sometimes repeats himself and having made a point, he then introduces a new subject but later returns to a previous point and expands upon it. He ends this section with the following words: 'Understand that he [God] is the precious Father of us who are impermanent and have the nature of birth and death'.<sup>73</sup>

The brief declaration in the Apostles' Creed:<sup>74</sup> "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth." does not tell the 'full story' but the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*

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<sup>71</sup> However the manifestation of created things was not a result of previously existing causes and conditions – there were none. They were manifested out of nothing. Thomas Aquinas elaborates on this point in his *Summa Theologiae* 1912: 211-283. Part I. Second Number (QQ. XXVII – LXXIV). Treatise on Creation. In particular see (ibid., 220) Question XLV on: The Mode of Emanation of Things from the First Principle. Also see: St Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, ed. Timothy McDermott: 1989: 85-86.

<sup>72</sup> Desideri is not saying that things cannot be destroyed; for example the second Jewish temple no longer exists – it has gone – but rather that God holds his created world together within the boundaries of time, space and the various natural laws he has created for it to function within. Desideri does not discuss the First Cause as opposed to secondary causes here but must have had these in mind.

<sup>73</sup> That is, we who are mortal.

<sup>74</sup> Lane 1984: 51 (Apostles' Creed); 28 (Nicene Creed); 73 (Athanasian Creed).

explains:<sup>75</sup> “The meaning of the above words is this: I believe with certainty, and without a shadow of doubt profess my belief in God the Father, the First Person of the Trinity, who by His omnipotence created from nothing and preserves and governs the heavens and the earth and all things which they contain.” These points are expanded upon in the following statements:<sup>76</sup> “By it we understand that there neither exists nor can be conceived in thought or imagination anything which God cannot do. For not only can He annihilate created things, and in a moment can summon from nothing into existence many other worlds”.<sup>77</sup> “For God formed the world not from materials of any sort, but created it from nothing, and that not by constrain or necessity, but spontaneously, and of His own free will. Nor was He impelled to create by any other cause than a desire to communicate His goodness to creatures.” The same section refers to God as the Divine Architect and makes it clear that he created all things in the beginning. “He spoke and they were made: He commanded and they were created.” The catechism also states: “For as all things derive existence from the Creator’s supreme power, wisdom and goodness, so unless preserved continually by His Providence, and by the same power that produced them, they (all things) would instantly turn to nothingness”.<sup>78</sup> We can see that Desideri has faithfully covered all these points in his own catechism.

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<sup>75</sup> See CCT Article 1: sub-heading ‘Meaning of this Article’.

<sup>76</sup> CCT Article 1: sub-heading ‘Meaning of the term Almighty’.

<sup>77</sup> CCT Article 1: sub-heading ‘Creator’.

<sup>78</sup> CCT Article 1: sub-heading ‘God Preserves, Rules and Moves all Created Things’.

## **The Incarnation of God the Son.** (Articles II and III)

This part of Desideri's manuscript centres on (1) the manner in which God the Son took human form and (2) the reason why he came to earth and was born in Bethlehem.<sup>79</sup> Desideri explains that the name 'Jesus' means to *lead and to save* in the sense of freeing or liberating a captive.<sup>80</sup> He elaborates on the significance of the phrase 'like a jewel on the crown of the head' when he states that not only is Jesus like that jewel, he is also like the sun in the midst of the planets and consequently, when compared to all the precious (*rin po che*) lamas and kings, he (Jesus) is unique and therefore he is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.<sup>81</sup> Desideri reminds his reader that Jesus is called the honourable Lord and Master because of his divinity – he is truly one with his Father (*yab dkon mchog*) and is the reason why we were caused to come into existence out of absolutely nothing.<sup>82</sup> Desideri clearly states that Jesus' coming into the world was to compassionately offer up his life on the cross for the benefit all people and that deliverance from the enslavement by evil spirits (*'dre bdud*) was part of

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<sup>79</sup> Concerning the Incarnation: see CCT Article II, sub-title *His Only Son*. "It is better, however, to contemplate what faith proposes, and in the sincerity of our souls to believe and confess that Jesus Christ is true God and true man, as God, begotten of the Father before all ages, as Man, born in time of Mary, His Virgin Mother". The admonition under the heading: CCT Article III, sub-title *How to Profit by the Mystery of the Incarnation* includes these words, "the faithful should particularly recall, and frequently reflect, that it is God who assumed human flesh; [and] that the manner in which He became man exceeds our comprehension". According to Geisler and Mackenzie (1995: 67): "The Christian tradition down through the centuries has proclaimed that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh [...]. He became truly man while remaining truly God. Jesus Christ is true man and true God." The words of the Nicene Creed declare, "We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father."

<sup>80</sup> UTS page: 19.

<sup>81</sup> UTS page: 20.

<sup>82</sup> UTS page 20. Desideri explains that the first reason for calling Jesus Christ 'our honourable Lord and Master' is twofold: (a) on account of the Father and the Son's immeasurable power and incomparable strength they are established as one and not two separate independent entities, (i.e. they are one in the same). (b) Jesus Christ who is the precious Son of the Father is the reason whereby we came into existence out of absolutely nothing. Desideri explains the second reason is because Jesus Christ died for the sake of all people by compassionately offering up his life in order to set us all free from the evil spirits that enslave us.

that.<sup>83</sup> The linking of Jesus' coming with his motivation of compassion for others is significant. The word *phan 'dogs* ('to bring benefit') has special significance in Tibetan Buddhism and Desideri would have been aware of this. It is intrinsically tied up with 'bodhicitta motivation' and relates to the Buddhist altruistic aspiration to bring benefit to others.<sup>84</sup> Desideri explains that Jesus demonstrated/taught the Good Path, and by means of various miracles, he worked for the benefit of individual beings and for all those who would believe in him in the future.

The seeker then requests clarification concerning the Pandit's earlier statement about Jesus being miraculously conceived in the womb of the faultless Mary. In his reply, Desideri uses the honorific word for womb (*lhums*) and explains that the conception occurred when the sublime power of the Incomparable Pure Mind (the Holy Spirit) *bla med rnam dag yid* miraculously permeated or overshadowed the womb of a chaste woman who was called Mary. He emphasises the mother's virginity was not violated.<sup>85</sup>

In describing the formation of Jesus' earthly body within Mary's womb, Desideri uses the honorific term *bltams pa* for birth. This is in contrast to the non-honorific word *skye ba*, which he uses when discussing human birth in general.<sup>86</sup> Having briefly explained several

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<sup>83</sup> UTS page: 20. Regarding demonic enslavement: I think Desideri is referring to mankind as a whole and not just a few people when he uses the word 'us'.

<sup>84</sup> See Part One A Section 2.

<sup>85</sup> The Catholic Church teaches that Mary is a perpetual virgin. "This immaculate and perpetual virginity forms, therefore, the just theme of our eulogy." (CCT Article III, sub-title *The Nativity of Christ Transcends the order of Nature*). Desideri appears to have made a special effort to emphasise her purity but whether he believed that Mary was conceived without original sin and that she was free from every personal sin during her whole life is less clear. See also Chapman (1994: 112-114) *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

<sup>86</sup> A brief examination of Desideri's Tibetan vocabulary to explain the Virgin Birth is interesting. He used a number of different words to reinforce the unblemished nature of Mary (UTS pages: 20-21). The word *tshangs spyod* refers to her chastity or pure conduct and he qualifies this by the word 'immaculate' (*dri ma med pa*). The word *ma gos pa* refers to being unsullied, unpolluted, or undefiled by any fault (*skyon*). In other words she was unblemished (or untainted) by defects and flaws of any kind. When the time came for her son to be born (*bltams pa* is the honorific term for 'birth') he was delivered from a mother who was *kun tu bzang mo* (i.e. completely good or perfect). It was pointed

facts pertaining to human reproduction (i.e. the need for sexual intercourse), Desideri emphasises again that the birth of God the Son occurred miraculously. His conception was not a result of human sexual activity. As there was no father, his birth was a unique event in human history. Desideri states that the body of the child was adorned with auspicious signs but does not define what these were.<sup>87</sup> He explains the body of the child was formed over a nine month period in the womb of the ‘All Good mother’ Mary (*kun tu bzang mo ma rya*). It was formed from her ‘pure heart blood’ (*snying khrag gtsang ma*) as a result of the Holy Spirit’s miraculous working.<sup>88</sup>

The Buddhist term *kun tu bzang mo* is used to refer to a particular female deity. Pomplun comments:<sup>89</sup> “I blush to think that Desideri, in describing the Virgin Mary as “thoroughly pure” (*kun tu bzang ma*), might have suggested she was like the female deity Kuntubzangmo (*kun tu bzang mo*)”.<sup>90</sup> This particular deity is considered to be one of the tantric consorts.<sup>91</sup>

Obviously Desideri is not linking Mary with such a deity, but his intention is to portray Mary

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out in the previous footnote the Catholic Church teaches that Mary is devoid of original sin. The word to conceive in Tibetan is *rgyu chags* and the word *tshangs pa* generally refers to being chaste or pure in a sexual sense. Desideri is keen to make it clear that in the case of Mary she was a mother who did not possess any fault of having had sexual relationships.

<sup>87</sup> Powers 2007 [1995]: 193. Also see Gyatso 1992a: 237. “The various physical signs of a Buddha such as elongated ears and a protuberance on the crown of the head etc. are said to “signify the unsurpassable qualities of a fully enlightened Buddha.”

<sup>88</sup> Since this thesis is not a theological commentary, I will refrain from discussing the phrase ‘the pure heart blood of Mary’. The CCT Article III, sub-title *In the Incarnation Some Things Were Natural, Others Supernatural* states: “Thus, in believing that the body of Christ was formed from the most pure blood of His Virgin Mother we acknowledge the operation of human nature, this being a law common to the formation of all human bodies, that they should be formed from the blood of the mother.” It also states: “[T]he body of Christ was formed of the pure immaculate Virgin without the aid of man, as we have already said, and by the sole operation of the Holy Ghost, so also, at the moment of His Conception, His soul was enriched with an overflowing fullness of the Spirit of God, and a superabundance of all graces”.

<sup>89</sup> Pomplun 2010:158.

<sup>90</sup> Actually, Desideri does use the term *kun tu bzang mo* several times when referring to Mary (See UTS pages 20-21).

<sup>91</sup> The Sanskrit term for *kun tu bzang mo* is Samantabhadrī. Samantabhadrī is considered to be the consort of the primordial Buddha (Samantabhadrā) notably in the rNying ma pa school of Tibetan Buddhism. By using this term for Mary the confusion for the Tibetans would be considerable and consequently I think it is reasonable to say that it was a major blunder on Desideri’s part.

as a completely good or perfect person who was untainted by sin in any way. It appears that he also wants to emphasise that she was a virgin mother who did not possess any fault in regard to having had sexual relations. He also states that a ‘most excellently adorned superior consciousness (*rnam shes*), which was caused to come into being *ex-nihilo*, was simultaneously combined with the child’s body in Mary’s womb’.<sup>92</sup>

An assertion that a consciousness (*rnam shes*) came into existence *ex-nihilo* would be a concept that the dGe lugs pas would consider impossible. They view consciousness as a beginningless flow of ‘moments of consciousness’, and since a moment of consciousness can only come about or arise from a previous moment of consciousness - and not from something that is unconscious - there can be no ‘first moment’ to such a continuum.<sup>93</sup> According to such a view the arising of a ‘moment of consciousness’ requires a previous cause of the same type or ‘stuff’. Therefore, an assertion that consciousness was caused to arise *ex-nihilo* would make no sense at all to a Buddhist who considers that there was never a time when there was nothing at all.

Desideri’s brief account of how the person of the intrinsically existent God the Son united himself with the mind (*sems*) and body of the distinctive pure human child is relevant. In the next few sentences he reinforces the purpose of the incarnation which was to bring benefit to all people here on earth.<sup>94</sup> Returning to the topic of the Trinity Desideri explains that although God the Son was ‘begotten’ there was no eternal mother. Not surprisingly, he wants to make it clear that there is no sexual connotation to referring to Jesus as ‘God’s Son’ (or ‘God the

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<sup>92</sup> UTS page: 21.

<sup>93</sup> Raptan (1992:12) states: “The mind is not a static phenomenon but a dynamic continuum within each individual”. He continues: “The mind has no beginning to its continuity and no end. The stream of consciousness manifest in us now has a history that reaches back into the past with no single point to be identified as its first moment. Likewise it will continue indefinitely into the future even when, through practice and effort, it has been transformed into the mind of a Buddha”.

<sup>94</sup> UTS page: 21. The coming of Jesus was not an emanatory appearance. He actually took flesh and blood and was born a human being.



Son'). This is why he so clearly states that there was never (*ye mi*) an eternal mother (*yum yod ye mi mnga' ba*).<sup>95</sup> Desideri continues, describing the manner in which Jesus visibly appeared in this world. He claims that Jesus' birth was completely unhindered and likens it to a ray of sunlight passing through a clear crystal without there being any obstruction whatsoever.<sup>96</sup>

### **The life and death of Jesus Christ.**                      (*Articles IV and V*)

Desideri restricts his focus to what he has described as 'the two endlessly compassionate accomplishments' and 'the two distinctive and precious actions', namely (1) the Birth of Jesus Christ, and (2) the Death of Jesus Christ.<sup>97</sup>

(1) His Life: Surprisingly, there are relatively few references to the life of Jesus Christ in Desideri's manuscript. He describes the birth of Christ, but not the nativity story in so far as it relates to the census, the manger, the appearance of angels to the shepherds or the visit of the wise men. His emphasis is on the significance of the incarnation – the Word made flesh. Desideri explains it by saying that the Son, who is without beginning, is the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* 'God'. At a certain time in history he took the nature and identity of a human body. He was born as a man - being established of/having both the incomparable

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<sup>95</sup> UTS page 21. See Part 2 of this thesis, chapter 3: The Virgin Birth.

<sup>96</sup> UTS page 21. It is possible that this comment has its origins in a statement found in the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* (CCT Article III sub-title, *The Nativity of Christ Transcends the Order of Nature*.) "[J]ust as the rays of the sun penetrate without breaking or injuring in the least the solid substance of glass, so after a like but more exalted manner did Jesus Christ come forth from His mother's womb without injury to her maternal virginity." It is likely that this reference relates to an assertion regarding the perpetual virginity of Mary and that her hymen was not ruptured.

<sup>97</sup> UTS page: 17. Desideri does not use the term 'incarnation'. He writes: 'Jesus Christ who is the holy, most excellent and glorious leader was born as a human being' (*g.yas gzu ke ri se sto 'dren pa'i dpal mchog dam pas mir bltams par gnang ste 'jig rten tu byon zhing*).

nature of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* and the non-supreme nature of man.<sup>98</sup> And these two natures were inseparably bound together as one.<sup>99</sup> Desideri points out that the meaning of the word ‘Jesus’ is ‘to lead and to save’, (i.e., Jesus is a liberator who leads people to freedom). And the word ‘Christ’ shows that he is like ‘the jewel on the crown of the head’ when compared to all the superior ones. By saying this he is elevating Jesus above all the buddhas, buddhist deities, and all earthly authorities.<sup>100</sup>

The seeker’s next question requests the Pandit to explain why Jesus Christ is called ‘the Son of God, the only (i.e. the unique) Lord’.<sup>101</sup> Desideri explains that God the Son came in a human form. Taking birth (as human being) he lived here on earth for 33 years and completed a life of perfected activity right up until he died.<sup>102</sup> Desideri then draws the reader’s attention<sup>103</sup> to Jesus’ perfect behaviour and the unlimited compassion he showed to

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<sup>98</sup> The Athanasian Creed states: “It is also necessary for eternal salvation that he [a person] believes steadfastly in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is both God and man. As God, He was begotten of the substance of the Father before time; as man, He was born in time of the substance of His Mother. He is perfect God; and He is perfect man, with a rational soul and human flesh. He is equal to the Father in His divinity, but inferior to the Father in His humanity. Although He is God and man, He is not two, but one Christ. And He is one, not because His divinity was changed into flesh, but because His humanity was assumed unto God. As a rational soul and flesh are one man: so God and man are one Christ”

<sup>99</sup> UTS page: 17.

<sup>100</sup> Desideri uses the word *lta bu* (like) when referring to Jesus being the jewel on the crown of the head and the sun in the midst of the planets. I would like to propose one possible reason (apart from his need to write succinctly) why Desideri’s references to the earthly life of Jesus are so few. It could be that he found Tibetans were not overly impressed when listening to accounts of miraculous feats of non-Buddhists. From my experience of living in the Himalayas, I found this to be so and a Tibetan would frequently respond by recounting extraordinary feats carried out by various Buddhist ‘saints’. In contrast I found that the death of Jesus frequently elicited a more sympathetic response.

<sup>101</sup> UTS page: 20.

<sup>102</sup> UTS pages: 17-21.

<sup>103</sup> UTS pages: 21-22.

mankind. He also explains that the amazing miracles Jesus performed were for the benefit of individual people and for all those who would believe in him in the future.<sup>104</sup>

(2) His Death: Although Desideri describes the death of Jesus Christ in more detail, he does not give an account of the actual crucifixion but makes a brief reference to the terrifying reign of Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judea. He describes him as a ruler who, filled with hatred and jealousy, had Jesus tortured and crucified. He points out that Jesus (voluntarily) gave up his life when he died on the cross following which some of his followers respectfully placed his slain body inside a new tomb.<sup>105</sup> The purpose of Jesus' sacrifice was in order to benefit all people (i.e. from the beginning of the world, right up until the end of the world). At this point Desideri does not elaborate further on why Jesus, who was innocent, willingly submitted himself to terrible tortures and even death itself, in spite of possessing unsurpassed strength and power. (But he does take it up again later on.<sup>106</sup>). Desideri explains that although it is true that Jesus Christ is the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, nevertheless he (voluntarily) took upon himself the nature of a human being because it was only as a human being that he could experience death.<sup>107</sup> Christ's resurrection is mentioned briefly. Desideri states that after Jesus died he went to the hell realms where he was exposed to, but unaffected by, the horrendous suffering and decay that is associated with hell.<sup>108</sup> However on the third day he was

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<sup>104</sup> Desideri reminds the reader that Jesus is called the honourable Lord and Master because of his divinity – he is truly one with his Father (*yab dkon mchog*) and that he (Jesus) is the reason why we were caused to come into existence out of absolutely nothing (UTS page: 19). *yab kyi sras rin po rje g.yas gzu ke ri se sto nged cag rnams la ci yang med pa nas mngon par grub tu 'jug par mdzad pa'i rgyu mtshan dang/*.

<sup>105</sup> UTS page: 21.

<sup>106</sup> UTS page: 24.

<sup>107</sup> He also reminds the reader that the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* (God) who is without form is: (1) established of all unsurpassed qualities and greatness and (2) is the very essence of all perfection.

<sup>108</sup> This would not sound strange to the reader. Williams 1989: 232 points out that the Buddhist deity Avalokiteśvara also descended into hell “in order to save the suffering hell beings”.

resurrected alive in a body that was restored to its previous state, i.e. alive as opposed to dead.<sup>109</sup>

Although Desideri does not point out that it was Christ's *sems nyid* ('spirit' or 'soul') that descended into hell while his dead body remained in the tomb - we may assume he expected Tibetans to believe that this would have been the case. The *Catechism of the Council of Trent* states:<sup>110</sup> "[W]e profess that immediately after the death of Christ, His soul descended into hell, and dwelt there as long as his body remained in the tomb; and also that the one Person of Christ was at the same time in hell and in the sepulchre." Desideri's description of the Christ's decent into these realms is not incompatible with Catholic teaching on Hell, Purgatory and Limbo.<sup>111</sup>

### **The Second Coming of Christ and future judgement.**     (*Articles VI and VII*)

The seeker changes the subject and asks for clarifications concerning the 7th creedal point: At the end of the world, Jesus Christ will come from heaven, from the right hand of the Father,

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<sup>109</sup> Desideri repeats these statements later on when he discusses them in more detail. UTS page: 24.

<sup>110</sup> CCT Article V, sub-title *He Descended into Hell*.

<sup>111</sup> The CCT Article V, sub-title *Hell* states: "Hell, then, here signifies those secret abodes in which are detained the souls that have not attained the happiness of heaven." The *Catechism of the Council of Trent* also states (CCT Article V, sub-title *He Descended*), "But although Christ descended into hell, His supreme power was in no degree lessened, nor was the splendour of His sanctity obscured by any blemish." Having despoiled the demons (when he died on the cross) he descended into the hell in order that "He might liberate from prison those holy Fathers and the other just souls, and might bring them into heaven with Himself [...] Christ the Lord descended [...] not to suffer, but to liberate the holy and just from their painful captivity, and to impart to them the fruit of His Passion." (CCT Article V, sub-title *Why He Descended into Hell*). See UTS page 24 for Desideri's description of liberation of the 'superior holy people' from limbo.

to judge all people - both the living and those who have died.<sup>112</sup> Desideri's reply contains the following five points.<sup>113</sup>

(1) Although the exact time when the world will terminate is unknown, nevertheless there is no doubt that it will come to an end and the world (which includes the whole universe) will be annihilated by 'an all consuming and terrifying fire'.<sup>114</sup>

(2) Jesus, the unique Lord and deliverer, will descend from the heavenly realm (*nam mkha'i zhing khams*). The literal meaning is 'sky realm'.

(3) His second coming will be as the precious Judge and his glory will be so unbearably bright that no human eye will be able to even look at him.

(4) On that last day, many of the people who die will be in the prime of their life, but following their sudden death they will be immediately resurrected. Their body, which has just died, will be raised up and come alive again and will be re-united with their mind (*sems*).

(5) The same will happen to all people who have died prior to the 'Last Day'.

To examine what Desideri is saying here it will be helpful if we look at some points he makes in reply to a question concerning his 11<sup>th</sup> creedal point. 'At the end of the world each person's body which they formerly occupied will be joined to their *sems* [mind/soul/spirit] again and will not be separated from it but will be resurrected'.<sup>115</sup> Desideri explains that because positive and negative actions (he refers to these as white and black deeds) occurred during the time of causation - when the body and the mind were both closely associated - it is

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<sup>112</sup> UTS page: 18-19.

<sup>113</sup> UTS page: 25.

<sup>114</sup> Destruction by fire is a familiar concept in Buddhist cosmology. Gethin 1998: 124 points out that there are times when the world contracts as a result of destruction by fire.

<sup>115</sup> UTS page: 27. CCT Article XI, sub-title *Arguments Drawn from Reason* states: "it appears fitting that the soul should be reunited to the body, and consequently that the body should rise again."

not appropriate (i.e. right or fair) that those good actions and evil actions and their associated fruit should just dissipate or vanish. Nor is it fair that their accumulated effects should be enjoyed by another and not by the doer of the actual deeds. The Athanasian Creed is more specific when it talks of the resurrection of the body. It states that “He [Jesus] died for our salvation, descended into hell, and rose from the dead on the third day. He ascended into heaven, sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there He shall come to judge the living and the dead. At His coming, all men are to arise with their own bodies; and they are to give an account of their own deeds”.

**Transgressions and forgiveness of sin.**      (*Article X*)

This subject relates to the 10<sup>th</sup> point in Desideri’s creedal summary where he states that wrongdoing or evil actions (*nyes byas*) no matter what they are – when these are remorsefully renounced (*sun ‘byin pa*) by the power of putting things right – the (evil) will be subdued (*phyir bcos*) and cleared away (*bsal ba*) because of God’s great limitless compassion.<sup>116</sup> Desideri continues, pointing out some of the devastating consequences of Adam’s and Eve’s transgression.<sup>117</sup>

- (1) As a result of ‘the fruit of their actions’ their descendants, lacking in self-restraint, made no attempt to avoid polluting behaviour.
- (2) An inconceivable number of people are affected in this way and it is as though they are all being dragged (in the wrong direction) by a noose (a lasso) of conflicting emotions or

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<sup>116</sup> UTS page: 19. The Nicene Creed states: “We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.” In this passage Desideri addresses the subject of the forgiveness of evil (i.e. non-virtuous or negative actions) but does not mention baptism. He does so later on (see UTS page 27 and 47-48).

<sup>117</sup> UTS page: 22. Desideri discusses this within the context of why Jesus Christ had to die. He gives a very brief account of Genesis 1-3 and points out that the created couple, on account of their being deceived by the devil, disobeyed and no longer took delight in God. (Here Desideri uses the Tibetan word *bdud* for devil). The negative actions of Adam and Eve brought about irreversible suffering, unhappiness, fear, illness, old age and death (into a world that up to that time was devoid of all suffering).

afflictions (*nyon mongs*). Unaware of their true situation they have no feelings of lamentation or remorse ('*gyod pa med pa*) and no fear as they continue to accumulate evil deeds.<sup>118</sup> The expression (*rtsa ba'i nyes sgrib*) indicates that there is evil at a very deep level which obstructs the generation of virtue and this particular choice of words might help a Buddhist gain some understanding of the completely new concept of 'original sin'.<sup>119</sup>

(3) As a consequence of being dragged in the wrong direction, people live as though they are enemies of the intrinsically existent compassionate *dkon mchog* (God).

(4) Thus their lives are deprived of God's blessing.

(5) And it is unlikely that they will ever attain the ultimate goal.

Desideri's point is that this description applies not just to one or two people but to humanity as a whole and the consequences he describes are terrifying. He explains that the power of their very negative actions has brought about the generation of inexhaustible sufferings in a hell that is without end and from which there is no possibility of deliverance.<sup>120</sup> Desideri then makes it clear that the human race, no matter what good deeds people may perform, is incapable of overcoming the power of evil. Moreover, it is impossible for a human being to bring about (self) deliverance from the inescapable hell of limitless suffering.

Desideri illustrates his next point by describing some snake bitten patients who ignored an expensive but very effective antidote that had been painstakingly prepared by a doctor and which would have saved their lives. He then 'paints a mental picture' in which he describes

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<sup>118</sup> UTS page: 22. Desideri describes people being shackled, as it were, to root defects.

<sup>119</sup> In Tibetan Buddhism, greed, hatred and delusion (*rmongs pa*) could be described as primary or root defects from which all other faults arise. According to Gyatso (2001: 161) the three main delusions "are ignorance, desirous attachment and anger [or aversion]. From these arise all other delusions, such as jealousy, pride and deluded doubt".

<sup>120</sup> Here Desideri uses several words (*nyes lei rnams*) which when translated mean 'heavy transgressions' or 'crimes'. I assume that he is referring to very negative actions, which the Catholic Church refers to 'mortal sins'.

the patients' responses.<sup>121</sup> Some on account of prejudice or arrogance did not even ask for the antidote. He likens such people to those who do not have faith in the unique Lord and Master, the Deliverer and Leader Jesus Christ. Then there are those who ask for the antidote but fail to ingest it even though they were fully aware that it would save them. Desideri's point is that each patient, as an individual, must act in order to turn things to their own advantage. He explains that if a person does not avail himself of the righteousness that Jesus Christ imparts – a righteousness that will effectively deal with the consequences of his or her wrongdoing - then that person is like the snake bitten patient who failed to ingest the antidote which would have preserved their life.<sup>122</sup> The thought here is that what Jesus offers is like an antidote that will afford release, restoration and hope to all who are shackled to a negative and self-destructive lifestyle, and are hopelessly in the grip of its powerful effects. Desideri gives several reasons why people do not avail themselves of the 'righteousness' (*bla na med pa'i dge rtsa rnams*) that Christ offers.

(1) Some people, having asserted their adherence to the Christian Faith, deliberately fail to live in a virtuous manner commensurate with faith in Christ and, lacking genuine repentance, they show no firm resolve to abandon their bad actions.

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<sup>121</sup> See UTS page: 23. In effect the seeker had asked for clarification as to whether Jesus Christ saves you or whether you have to save yourself. References to a doctor and his patient(s) are mentioned in Buddhist texts e.g. Tsong kha pa (GT1: 59). Snakes are also mentioned. The well-known illustration of mistaking a rope for a snake is discussed in Tsong kha pa's *The Great Treatise* (GT1: 300).

<sup>122</sup> The term Desideri uses here is *bla na med pa'i dge rtsa rnams* which translates as 'incomparable roots of virtue'. I have substituted this concept with the word 'righteousness'. A similar story is found in the Lotus Sutra (Kosei-kai, 2008: 294) but in this case the clever doctor, who has the ability to make potent medical cures, has to leave on a business trip. However, on his return he discovers that his numerous sons have inadvertently taken poison. Some take the medicine he offers but the others (i.e. those whose minds have already been deeply affected by the poison) do not.



(2) Then there are others whose lack of application regarding God's antidote for *nyes spyod* (wrongdoing) may be due to their laziness and ignorance.<sup>123</sup>

Desideri gives an additional illustration in order to demonstrate God's unlimited compassion for lost and condemned human beings. He describes the reaction of a parent who sees his or her young son caught in a terrifying and desperate situation from which the child does not have the strength to remove himself. The parent, without any hesitation or procrastination, exerts every ounce of his or her physical strength to pull their beloved child from danger. Moreover that parent, despite having suffered so greatly, both physically and emotionally, is overwhelmed with great happiness or joy.<sup>124</sup> Similarly, Jesus willingly endured suffering in order to offer himself as a sacrifice in order to liberate people from the slavery of their sinful actions. His perfect accomplishment was twofold:

(1) Immeasurable, unsurpassed and most excellent virtue and goodness (righteousness) was generated by virtue of his overflowing compassion.

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<sup>123</sup> The word *nyes spyod* has different meanings such as 'negative actions', 'unwholesome forms of behaviour', 'misdeed's, 'crimes' or 'wrongdoing'. The word *nyes* means 'evil' but may also be used for 'sin' *sdig (pa)* which describes moral wrongdoing or sin in a Buddhist context. In contrast, terms such as 'sin(s)' and 'transgression(s)' have a distinctive meaning when associated with Christian thought. The word for 'ignorance' is *gti mug* which, in a Buddhist sense, means 'an ignorance of' - or 'not realizing' - the way things are or truly exist. However *gti mug* can also mean 'close-mindedness' and perhaps Desideri may have had that in mind when he linked it with those who are lazy or indifferent (*le lo can*). According to Wallace & Wallace (Śāntideva 1997: 24n22), "Modern Western readers commonly reject the introduction of the word *sin* into Buddhist translations on the grounds that it is too heavily laden with theological and psychological nuances from the history of Western religions and society". However the Wallaces feel that the word *sin* or *vice* is the most appropriate translation for the Sanskrit word *pāpa* (*sdig pa* in Tibetan) and they give a detailed explanation for this.

<sup>124</sup> UTS page: 22. In the Lotus Sutra (Kosei-kai, 2008: 113) there is a description of a father who discovers his house in flames and although he can escape his many children, unaware that fire has broken out, are unconcerned. The children, absorbed in playing games, take no notice when he calls them. So he devised a skilful plan to entice them to come outside by offering each one a fine carriage of their choice. Thus the children save themselves from the fire by running outside to inspect the array of wonderful carriages. Desideri's illustration, however, is different in that the parent suffers by deliberately going into the terrifying place in order to rescue the child who was incapable of extracting himself from destruction.

(2) Not only was his sacrificial death beneficial for the entire human race, past (present) and future, but by virtue of his compassionate actions - he thoroughly condemned, right to the very root, all sinful behaviour - including the overcoming of all its associated powers.

We have seen that Desideri refers to original sin as root defects (*rtsa ba'i nyes sgrib*). He now points out that through 'baptism' (transliterated as '*ba' sde zi mo*') the power of God's grace is mediated to an individual.<sup>125</sup> Not only is original sin dealt with but the person receives the blessing of becoming a 'child of God'. Desideri explains that there is a power of grace which is called 'penitence' (rendered as *phe ni gdan tsa*) whereby one is cured, i.e. cleansed, of all one's own self-accumulated evil (*bdag gis bsags pa'i nyes byas*) and, as a consequence, the person receives the blessing of being established as a 'friend of God'. Desideri does not expand on this topic but returns to it later,<sup>126</sup> when he discusses the Sacraments of the Catholic Church.<sup>127</sup>

### **Heaven – the Ultimate End (or Goal)**      (*Articles XI and XII*)

This part of Desideri's manuscript discussing 'the life of the world to come' has its origins in *Laying the Foundation*, where Desideri introduced the concept of a highest excellence.<sup>128</sup> He now re-introduces the subject of the ultimate or final goal within the context of the seeker

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<sup>125</sup> UTS page: 27.

<sup>126</sup> UTS page: 47-48.

<sup>127</sup> See the first line of UTS page: 22. In summary, Desideri's points are: (1) God (the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* of great unlimited compassion) on seeing human beings unable to escape from the punishment of hell gladly submitted himself to terrible suffering and gave up his life by dying on a wooden cross. (2) God did this (in the person of Jesus Christ) in order to completely set free people from the slavery of their sinful behaviour. (3) Deliverance, in the sense of perfectly accomplishing the condemnation of everyone's sinful behaviour, right down to its very root, was brought about by means of Jesus' boundless, unsurpassed excellence and goodness (virtue).

<sup>128</sup> Part One B: Section 17. The final sentence of the Nicene Creed states, "We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen."

requesting clarification concerning the irreversible, never-ending, and unsurpassable ultimate end which is described as a life of complete perfection and enjoyment that is permanent, unchanging and indestructible (*jig med*). In other words, the seeker wants to know more about ‘indestructible eternal life’.<sup>129</sup> I have translated the term *yang dag par rdzogs pa* as ‘complete’ or ‘total perfection’. However, in a Buddhist context this refers to true and complete enlightenment (i.e. buddhahood). The use of such term may have caused some confusion in the mind of the reader but Desideri was probably aware of this potential problem, nevertheless, he chose to use it.<sup>130</sup> He clarifies the ultimate goal as a state of complete enjoyment for both the body (*lus*) and the mind (*yid*)<sup>131</sup> of those who have been perfected and have transcended all fear. It is important to note that Desideri is not saying their worldly bodies and worldly conceptual minds (*yid*) will inhabit heaven but they will receive a transformed *yid* (mind) and a transformed body that will not wear out.<sup>132</sup> The resurrected person is the same person who died but there are aspects in which they are different. He explains that when people lived as ‘fallen’ human beings on earth each person’s worldly mind (*yid*) and mortal body were characterised by destructibility. In contrast to this, the wonderful, new, transfigured spiritual body and the perfected mind (*yid*) of enjoyment will never wear out. They are indestructible.

Desideri refers back to his earlier illustration which he had initially introduced in Laying the Foundation concerning a road leading from Lhasa to India.<sup>133</sup> He comments that those who

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<sup>129</sup> UTS page: 28.

<sup>130</sup> Perhaps he did not want his reader to think that what he was discussing was less than complete or total perfection (*yang dag par rdzogs pa*).

<sup>131</sup> The word *yid* refers to one’s intellect or mental abilities and is commonly used to refer to one’s conceptual mind.

<sup>132</sup> Wright (1997: 140) comments: “Resurrection is not simply resuscitation; it is transformation, the changing of the present mode of physicality into a new mode of which Jesus in his risen body is the only prototype.”

<sup>133</sup> See Laying the Foundation Part One A, Section 10.

have set out on the road that leads from Lhasa to India will fail to arrive at their desired destination should they abandon their journey part-way along the road. He adds that: (1) those who have not entered on the path of the Christian Faith, as well as those (2) who have entered but who then fail to press on (i.e., striving to do that which they ought to do and abandoning those things they should give up) will be unable to reach the final goal of Highest Goodness. Desideri makes it clear that the final goal can only be reached by those who continue to have heartfelt faith in Jesus Christ right up until their death. Desideri comments that such people are perfected as they act in accordance with the system of faith and doctrine that was revealed by Jesus Christ – the unrivalled and unique Lord.

In closing this topic, Desideri highlights that the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* Jesus Christ, who is the unrivalled leader and unique Lord, is not delusive (*'khrul med*) and it is impossible that he could ever deceive.<sup>134</sup> This assertion is significant within the Buddhist context. There is no way that God should be thought of as being a deceptive object in a conventional Buddhist sense. In Part One B Section 27 the subject of the delusory and deceptive nature of objects, was discussed from a dGe lugs perspective. Desideri uses the Buddhist phrase *nges legs kyi don* ('definite' or 'certain goodness') to refer to the object (goal) of Highest Good. In Buddhism this is understood to refer to buddhahood or nirvana and can also mean liberation from cyclic existence. In choosing to use such a word Desideri is seeking to show that what he is saying is not inferior or less than that to which Buddhists aspire.

### **The Universal Church** (Articles VIII and IX)

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<sup>134</sup> UTS page: 28.

The 8<sup>th</sup> point in Desideri's Creed relates to the Holy Spirit whom he describes as (*bla med rnam dag yid*) the Incomparable Pure Mind. He merely states that he believes in the *bla med rnam dag yid* and does not comment further.<sup>135</sup>

Desideri's 9<sup>th</sup> point concerns the church and he declares his belief in both:

- (1) The pure (*rnam dag*) Catholic Church. The word Desideri chooses for Church is *rgyas za* (meaning expansive) and he transliterates Catholic as *kha to li ga*.
- (2) The accumulated 'virtuous roots' (*dge rtsa rnams*) of the 'purified people' (*skyes bu rnam dag rnams*) – which are said to be for the common good.

In response to the seeker's request for more clarification concerning the Catholic Church, Desideri discusses the following points:<sup>136</sup>

- (1) The church is an assembly of people who have faith in Jesus Christ and live according to his teachings.
- (2) The Catholic Church is universal but it is one single entity.
- (3) It is *rnam dag* ('pure').
- (4) The accumulated roots of virtue are for the common good.

After repeating his earlier definition of a Christian,<sup>137</sup> Desideri emphasises that Jesus Christ is the only Lord and that he is a matchless liberator. Christians are people who not only have

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<sup>135</sup> Tibetan Buddhists also have a concept of a sublime pure mind which is referred to as *de dzhin gshegs pa'i snying po* (or *tathāgatagarbha* in Sanskrit) but that is not the Holy Spirit Desideri is talking about.

<sup>136</sup> See UTS pages: 25-26 for Desideri's comments on the Church, and UTS page: 19 for the initial summary of his creedal points.

<sup>137</sup> UTS page: 12.

faith in him but they hold his revealed teachings ‘like a jewel on the crown of the head’ and they live their lives according to this stainless faith system and system of religion.<sup>138</sup>

Desideri points out that although the Catholic Church is universal it is nevertheless a single unity. He illustrates its ‘unity in diversity’ by pointing out that in Tibet there is only one king but within his kingdom, although it is a single country, nevertheless there is much diversity. Desideri then explains that although there is great diversity in the Catholic Church amongst those who make up the assembly (*tshogs*) of people who are called Christians, and although they live in many different places throughout the world, nevertheless as far as their beliefs and ideology are concerned, there is unity. They all believe in the one Lord Jesus Christ.

He then gives his reasons as to why the Church is called pure (‘holy’). Desideri uses the word *rnam dag* because there is no word for ‘holy’ in Tibetan and so for this reason I will translate it as ‘pure’. His first point is that the religious teachings are precious and pure. They are not a product of man’s imagination because they surpass all human thought and cannot be received by mere explanation. By virtue of this, the ‘revealed teachings’ are said to be stainless and completely perfect. Thus, this system of religion is considered in all respects to be pure (‘holy’). Desideri explains that another reason for calling the Church pure (‘holy’) is that many people in the assembly of the Church are referred to as pure because they are adorned with various and exceedingly good qualities.

Desideri’s final illustration centres on the Communion of Saints. He states: ‘The good that I do is not only of benefit to me, it is beneficial for all other people who are members of the assembly.’ Using an example of a healthy physical body, he points out that if something good happens to one part of the body it will have a beneficial effect on the wellbeing of all the

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<sup>138</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that because Desideri was a Catholic Jesuit the phrase ‘according to this stainless faith system and system of religion’ is a reference to the Roman Catholic Church. He naturally would have viewed the Roman Catholic Church as the conduit through which the teachings of Jesus Christ were to be mediated to people.

other limbs of that body. Similarly, good deeds<sup>139</sup> performed by members of the assembly of Christians are said to benefit others in the group.<sup>140</sup> He explains that people who manifest such deeds are referred to as ‘pure (‘holy’) saints’ and it is believed that their ‘accumulated virtuous roots’ (*bsags pa’i dge rtsa rnams*) are of benefit for the common good.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Here Desideri uses the expression white karma *dkar po’i las* to refer to good deeds.

<sup>140</sup> See UTS page: 26.

<sup>141</sup> The concept of ‘sharing for the common good’ is based on Acts chapter 4 verse 32. In Buddhism the term ‘virtuous roots’ or ‘roots of virtue’ (*dge rtsa rnams*) refer to a person’s favourable karmic predispositions - the fruition of which may result in a favourable future rebirth or a happy experience in the person’s current life.

## CHAPTER THREE

### A TRANSLATION OF DESIDERI'S CATECHISM

(Translated from Tibetan by E.M. Robson)

#### 1. The Triune God

A questioner searching after the essence of wisdom made the following request:<sup>142</sup>

[1] **The Seeker:** Covering us who are ignorant and deceived with your kindness, we request that you please teach us about the system of faith [that is not only] stainless but is a system of doctrine which is correct [or] pure.<sup>143</sup> [Saying these words he addressed his request to the Pandita the Learned One – who replied:]<sup>144</sup>

**The Pandit:** Understand that it is only the system of the Christian faith and doctrine which is totally pure [correct], completely good, unrivalled and without stain. It is worthy to hold as an ornament to adorn the crown of the head. So he replied.<sup>145</sup>

[2] **The Seeker:** Who is that one who is called a Christian?

**The Pandit:** A Christian is a [person] who has faith in the most excellent and supreme unrivalled leader [or] deliverer Jesus Christ.<sup>146</sup> [Such a person] practises the stainless system

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<sup>142</sup> From now on I will shorten this phrase to 'The Seeker'.

<sup>143</sup> The phrase, 'the system of faith and the system of religious doctrine' will be shortened to 'the system of faith and doctrine'.

<sup>144</sup> In my translation I will use the word 'Pandit' as an English reader is familiar with this spelling rather than *Pandita*, which Desideri used.

<sup>145</sup> In the absence of a specific qualifying statement the phrases 'so he requested' and 'so he replied' will generally be taken as read.

<sup>146</sup> The word '*dren mdzad*' refers to 'leader' or 'guide'. It can also mean 'deliverer' or 'liberator' however, the specific word for deliverer is *sgrol ba po*. As Desideri occasionally uses both words side by side I assume 'leader' is the most appropriate translation in this passage.



of faith and doctrine that was spoken by the one and only unique Lord Jesus Christ, and he/she holds [the words of Jesus] ‘like a jewel on the crown of the head’.

**[3] The Seeker:** Please tell me about the manner in which [Christians] practise that which they hold as a jewel on the crown of the head, [namely], the stainless system of faith and doctrine that was spoken of by the one and only Jesus Christ, in whom they have come to have faith as the supreme, most excellent and unrivalled leader.

**The Pandit:** It is necessary to generate, sincerely from the heart, three dimensions [or] aspects of faith which cannot be expressed in just [mere] words. If you ask what these three aspects of faith are [I will tell you]:

- [1] There is the [aspect of] faith which generates [or strengthens] trusting belief.
- [2] There is the [aspect of] faith which is able to build up expectation [or] hope.
- [3] And there is the kind of faith which is loving and arises from an unflawed mind.

**[4] The Seeker:** How is a faith of trusting belief generated?

**The Pandit:** There are three [aspects to consider]:

- [1] The precious distinctive object in which a faith of trusting belief is generated.
- [2] Recognition of how a faith of trusting belief is generated.
- [3] The mental focus [or] thought upon which one depends, in order for a faith of trusting belief to be generated.

As for the first one, if you should ask: ‘What is the distinctive precious object on which a faith of trusting belief is generated?’ [Well] there are two things to be believed concerning the intrinsically existent precious *dkon mchog* [God], who is the unrivalled, and the unique Lord: The first concerns the manner in which the three incomparable persons are miraculously established. The second relates to [i] the manner in which Jesus Christ, the most excellent deliverer came into this world and graciously took birth in human form. [ii] And the manner in which he [later] died for the benefit of all mankind.

*The intrinsically existent dkon mchog ‘God’*

**[5] The Seeker:** Please enlighten our minds by showing us detailed reasons for saying the precious intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* is the only incomparable Lord. [Please clarify] the meaning of this very distinctive object of faith.

**The Pandit:** Initially, having looked at the expressed evidence for the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, according to what was shown earlier, [we understand that] all people and phenomena are subject to destruction and are not established with intrinsic existence. They are empty of intrinsic existence just like an appearance of the moon's reflection in a clear lake. For example, if there is an appearance of a reflection of the moon in a lake, then necessarily a real [actual] moon must exist [elsewhere]. If there is no actual moon then necessarily there can be no reflection of it. Similarly, if we who are destructible exist<sup>147</sup> there necessarily has to exist One who is established intrinsically, [and who] is totally permanent and indestructible. If there is nothing that is intrinsically existent then we would be like the non-substantiality of a moon's reflection and would necessarily be completely non-existent.

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<sup>147</sup> It means that we exist conventionally, not intrinsically.

Therefore, if one is to enter on the pure<sup>148</sup> path of the stainless system of Christian faith and doctrine, first of all one must meditate frequently<sup>149</sup> with sincerity [i.e. fixing all one's thoughts] upon that One which is established as intrinsically existent. And [we] must with our whole heart believe in that One, which is by means of all our thoughts, inconceivable.

**[6] The Seeker:** For example: [1] just as the very thick darkness of the night dissipates as the ball of the sun rises in a cloudless sky and, [2] just as [one's] sense of sight delights in the appearance of the spreading rays of the sun, similarly, having cleared away the darkness of an incorrect and untrustworthy system, you have shown me the existence of an intrinsically existent Being. [Consequently] my mind has become full of immeasurable joy and I have no more remaining doubts - my mind is satisfied. So now, without any misgivings, please explain the reasons for saying [he is] the precious *dkon mchog*. And please clarify the meaning of the words which pertain to this great distinctive object of faith.

**The Pandit:** [Let me explain] the reasons for using the word *dkon mchog*. When you say *dkon mchog* in the Tibetan language, it is understood to refer to an object that is worthy of veneration and worthy of taking refuge in. Meditating on the intrinsically existent One who is definitely *dkon mchog* and is not an illusion, and meditating sincerely and repeatedly [on this object], a faith of trusting belief that is inexplicable and cannot be expressed in words will necessarily be generated. If [one] examines in detail the reasons for this then concerning the offering of both homage and worship by means of [one's] body, speech, and mind; [you should understand that] the object to whom [we] offer homage and worship has virtue and complete authority. [Because of this], the taking of delight in [that object's] all-encompassing

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<sup>148</sup> The word *rnam pa dag pa* also means correct.

<sup>149</sup> Literally: again and again.

greatness is an act of homage which involves the body, speech, and mind. Therefore if there is an intrinsically existent [One], his nature is established of all unsurpassed qualities and he is supremely pure. By means of immeasurable might he by himself, ordered [set out] the past, the present and the future [and so] is: [1] worthy to receive homage together with worship and [2] is worthy of taking refuge in. [This One] is most certainly *dkon mchog* and is not an illusion. I have now clarified the meaning of *dkon mchog* and shown reasons for this.

[7] **The Seeker:** Kindly clarify the significance of that which was said regarding the One who is said to be the unique [only] unrivalled Lord.

**The Pandit:** If he is intrinsically existent then he necessarily, [i.e.] by his very nature, is established in all aspects with limitless virtues and greatness. Therefore, there is no other that exceeds his qualities and greatness. [Apart from him], there is not even one contender who is equal as far as his qualities and greatness [are concerned]. He necessarily has to be the unrivalled and only Lord. Because of this, understand that, except for the intrinsically existent One, no matter whatever else there is, everything that exists in the presence of him who is intrinsically existent, is immeasurably smaller, immeasurably lower, and has immeasurable defects [i.e. is immeasurably flawed]. Therefore understand that with the exception of the One who is intrinsically existent, there is not even one other who is worthy of veneration and worship or worthy of going to for refuge. For that reason one must decide that apart from the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* who is the unrivalled and unique Lord, there is no other *dkon mchog*. If one generates this kind of faith and trusts completely, [focusing all your] thoughts on this distinctive precious object of faith, you may enter the path of the Christian Faith. If one is not able [or does not dare to] to generate this kind of faith [then] it is

meaningless to embark on this Good Path. [Moreover] after death [only] more great suffering will arise.

**[8] The Seeker:** For example, when the sun rises in a cloudless sky all the shining stars which at night appear so beautiful cannot be seen. Similarly, the incomparable qualities and greatness of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the unrivalled and unique Lord, have appeared<sup>150</sup> to the eye of faith.

Formerly I was gripped by a totally deceived and clouded mentality and I mistakenly took illusory things to be *dkon mchog*. [Because these deceiving objects were like false impressions of *dkon mchog*], the superior greatness of the [intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*] was not apparent [to me. From now on] I will meditate from the depths of [my] heart and with an unshakable faith on the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* who is unquestionably without contention unrivalled. He is worthy to take refuge in, and worthy of worship. There is absolutely no other. Now extending your kindness once again [please] explain the manner in which the incomparable person is miraculously established with a threefold [nature].

### *The Trinity*

**The Pandit:** For example, just as an immature child who has no discernment could imagine all the waters of a great ocean being poured into a very small hole [e.g. a well or pit] I, likewise, would be no different from that undiscerning child if I thought I could explain the immeasurable, inconceivable mode of being of the intrinsically existent unique Lord.

However, in order to satisfy [your mind], I will clarify this object of faith just a little. For example, let us take the case of someone who looks in a mirror and [sees] a reflection of his

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<sup>150</sup> The literal meaning is 'arisen' or 'shone'.

body which appears to be just like himself. The intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the unique Lord, whose omniscient person is without obstruction or limit, has always been cognisant of himself and he, who is eternally aware of himself, [similarly] produced a reflection of incomparable wisdom that is identical to himself in all aspects and which is without beginning. Moreover, having looked at the difference between, [1] the reflection of a person who looks [at himself] in a mirror and, [2] the reflection of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the unique Lord who is fully cognisant of himself [it is clear] that the reflection of the person who looked in the mirror has no [actual] existence or individuality.<sup>151</sup> [However] it is established that there is no [such] distinction between the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* who is fully aware of himself, and the reflection of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the unique Lord who is fully aware of himself. They are established as one. [But] there is no way that a cognisant object and the reflection of that cognisant object can be established as one.<sup>152</sup>

Having meditated on the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* who is cognisant of himself, be aware that the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* is established as two distinct persons.

Furthermore, because the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, who is fully cognisant of himself, has made [i.e. begotten] a reflection that is one in essence [with himself] the reflection is without beginning and is similar to himself in all aspects. The ‘maker’ [the begetter] is called by the name of Father and the name of the ‘made one’ is the Son. Also, according to what was said earlier, both the ‘maker’ who is the Father and the ‘made one’ who is the Son are established as one. Their nature is inseparable and essence indivisible. These two are not two

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<sup>151</sup> Desideri wants to point out a person’s reflection has no personality of its own. A more literal translation would be: it is not possible to establish a lineage between the reflection of the man who looked into the mirror and the man himself. A Tibetan would understand this comment to mean that the reflection lacked a mental continuum. Whereas Desideri’s point is there is no differentiation in the mental continuum of the Father and the Son.

<sup>152</sup> The ‘cognisant object’ is the man who looked in the mirror.

separately intrinsically existing *dkon mchog*. Understand that the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* [who consists of] two distinct incomparable persons is only one [entity].

Furthermore, the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the unique Lord who from eternity has been fully cognisant of himself, is established as two distinct persons, namely, the Father and the Son and the Father rejoices without measure in the great limitless incomparable qualities of the Son who is identical with himself. The Son also rejoices without measure in the great limitless and incomparable qualities of the Father who is identical to himself. For example, as the Father who is cognisant of himself produced [begat] the person of the Son, similarly both the Father and the Son, through their mutual love ‘produced’ another incomparable person. [I assure you], although it is true that the Son that was made [‘begotten’] of the Father, and that the person of the Father and the Son are established as separate or distinct persons - nevertheless [these two] are established as one. They are inseparable in nature and indivisible in essence.

Similarly, from both the Father and the Son, who delight in one another, a third person was produced [proceeded]. Although it is true that this person is established as distinct from both the person of the Father and the person of the Son - nevertheless he is established as one with the Father and the Son. The nature and essence [of all three] is inseparable and cannot be divided. The third person ‘produced’ [*grub pa*] from both the Father and the Son is named the ‘Incomparable Pure Mind’.<sup>153</sup>

Finally, in the last analysis, the Father is *dkon mchog*. The Son is *dkon mchog* and the Incomparable Pure Mind [referred to by Christians as the Holy Spirit] is *dkon mchog*. The nature of all three, the Father; the Son and the Incomparable Pure Mind is inseparable. Their essence is indivisible and they are established as one [Entity]. The Father and the Son and the

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<sup>153</sup> The word *bla na med pa* can be translated as ‘incomparable’ or ‘sublime’. But ‘incomparably sublime’ would also be acceptable.

Incomparable Pure Mind are not three intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*. It is necessary [therefore] that a believing faith is generated in this One who is precisely the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* – the unrivalled and unique Lord.

*What does the word 'incomparable' mean?*

Let us apply [ourselves] to understanding the meaning of the word 'incomparable' [*bla na med pa*] by using a finite illustration:

[1] A spring of water becomes a river and from the river a lake arises. [These] three – the spring, the river and the lake – are three separate entities, but the water of the spring, river and lake is the same and is undifferentiated. [Here in another illustration.]

[2] Each finger of the hand has three joints, namely, the first joint, the middle joint, and the end joint. The middle and the end joints are separate.<sup>154</sup> However, the three separate joints do not constitute three separate fingers but one single unitary finger.

Similarly from among the three, the Father, the Son and the Incomparable Pure Mind, the Father has 'made' [begotten] the Son. Like the river that issues from the spring, so the Son was made [begotten] of the Father. And the Incomparable Pure Mind [who proceeds] was established from both the Father and the Son, is similar to the lake that was produced from both the spring and the river. All three, namely, the Father, the Son and the Incomparable Pure Mind, are established as three incomparable distinct persons. Just as the indivisible water of the three [entities], namely, the spring, the river and the lake flows as a single [entity], likewise [the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit] are established as one [Entity], their nature is indistinguishable and essence is indivisible. The intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the unrivalled and unique Lord is one.

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<sup>154</sup> At this point the Tibetan text is very faint and difficult to read.



*Who is Jesus Christ?*

[9] **The Seeker.** Lo! For example, to a child's mind a lake which measures four to five miles in circumference will appear to cover an extremely wide area. [But] later, if that child were to try and cross a huge and very difficult ocean, whose depths seem never-ending and whose boundaries to the right and left, up and down, and on all sides appear limitless - then the [small] lake which the child had seen previously will not only seem very small, but that child's mind will [naturally] forget and suppress the earlier impression [of vastness] and will reach out without hesitation and only think about the qualities of the huge ocean. Similarly, this mind of mine previously generated a concept of wisdom which was like a [destructive] fire. It [was the product of] a confused belief system and was a totally deceptive [enticing] impure religious system. Oh learned one! You are like a helmsman and your kindness, on which I have depended, is like a boat that [has helped me] embark on the path across the great ocean of the inexpressible and all surpassing qualities of intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the unrivalled and unique Lord who transcends all limits in every direction.<sup>155</sup> All my previous [erroneous] conceptions have [now] been cleared away. The exceedingly great qualities of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the unrivalled and unique Lord, are [not only] incomparable, inconceivable and inexpressible but, taking a tireless delight in them – and having completely submitted from the depths of one's heart [to the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*] - the generation [or strengthening] of that aspect of faith which is trusting belief is established. Now please clarify the meaning of that which is said concerning Jesus Christ, the supreme and pure leader, who graciously came into this world, was born as a man, and [please explain] how, having given up his life for the benefit of all mankind, he died.

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<sup>155</sup> Pabongka (1993: 90) likens the ocean to the great [Buddhist] classics and points out the *Lam rim* is like a boat and the guru who teaches the *Lam rim* is like a skilful captain.

**The Pandit:** From amongst the incomparable three persons of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* who is the unrivalled unique Lord – all three, namely, the Father, the Son and the Incomparable Pure Mind – are established as one, wholly inseparable in nature [*rgyud*] and indistinguishable in essence [*ngo bo*]. The Son, who is without beginning, is the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*. At a certain time in history he took the nature and form of a human body. He was born as a man, being established as having both the incomparable nature and essence of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* and the non-supreme nature and physical form of man. Both [natures] were inseparably bound together as one.

Taking birth, he lived here for thirty-three years and demonstrated [taught] the Good Path. By means of various miracles, he worked for the benefit of individual beings as well as for all those who would believe in him in the future. Being thrust through with iron nails onto a wooden cross he died. In dying he gave up his life for the benefit of all people – for those from the beginning of the world right up until the end of the world. He accomplished the most excellent and pure actions and he encompassed us all with unlimited compassion.

[Now] I will briefly recap the meaning of what has been said:

[1] The intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* [God] is the one and only [unique] Lord.

[2] This incomparable person is, in a miraculous manner, established as three.

[3] The two endlessly compassionate accomplishments are:

[a] Jesus Christ, who is the pure, most excellent and glorious leader, was born as a human being.

[b] Having come into this world he died for the benefit of all people.

These two distinctive and precious actions [or accomplishments] are able to bring about the generation of a faith of trusting belief.

Focusing one's thoughts on these two distinctive and precious actions,<sup>156</sup> which are able to bring about the generation of a faith of trusting belief, it is helpful for all Christians – both great and small – to remember [Jesus] by making the pure sign of the cross many times throughout each day. If you ask, ‘What is the sign of the pure cross?’ I will explain:

*Making the sign of the cross*

- (1) First of all, having touched the middle of the forehead with the tip of the finger of the right hand, [one] says ‘Father’.
- (2) Touching the spot between the chest and the navel [one] says the ‘Son’.
- (3) Lastly, the action of touching both the left and right shoulders signifies the ‘Incomparable Pure Mind’.

If you make these gestures with faith saying: ‘In the name of the Father, the Son and the Incomparable Pure Mind’, then you have made the sign of the pure cross. We do not say ‘in the *names* of ...’, but rather we articulate the individual name of the Father, the Son and the Incomparable Pure Mind as [we] meditate with a faith of trusting belief on the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the unrivalled unique Lord.

[If one] meditates with a faith of trusting belief on the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* who is established as three incomparable persons, and makes the sign of the pure cross, then

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<sup>156</sup> This relates to the two perfect accomplishments just described.

[one's] faith of trusting belief in Jesus Christ is strengthened. He is the glorious, excellent, and pure leader, who having come into the world died for the benefit of all mankind.

## **2. The Apostles' Creed**

[10] **The seeker:** [You] said that before entering the Good Path of the Christian Faith system it is necessary to identify the ways whereby a faith of trusting belief is generated. Now please recite something [from memory] that will be a way of generating a faith of trusting belief.

**The Pandit:** These twelve statements were composed by the twelve famous disciples of the pure and wonderfully glorious leader Jesus Christ. [They will serve] as a means of generating a faith of trusting belief. Once they are translated [into Tibetan], if you recite them, they will be like this:

[1] The precious intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* [God] the Father, by incomparable strength and limitless power caused the heaven(s) and the earth together with the all-pervading phenomena to be created *ex-nihilo* [i.e. from absolutely nothing].

[2] His only son Jesus Christ who is the Lord of us all, by the power of the Incomparable Pure Mind [the Holy Spirit] miraculously entered the womb of a celibate mother who was unblemished and without any defects.

[3] He was born of the completely chaste Mary who was without any defilement at all.

[4] During the terrifying rule of Pontius Pilate, he was nailed to a wooden cross and experienced many extremely harsh sensations of suffering. He died and [his body] was placed in a tomb.

[5] After dying he went to the hell realms but on the third day his executed body rose to life again [despite] having been exposed to all the completely horrifying phenomena there.

[6] Ascending to heaven, by means of limitless power and sublime strength, he sat down at the right hand of the all-pervasive intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* [God] the Father.

[7] At the end of the world he will come from heaven, from the right hand of the Father to judge everyone - both the living and the dead.<sup>157</sup> [All these things which I have said] I really believe with my whole being.

I also believe in:

[8] The Incomparable Pure Mind. [The Holy Spirit.]

[9] The pure Catholic [universal] Church; and the purified persons' accumulated roots of virtue which are for the common good.

[10] [I believe that] transgressions, no matter what they are, when they are renounced through the remedial power of repentance [i.e. by putting things right] will be subdued and cleared away because of [God's] great limitless compassion.

[11] [I accept that] at the end of the world each person's body which they formerly occupied will be resurrected and joined to their mind [*sems*]. They [the body and mind] will not become separated [again].

[12] I believe with my whole being there is a life of permanent perfect enjoyment which is the ultimate meaning [of life]. It cannot be driven back or reversed and it has no end. Amen.

Now I have explained what may be recited from memory in order to help the generation of a faith of trusting belief.

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<sup>157</sup> The literal translation is: 'he will encompass them with his judgement'.

[11] **The seeker:** From what you explained earlier, you have clarified the meaning the One who is called the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* [God] the Father. Please show me the reason for saying [his] limitless power and incomparable strength are all encompassing.

**The Pandit:** Nothing is impossible for the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* the unrivalled unique Lord, who possesses limitless power. Nothing can withstand [him], and there is nothing that is too difficult [for him]. He can create or destroy anything according to his will.

[12] **The seeker:** How can one comprehend that which was said earlier, namely, that from out of nothing [i.e. in the absence of any pre-existing material] all phenomena, together with both the heavens and the earth, were created?

**The Pandit:** The intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* is unrivalled. He is the unique Lord and is without beginning and end. He is permanent. Therefore he cannot *not* exist. [But] all those things which are included among the [elements]<sup>158</sup> are impermanent and did not exist at the beginning.<sup>159</sup> The intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* [God], by his infinite compassion and incomparable strength, at the beginning of time caused the heavens, the earth and all animate and inanimate things of various kinds to come into existence out of absolutely nothing. I have now explained what the phrase 'out of nothing' means.

It is necessary to understand the difference between the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* and [created] impermanent things. Indeed it is like this: compounded things arise and perish and they come about in relative dependence upon one another. Although it is true that they take

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<sup>158</sup> Literally: all phenomena that are subject to birth and destruction.

<sup>159</sup> Here Desideri is saying that prior to God's act of creation there was nothing.

their shape and form in mutual dependence upon one another, nevertheless, without being associated with circumstances relating to other causes and conditions, it is impossible for them to reproduce themselves. For example, a builder is unable to build a house without procuring stone(s), earth, columns, wooden planks, beams etcetera. Even if what is built is demolished, the component parts of that house, e.g. the stones, earth etcetera, cannot be destroyed.<sup>160</sup> The intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* is not like those dependent phenomena. In the absence of all causes and conditions, and without there being any other produced materials, he caused all phenomena to be created *ex-nihilo*. And should he decide to destroy those things that have been created, he is able to annihilate them utterly.

This being the case, the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* who is known by the name of Father is eternally aware of himself. From eternity the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* produced [begat] an only Son, who is not only identical to himself but is indistinguishably one and without separation in nature. Furthermore, [on account of his] immeasurable compassion and incomparable strength he caused impermanent phenomena to be created out of absolutely nothing. He continually sustains that which he created and does not permit [its fundamental basis] to become non-existent, but causes it to continue.<sup>161</sup> Understand then that he is the precious Father of us who are impermanent – who are mortal [i.e. who have the nature of birth and death].

**[13] The seeker:** Please clarify the meaning of the words, Jesus Christ, and the reason, according to what you taught earlier, for saying he is the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* [God's] Son; and is the only Lord.

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<sup>160</sup> Even though the shape and form of the wooden planks, bricks etc. are destroyed the elements are not.

<sup>161</sup> Having created these things he makes sure they continue to exist. God sustains what he has created.

**The Pandit:** The name of the only Son of the Father - the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* - is Jesus Christ. The word Jesus means to lead and to save.<sup>162</sup> The name Christ shows he is the One, who from amongst all the superior ones, is like the jewel on the crown of the head. From out of all the precious lamas and kings, he is the Lord of lords. He is like the sun in the middle of the planets. The [first] reason for calling him our honourable Lord and Master is that by virtue of [the Father] and the Sons' immeasurable power and incomparable strength they are not two but are one.<sup>163</sup> The precious Son of the Father, namely Jesus Christ, is the reason whereby we were caused to come into existence out of absolutely nothing. The second reason is that he, having come into the world, died for [the benefit of] all people by compassionately offering up his life in order to release us all who are enslaved by evil spirits. I have now explained the reasons why he is called our honourable Lord and Master.

### *The Virgin Birth*

**[14] The seeker:** Please give a more detailed explanation concerning [that which you mentioned earlier], namely, that as a result of an incomparable miracle through the power of the Incomparable Pure Mind, [God the Son] entered and was conceived in the unpolluted womb of a virgin mother and was born of Mary who was completely good and without fault in all respects.

**The Pandit:** As far as all people are concerned there can be no birth without dependence upon the blood [ovum] of the mother and semen of the father. Without sexual intercourse between two parents a child cannot be conceived and formed. As for the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* [God] the Son: he was born in a miraculous manner as a human being, without a

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<sup>162</sup> He is the one who leads us to freedom. He is the deliverer.

<sup>163</sup> The Tibetan is not very clear but the addition of the word 'Father' would seem appropriate.



father and from a perfect [virgin] mother. The Incomparable Pure Mind, by means of unsurpassing power formed in the womb, from the 'pure heart blood' of the perfect Mary, who was without any impurity, the body of a child. Simultaneously, a most excellently adorned superior consciousness, decorated with all excellent qualities, was caused to come into being [i.e. was established] from absolutely nothing. This consciousness was paired up with the [child's] body which possessed auspicious signs. The intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* [God] the Son united his [eternal] person with the mind and the body of this distinctive pure human child. And in this miraculous manner, Jesus Christ, who is the glorious leader and unrivalled unique Lord – and who from eternity consisted solely of the nature of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* - at a specific point in time became a human being in order to benefit all mankind.

[I will] illustrate this point further: In all eternity there never was a mother. The Son being made [begotten] by the Father is established with the nature of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*. At an appointed time he was born a human being but without ever having had a [human] father. He was born from a perfectly honourable mother. Now, in regard to the manner in which the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* [God] the Son was in the womb of the mother it is like this: at the end of nine months the body of the pure and distinctive child was fully formed. Both the mother and son were entirely unpolluted by impurity and the mother experienced the suffering of childbirth without there being any harm. As for that most excellent, distinctive, pure child [allow me to explain further by using the following illustration]. Just as a ray of sunlight passes through a clear crystal without any hindrance [or breakage] to the other side [of the crystal]: similarly, without any hindrance, [this special child] was born from a human mother and came visibly into the world. Therefore [understand] that Mary was the precious mother of the glorious leader Jesus Christ. She was

completely chaste [i.e. without any fault at all] not only before the baby son was born, but during the time of the birth, and after the birth.

I have now given you a detailed explanation of the second [and the third creedal] points. <sup>164</sup>

*Did Jesus Christ die because he had accumulated bad karma?*

**[15] The seeker:** Please clarify all that has been said that: [1] during the terrifying reign of Pontius Pilate [Jesus] experienced very many harsh and violent sufferings and, [2] he was hammered with iron pegs to a wooden cross. And when dying he [voluntarily and sacrificially] offered up his life. After which his slain body was placed in a tomb.

**The Pandit:** Jesus Christ, the deliverer and unique Lord, having been born of a completely good mother, accomplished [a life] of perfected activity right up until he died. He demonstrated the [most] excellent path for the attainment of a system of faith and doctrine that [results in] beneficial accomplishments. By various miracles he worked for the benefit of individuals and for all those who would believe in him [in the future]. He remained in this world for thirty-three years. There was a governor of a province called Judea by the name of Pontius Pilate. He was a man who was filled with hatred and jealousy and he had [Jesus] tormented by various savage and severe tortures and he caused him to be nailed to a wooden cross. For our sake the great leader, who was completely pure and entirely faultless, with great compassion sacrificially gave up his life and met his death. [After this] some of his followers respectfully placed his slain body inside a new tomb.

I have now explained the fourth part [of the creed].

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<sup>164</sup> I have included the third point in this section.

[16] **The seeker:** I am puzzled why the completely perfect Jesus Christ, who [not only] possessed unsurpassed strength and power but was entirely innocent and without fault, voluntarily [endured] various sufferings and in particular that of being killed.

**The Pandit:** According to what was said earlier the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* of boundless compassion by means of unsurpassed strength and power, at the beginning of time caused the heavens, the earth, and all species of living beings as well as inanimate things to be created out of nothing at all. He [commanded] the first [original] man and woman to [multiply and] spread. And he showed them the path [of discrimination] between that which should be accepted and that which should be abandoned. [But] shortly afterwards, due to Satan's deception, both the man and the woman did not behave as they had been commanded to and [they no longer] took delight in the unique intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*.

Immediately the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* was no longer able to delight in this original couple, nor in their seed. Irreversible observable suffering, unhappiness, fear, illness, old age, death and so forth were permitted to come about in conformity with the potency [*nus pa* of Adam and Eve's] sinful behaviour, and the violation of their not obeying instructions. Moreover, gradually, man's descendants greatly increased and each person, as though they were being dragged by a noose of afflictions [from] following in the direction of pure and worthy activities, did not avoid polluting sins. And completely lacking any sense of remorse, shame and self-control they fell into the abyss of hell that is without end and from which there is no deliverance. That being the case: by reason of what was said earlier [regarding their not enjoying or taking delight] in the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the unique Lord, the potency/powers of [their] intense crimes<sup>165</sup> [tragically] brought about the generation of inexhaustible sufferings of a hell that is without end, and from which there is no deliverance.

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<sup>165</sup> Literally: 'their heavy sins'.

Even now, on account of [their behaviour] being displeasing to the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the [effect] of the potency [or] power of sinful behaviour is unlimited. [Therefore] no matter what good deeds are performed by all human beings, these [good deeds] are not capable of cancelling out the potency of evil acts and the limitless suffering of an endless and inescapable hell. They [the good works] are unable to restore you [to the original pure state].

To illustrate this further: for example, if a loving mother or father see their son go off in a terrifying direction and [knowing] the boy's own strength is insufficient to enable him to pass through it [the parent] will of necessity, urgently, without hesitation or procrastination, fearlessly strive with all diligence and physical effort to pull their only beloved child back from danger. Just as that parent achieves happiness in [their] son by having suffered [on his behalf], similarly the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* of great unlimited compassion, on seeing sinful human beings unable to escape from the terrors of hell, [intervened]. Possessing might and abiding in compassion for the sake of us all, not considering it a burden but a delight, he submitted [himself] to numerous pains of suffering in order to liberate all people from the slavery of sinful behaviour. He took upon himself [voluntarily] the suffering of being nailed to a very horrifying wooden cross and offered up his life as a sacrifice. On account of [the resulting] virtue and goodness which is boundless, unsurpassed and most excellent he condemned right to the very root, the sinful behaviour of all people and all its [associated] potency/powers. He has perfectly accomplished this for the benefit of all people, past present and future.

In answering I have now cleared away doubt.

*Does Jesus Christ save you or do you have to save yourself?*

**[17] The seeker:** [I understand] Jesus Christ, the unrivalled leader, deliverer and unique Lord, for the benefit of all those people who have already come into existence, and for all those who will exist in the future, has dealt with and perfectly accomplished the condemnation of every person's sinful behaviour right to its very roots - including the overcoming of all its associated potency. In this world if we do not do the things we ought to do, or if we do not shun those actions that are to be renounced whenever they arise [then] after death very many people will experience the sufferings of hell. I am really puzzled – how is it possible for the two forms of cleansing to necessarily be compatible? Are non-virtuous actions cleansed through our repentance and strong resolve [not to repeat them]? Or must one necessarily be cleansed through the power of being made whole again [i.e. by the actions of Jesus Christ]?

**The Pandit:** Here is an illustration: [Take the case of] a learned well intentioned doctor who made an expensive antidote in order to treat people bitten by a poisonous snake. [However] some from amongst those snake bitten patients, due to the power of prejudice or arrogance, do not ask for the antidote. Other patients, even though they ask for the antidote, if they fail to apply [or take] it - despite the wise doctor having demonstrated that the very powerful antidote will benefit all those bitten by such a snake - [then] a great many of those snake-bitten patients will die helplessly. Similarly, Jesus Christ, the unique Lord and unrivalled leader and deliverer, accomplished everything [pertaining to the cleansing and overcoming of sin] for the benefit of all people, past, present and future. Although it is true that he overcame - right down to the very root - the sinful behaviour of all people, including its associated powers, nevertheless, the patient must apply the superior antidote which has been prepared by his carer Jesus Christ and which is for our benefit. The accumulated incomparable

righteousness <sup>166</sup> [is the antidote Jesus offers to everyone]. It has the ability to overcome the power of all sinful behaviour, right down to its very root. But it is necessary that each individual person acts so as to turn things to his/her own advantage.<sup>167</sup>

[1] Those people who lack faith in the unique Lord, the matchless deliverer and leader Jesus Christ, who revealed the system of Christian faith and doctrine, are like those patients who did not ask for the antidote.

[2] Those who have believed in him and in the system of faith and doctrine that he revealed but have failed to live virtuously,<sup>168</sup> and have not produced genuine repentance coupled with a resolve not to repeat those bad actions, are lazy and ignorant. They are like the patients who were bitten by a snake and even though they asked for antidote they failed to apply it!

Jesus Christ amassed for all such people, and for us [too], incomparable righteousness that possesses the power to condemn all evil behaviour right down to the very root. [As a result of] failing to apply [this antidote] and thereby turning things to their own advantage [such] people will helplessly undergo the endless suffering of a hell from which here is no escape.

I have now cleared away your perplexity by this explanation.

**[18] The seeker:** I am puzzled. How was it possible for Jesus Christ, who is the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* and glorious deliverer, to experience suffering and death?

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<sup>166</sup> Literally: 'the root of virtue'.

<sup>167</sup> That is, to avail himself of the righteousness that Jesus Christ possesses and offers in order to deal with the consequences of wrongdoing. This can be likened to a patient actually taking the medication!

<sup>168</sup> They have not allowed his righteousness to have a practical effect in their lives.

**The Pandit:** Let me illustrate: Although it is true that a person has both a body and a mind [sems]<sup>169</sup> and since it is [also] true that the mind [sems] is indestructible and will not die, nevertheless when the body dies it is an established truth that the person has died. Also, by virtue of the fact that the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* is established as being intrinsically existent he is without form and is the essence of all perfection.<sup>170</sup> He, by his very nature, is necessarily established as the essence of all greatness and good qualities. It is true that Jesus Christ is the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* nevertheless, while yet being [God] the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, he took upon himself the nature of man [i.e. he became a human being]. As the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* it was not possible for him to experience suffering or to undergo death however, as a human being, he experienced the pain of authentic suffering, [including] the suffering that is associated with death.<sup>171</sup>

I have now cleared away any further doubt.

*Desideri's description of purgatory*

[19] **The seeker:** Please clarify what has been said that after death he [Christ] went to the hell realm for three days and was completely exposed to all the destructive phenomena of decay or suffering, but that he rose again, alive in a body that was completely restored.

**The Pandit:**

[Content Abridged.]

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<sup>169</sup> In this context Desideri is probably referring to a person's spirit or their awareness after death.

<sup>170</sup> He is without any fault at all.

<sup>171</sup> The suffering was authentic or genuine in that the pain was real, as opposed to a (perfected Buddhist) emanatory form which 'appears' to undergo suffering but in actual fact does not.

On the third day after his death, [having been exposed to] but not a partaker of the experience of horrendous suffering or decay [that is associated the hell realms], Jesus Christ was resurrected alive in a body that was restored to its previous state.

I have now clarified the fifth point [of the creed].

### *The second coming of Christ*

**[20] The Seeker:** Please clarify that which was said, namely, that having gone to the heavenly realm he sat on the right side of the Father, the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* who is pervaded with limitless power and incomparable strength.

**The Pandit:** After Jesus Christ had risen and come alive again in the body that previously had been killed [but was now transformed], he remained in this world for forty days. [During this time] he actually appeared to very many of the believers who were pure in heart and he performed various miraculous signs. Having been seen by all [these people] he finally, by means of his limitless power and incomparable strength, went to the heavenly realm [together with] his resurrected body. There, by virtue of the fact that he is equal with the Father and the Incomparable Pure Mind, he sat down at the ‘right hand’ of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* [God] the Father.<sup>172</sup>

Having explained this [to you], the meaning of the sixth point [of the creed] is now clear.

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<sup>172</sup> Desideri has used the words *lhag chad dam mtho dman med pa* to show equality (i.e. without too much or too little or without being high or low).



**[21] The Seeker:** Please clarify the meaning of that which has been said that at the end of the world, he will come from heaven, from the Father's right hand, in order to judge the living and the dead.

**The Pandit:** First let me explain what is meant by 'the end of the world'. It is true that we do not know the exact time for the termination of this world. Nevertheless it is certain [it has been decided] the world will not remain [indefinitely] but will be burnt up by an all-consuming and terrifying fire and will finally be annihilated. At the time of the end of the world Jesus Christ who is the deliverer and unique Lord, will come from the heavenly realm in the manner of a precious Judge and on account of his unbearable blinding glory [people will be unable to look at him].<sup>173</sup> Once again, regarding the explanation of 'the living and the dead', at the time when the world comes to an end very many people who will die will be in the prime of life. They will die suddenly but as soon as they do they will [at once] become alive again and be resurrected with both their body and mind [*sems*] reunited. Thus, those who died earlier, as well as those who even though they were alive on the last day of the world and died, will all necessarily be resurrected with both their body and mind [*sems*] reunited. This then is the explanation concerning the judgement of the living and the dead.

I have now clarified the meaning of the seventh point [of the creed].

**[22] The Seeker:** [1] You have already made it clear during the explanation of the eighth [creedal] point that the distinctive precious object in which the faith of trusting belief is generated is the Incomparable Pure Mind. [2] Now please clarify the meaning of that which was stated earlier concerning the 'roots of virtue' that are said to be for the common good, and which are accumulated by the pure Catholic Church and the purified people.

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<sup>173</sup> They will be unable to face his challenge.

*The Catholic Church*

**The Pandit:** [1] Regarding an explanation of the Church [understand] that it is an assembly of people who are called Christians. Christians [are people] who have put their faith in Jesus Christ, the matchless deliverer and unique Lord. By virtue of [having faith in Jesus Christ] they hold, ‘like a jewel on the crown of the head’, his revealed stainless system of faith and doctrine, and they carry out their practice in accordance with [those teachings].

[2]The etymology and significance of the word ‘Catholic’ means universal. In the final analysis, particular and general things are not two separate things but are one. Furthermore, regarding the explanation as to why they are said to be without differentiation, we can take for an example the country of Tibet. Even though there are many diverse houses, towns, cities and market places in Tibet yet there is only one king. And there is only one way of doing things. Therefore, as far as Tibet is concerned, there is only one country. Similarly, although there is inconceivable diversity amongst those who make up the assembly of people throughout the whole world who are called Christians, yet as far as the religious teaching is concerned [there is unity]. They all [accept that] Jesus Christ the unique Lord and they all hold the system of faith and doctrine [he revealed] without any differentiation. I have now explained the reason as to why they are said to be one.

[3] As for the meaning of the word [pure] *rnam dag*: it relates to the precious religious teachings. These cannot be received by [mere] explanation as they surpass all human thought by virtue of the fact that they are pure [*rnam dag*]. Because [the Christian Faith] is a revealed faith system [and not produced by man] it is stainless and completely pure. Consequently this system of religion in all respects is pure. In the assembly of those people who are called

Christians there are very many people who are described as pure by virtue of the fact that they are adorned with various and exceedingly good qualities.<sup>174</sup>

[4] Furthermore, concerning the reason for saying that roots of virtue accumulated by purified people are for the common good [the following illustration will help]. Take the case of the many limbs that make up a completely healthy body: for example if during one's lifetime something good happens to one of those limbs this will have a beneficial effect on the well-being of all the other limbs.<sup>175</sup> Similarly, whatever good deeds there are amongst the assembly of those who are Christians, these good deeds are manifestly obvious to each and every person and the good that I do is not only of benefit to me; it is [also] beneficial for all the other people who are members of the assembly.<sup>176</sup>

I have now explained the [eighth &] ninth points [of the creed].

### *Becoming a child of God, and the final goal*

[23] **The seeker:** Please clarify what [you] said earlier that sins, whatever they might be, are dealt with by the power of redemption [*phyir chos stobs kyis*]. They are vanquished and cleared away by being overcome with limitless mercy?

**The Pandit:** All people are linked to the descendants of the original man and woman. These two were created at the time of the beginning. And as far as all people are concerned it is as though they are born shackled by 'root sin'.<sup>177</sup> Furthermore, an inconceivable number of people, as if dragged by a noose of conflicting emotions [*nyon mongs*], heedlessly and

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<sup>174</sup> They wear these good qualities like an ornament.

<sup>175</sup> If one benefits then all benefit.

<sup>176</sup> Desideri refers to these good deeds as 'white actions'.

<sup>177</sup> This seems to be a reference to original sin. Desideri uses the words *rtsa ba'i nyes sgrib* which mean 'root defects'.

without lamentation or fear accumulate evil deeds.<sup>178</sup> As for these who are shackled by original sin or who are visibly accumulating black karma, they exist as though they are deprived of the blessing of the compassion of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*. It is as though they are an enemy of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* and, as long as this situation remains, it is unlikely that these people can obtain the ultimate or final goal [of Highest Good]. If they knowingly and deliberately accumulate evil they will unavoidably undergo the inexhaustible sufferings of the hell that has no end and from which there is no escape.

Having been cured [or] redeemed [*phyir bcos*]<sup>179</sup> from original sin through the power of grace which is called baptism, the blessing of becoming a child of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* is established. [Content Abridged]. Apart from the Christian system of faith and doctrine there is no other religious system that has these ... [blessings].<sup>180</sup>

I have already drawn attention - by way of my earlier illustration – to a snake bitten patient who failed to take the antidote [that would have cured him]. I have [also] shown the importance concerning the generation of a faith of trusting belief. It is only in the revealed teachings of Jesus Christ who is the unique Lord and deliverer, that wrongdoing - no matter what it might be – is condemned and vanquished by [God's] great immeasurable mercy [through] the power of redemption and the blessing of cleansing [i.e. clearing away the stain and potency of evil actions].

I have now clarified the meaning of the tenth point [of the creed].

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<sup>178</sup> Desideri uses the words *nag po 'i las* which refers to black karma or unwholesome activities.

<sup>179</sup> The word *phyir bcos* means 'to fix up' or 'restore to its original condition'.

<sup>180</sup> This is referring to either the two means of grace, namely, baptism and penitence, or to becoming both a child of God and a friend of God.

**[24] The seeker:** Please explain the meaning of that which was said, that at the time of the end of the world all people will be [resurrected alive] in the bodies they lived in formerly, and having been reunited with their mind [*sems*], the [body and the mind] will never be separated again.

**The Pandit:** It is inadmissible that good actions and evil deeds [as well as their effects] should just dissipate. Because the mind [*sems*] and the body were closely associated during the time of causation, when both black deeds and white deeds were carried out;<sup>181</sup> [it is only reasonable that] at the time of fruition, the mind having been closely associated [with those deeds], must necessarily be touched by pleasant or unpleasant effects [i.e. the fruit] of one's previous actions. Furthermore, it is not admissible that the fruit accumulated by another should be enjoyed by someone else!<sup>182</sup> Therefore in this current time of causation, the body and mind being closely associated, there must necessarily be contact with the agreeable and disagreeable [resultant] fruit.

Because of [these] two correct and intelligent reasons pertaining to the realm of cause and effect [people] will at the time of the end of the world, be [resurrected alive] in the bodies that they lived in formerly, and having been reunited with their mind [*sems*] they will never be separated again. This is taught as an article of belief.

I have now clarified the meaning of the eleventh point [of the creed].

**[25] The seeker:** How is it possible for those who died, having been burnt by fire and reduced to ashes, to be resurrected alive at the time of the end of the world. And what about

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<sup>181</sup> The mind and body together have felt (i.e. been involved in) both the good and bad deeds that were done when the person was alive.

<sup>182</sup> That is, by another person. This would apply not only to positive effects and also to negative effects.

other corpses that became food for the creatures that inhabit the earth, the skies, or the oceans? How can they come alive [again] and be resurrected at the end of the world? I am very doubtful about these [things].

**The Pandit:** As I said when talking about my initial point, the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the matchless and the unique Lord, is all-pervasive. By virtue of immeasurable power and unsurpassable strength he caused the heavens and the earth and all compounded things to be created out of absolutely nothing. At the time of the beginning he caused the foundation [or] basic nature of both the mind [*sems*] and the body to be created *ex-nihilo*. [This being the case] how much easier it will be at the time of the end of the world [for him] to cause to be established the previous appearance of those bodies that have been reduced to ashes. In giving this reply I have now cleared away doubt.

**[26] The seeker:** Please clarify what was said concerning the irreversible, never-ending and unsurpassable ultimate end. It is said to be a life of complete perfection and enjoyment that is permanent, unchanging, and indestructible.

**The Pandit:** As for the irreversible, never-ending, unsurpassable and ultimate end it is a life of pure rapture [bliss] that is permanent, unchanging, and indestructible. After the world [comes to an end], both the bodies and minds [*yiḍ*] of people who are pure and have transcended all fear [will be changed into] marvellous bodies, and minds [*yiḍ*] of enjoyment, that will not wear out. The [transformed] bodies which people will receive are sublime, indestructible, changeless and completely perfect.<sup>183</sup> I have now described the ultimate end and [the ultimate goal] which is Supreme or Highest Goodness.

Here is an [additional] illustration: take for example [two groups of people]: [1] There are those who do not even start out on the road to India and [2] there are those who having

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<sup>183</sup> Wright (1997: 35).

started, fail to keep up their earlier progress, and giving up they abandon the route. [Both groups of people] will find it impossible to reach India.

Likewise, if those who have set out on the path of the system of faith and doctrine that was taught by Jesus Christ, the unrivalled and the unique Lord, are devoid of a whole hearted commitment [then] after entering that path, should they fail to strive to do the things they should and fail to refrain from doing those things they should not, [then] such people, regardless of having entered the path, because they abandon it and turn back, will be unable to reach the ultimate goal of the Highest Good. For this reason, right up until the point of death, there [needs] to be a sincere faith from the depths of one's heart in Jesus Christ, the deliverer and only Lord. I have now explained the ultimate goal of Highest Goodness which is obtained only by those perfected people who act in accordance with the revealed system of faith and doctrine.

By means of this twelfth point [of the creed] I have clarified how to generate a faith of trusting belief.

[27] **The seeker:** Now, please outline to my perfectly trusting mind [*sems*] the object of thought that I can focus on in order to generate a faith of trusting belief.

**The Pandit:** In regard to the generation of a faith of trusting belief cultivate a mind which seizes upon truth according to what has been taught. Such wise and logical speech is without any deception. In all these individual articles of faith [we discover] the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* Jesus Christ, the unrivalled leader and unique Lord, is real [he is not an illusion] and it is impossible that he could ever deceive. According to what has been said [earlier] this must necessarily be so.

By meditating on the meaning of those [previously] undisclosed and completely hidden things that [Jesus] revealed [and] taught to us who are ignorant, an unshakeable faith of trusting belief is generated from the depths of one's heart.

### **3. The Lord's Prayer**

[28] **The seeker:** Now please fulfil my wishful hope [aspiration] by kindly instructing me in the way whereby the aspect of faith that has the ability to build up hope [or] expectation may be established.

**The Pandit:** There are two ways:

[1] There are seven distinctive precious things that have the [potential] to generate the aspect of faith that is able to build up expectation.

[2] And there is the particular thought upon which having depended, a faith [which increases hopeful expectation] is generated.

First of all [understand that] compassion is shown towards those who are deluded [*rmongs pa*] and who, like children, are unable to discriminate between things that benefit and things that harm. [Such people] follow after those things that generate ignorance and passionate attachment. Jesus Christ, the unrivalled leader and unique Lord composed a prayer of supplication [a *sādhana*] for contemplation which is very powerful.<sup>184</sup> Encompassed by compassion,<sup>185</sup> like that of an extremely caring nursemaid towards her beloved child, we who are enslaved [receive] the concentrated milk of faith which is able to arouse expectation. If you ask me what is this wonderful prayer of meditation like [I will recite it]:

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<sup>184</sup> /*gsol'debs kyi thugs dam* /.

<sup>185</sup> Compassion implies grace and favour.



[1] Oh! Our precious Father who dwells in the boundless heavenly realm; May your name, which is famous everywhere, be honoured and praised.

[2] May your kingdom be revealed to us.

[3] May your will be visibly established in all parts of the earth just as it is established in the boundless heavenly realm.

[4] Give us today our daily provisions.

[5] According to the measure that we have not demanded from others that which they owe us [i.e. to the extent that we have pardoned others] will you also please wipe out our debts? [*bu lon*].

[6] Do not let us fall into situations which would [a] hinder a virtuous mind and [b] generate a non-virtuous mind.

[7] Saving us from all fear and harm, both internal and external, please deliver us.

May [all these things] be established. The End! These are the seven requests that are in the ‘palm of your hand’ and they are wonderful prayers of supplication for contemplation. In my reply I have described the seven points [which are the basis] of expectant faith.

*A detailed explanation of the prayer*

[29] **The seeker:** [1<sup>st</sup> part of the prayer]. Please clarify the meaning of that which was said ‘Our precious Father who dwells in the infinite realm of heaven’.

**The Pandit:** According to the introductory words of the prayer regarding to whom the prayer is addressed it has been shown that there are two distinctive characteristics:

[1] He [God] is the One to whom we go for refuge and he is the focus [or object] of the prayer.

[2] He is the unrivalled intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the unique [only] Lord.

By recalling the greatness of him who dwells in the infinite heavenly realm, who encompasses all by virtue of his immeasurable might and incomparable strength, we [come to] understand that [those things] which we have need of and desire will be effectively permitted [i.e. allowed by him. Moreover] we understand him to be our ‘Precious Father’ as a consequence of his having carried out [actions that benefit us]. By recalling the greatness of our having become his child<sup>186</sup> we understand that because his incomparable qualities of compassion and loving kindness are all pervasive and [since] he possesses great unbounded compassion, it is impossible [for him] to neglect our needs. Possessing this kind of faith [our] petitioning mind/heart greatly expands [in confident hope].

**[30] The seeker:** Since the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* dwells everywhere and in no particular place [i.e. he everywhere and nowhere] what is the reason for saying he dwells in the infinite heavenly realm?

**The Pandit:** Even though it is true that the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* pervades absolutely everywhere [i.e. he has no shape or form] yet [if one] compares the infinite heavenly realm with all those parts that make up the universe it is clear the [infinite heavenly realm] is greater. [However] the infinite heavenly realm is subsidiary to, [but] in harmony with the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*. He is the [epitome] of all greatness, unlimited

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<sup>186</sup> Desideri uses the honorific word (*sras*) for ‘son’.

ability, and power. The ‘infinite heavenly realm’ refers to the ‘place’ where the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* is ‘seen’ continually, without any impediment, veil or obscuration.<sup>187</sup>

This is the explanation of the words concerning ‘abiding in the infinite heavenly realm’.

**[31] The seeker:** Please clarify what you said: ‘Your famous name is renowned everywhere - may it be praised and honoured’.

**The Pandit:** In this world there are an inconceivable number of people who are outsiders<sup>188</sup> and are deluded followers of incorrect Dharmas. They do not have faith in the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the unrivalled and unique Lord. They know nothing of his excellent name and his existence, let alone his matchless qualities.

As a result of his kindness of great boundless compassion, faithful Christians have become sons [children] of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* and, on account of their [voluntary] total submission to him, the renown of the name of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* spreads far and wide. They make prayerful supplications to him who has become their focus [object] of honour and praise.

**[32] The seeker:** [2<sup>nd</sup> part of the prayer] Please explain what is meant by the request, ‘May your Kingdom be visibly manifested to us’.

**The Pandit:** Because of the blessing of [God’s] great unlimited compassion a Christian, having become a child [son] of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, seeks that which is obtainable to him, namely the ultimate goal of Highest Good.

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<sup>187</sup> The Tibetan *zhal mjal* means ‘a face-to-face meeting’. Here, I have added the inverted commas to ‘seen’.

<sup>188</sup> Desideri uses the word *mu stegs can*, which is used to refer to those who hold wrong (or heretical) views.

And after death that person will cross over to the heavenly realm [where one] obtains, eternally and without interruption [the state] of ‘seeing’ continually the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, without any obstruction, hindrance or obscuration.<sup>189</sup> [Christians] pray and offer supplication that at the end of the world they will attain a completely perfect, unchanging, indestructible mind and body of sublime delight.

I have now clarified the meaning of the second part of the prayer.

**[33] The seeker:** [3<sup>rd</sup> part of the prayer] Please explain what is meant by the saying: ‘May your will be done in all the earth as it is in the infinitely heavenly realm’.

**The Pandit:** Those who have passed beyond all fear and have obtained an everlasting vision of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* in heaven will, at the end of the world, receive a body and mind of never ending sublime enjoyment. This is the meaning of the attainment of the ultimate goal of Highest Good.

[If one] is in agreement with the stainless system of faith and doctrine taught by Jesus Christ [then] regarding the method [or skilful means] to enable this to be manifestly established, three things [are necessary]:

[1] In accordance with that which [Jesus Christ] has said, the first requirement is to have faith.

[2] The second requirement is to abandon those deeds that should be avoided.

[3] And the third is to do those things that ought to be done.

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<sup>189</sup> This implies that the person is in the presence God.

For example: when a child is an infant it does not have the ability by itself to provide for its own necessities of life and the crying infant must implore the kindness of both its parents [for help]. Similarly, all people without any distinction exist as though they are tightly bound by the entanglements of conflicting emotions. They have continuously had total confidence in themselves over a long period of time [believing the attainment] of complete enlightenment [is possible] as a result of their own [abilities] and strength. [However] they were unable to achieve the work of openly accomplishing [all] the things they should have done, nor were they able to reject completely [all] those actions that should be avoided [in order to attain] complete enlightenment.

In regard to all this, Christians – after praying and making supplication that they might attain the manifestly established ultimate goal of Highest Goodness – sincerely request the blessing of being able to openly accomplish virtuous actions, and to [be enabled] to completely avoid non virtuous actions in conformity with that which the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* says and desires.

**[34] The seeker:** Please clarify and explain the reason for that which was said: ‘...according to what is done in the infinite realm of heaven.’

**The Pandit:** There are an innumerable number of pure, special spirits [*sems*] that possess the characteristic of having no body. They are called angels.

There are [also] an inconceivable number of minds [*sems*] of pure people who died and left their earthly body. In the realm of heaven [these pure people] enjoy the ultimate goal of Highest Goodness, namely that of obtaining the vision of seeing the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*. It is as though they always, without any change of mind, continually rejoice

without measure and delight thoroughly in the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*. [Moreover] there is no violation of his will whatsoever.

Similarly, [here on earth] the faithful themselves, right up until they die, always and without any change of mind, rejoice totally and thoroughly delight in the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*. They pray and ask him for the blessing of never violating his pure will.

I have now clarified the third part of the prayer.

**[35] The seeker:** [4<sup>th</sup> part of the prayer]. Please explain the reason for saying: ‘Give us today our daily provisions’.

**The Pandit:** Mankind is manifestly established as being a collection [an association] of body and mind [*sems*]. To illustrate this: if the body does not receive daily nourishment it is inevitable that it will fall into the abyss of all the sufferings of pain and death.

Similarly, with regard to the consciousness [*rnam par shes pa*], if great strength [or] determination is not generated in the blessings of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* – blessings that result in the spread of [Christian] doctrine, and the drawing of [a person’s] focus towards religious teaching – then it is inevitable that one, having caught the very severe illnesses that are the result of conflicting emotions, must fall into the terrifying abyss of all suffering.

In regard to this, Christians pray daily for those blessings which are strongly conducive towards strengthening the mind. It is as though they ask for food for the mind [‘soul’] as well as for food for the body.

I have now clarified the fourth part of the prayer.

[36] **The seeker:** [5<sup>th</sup> part of the prayer]. Please teach us about that which was said: ‘Will you cancel all our debts in accordance with our not calling in the debts of other people’, [i.e. to the same extent of our not demanding a return of that which is owed to us by others].

**The Pandit:** In the first, second, third, and fourth parts of the prayer [you] have already asked that good would be manifestly established for the mind [*yid*] and body.

Now, during the fifth, sixth and seventh part of the prayer we ask the intrinsically existent, *dkon mchog*, on account of his limitless compassion, to protect us from all fears [that would assail] both the body and the mind.

Above all, regarding that which we call debts, we give thanks for being delivered from the terrors of evil, and for being completely purified [*sbyang ba*] of those things which we call debts.

[37] **The seeker:** Please explain the reason why you call [evil] deeds debts?

**The Pandit:** Let me illustrate. According to the custom of this world, wherever a debt has been generated, there is an accumulation of a consequential penalty [or] retribution [*lan chags*] which is the necessity of repaying the debt. Similarly, after evil actions have been performed there will be the generation of [the need for] retribution.<sup>190</sup> Thus I have used the term 'debts' to refer to evil actions.

Because [mankind] carelessly and without thinking did not behave in accordance with that which is taught in the revealed teachings of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the ‘path of

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<sup>190</sup> i.e. retribution of karmic debts that have been incurred due to previous negative actions.

white actions' [*dkar po'i las lam*] was not actually established. As a consequence of mankind's evil behaviour, bad actions followed and this is the reason why the penalty of retribution was generated.

Not having listened to, or taken delight in what the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* has said [if such a person] later [has a change of heart and decides to] delight in him there is [still] the need for reconciliation [*'dums pa*]. In the absence of such reconciliation that person, on account of their not being blameless, will after death necessarily undergo the sufferings of an endless hell from which there is no escape.

**[38] The seeker:** Please explain the reason for that which says: 'according to our not calling in the debts of others'.

**The Pandit:** Concerning the word debt, [it can refer to] any harm that has been done to our good name, or to our body, or to whatever property we may have. Let me illustrate: the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* takes no delight in our evil actions.

Just as we give thanks [to him] for his forbearance [*bzod pa*] and for clearing away all our evil actions together with their power to produce [negative] effects, we similarly must sincerely and from the heart, forgive [others].

Similarly, if we do not refrain from returning evil to others and refrain from being angry at the injury [that has been done to us], and if we do not of necessity sincerely contemplate patience, there will be no power to accomplish that for which we are praying at the present time.

I have now clarified the meaning of the fifth part of the prayer.



**[39] The seeker:** [6<sup>th</sup> part of the prayer]. Please explain to me that which was said: ‘Do not let us fall into situations where a non-virtuous mind is generated and a virtuous mind is obstructed’.

**The Pandit:** [The situations] that obstruct a virtuous mind and generate a non-virtuous mind are very powerful indeed. Whenever we meet those situations it is as though we are forced to do bad deeds.

Those who possess pure minds pray that they will not meet situations where the virtuous mind is hindered and the non-virtuous mind is generated.

I have now clarified the meaning of the sixth part of the prayer.

**[40] The seeker:** [7<sup>th</sup> part of the prayer]. Please explain the meaning of that which was said: ‘Please save and deliver us from all external and internal dangers and from all fear.’

**The Pandit:** In the 5th and 6th parts of the prayer, supplications are made separately: [1] that we will progress beyond the terrors associated with evil behaviour and [2] that we will not meet with obstacles that would hinder pure thought(s).

In regard to this, we, having taken refuge in the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, give thanks [to him] for having saved us from all external and all internal common fears. By means of clarifying the seven parts of the prayer that Jesus Christ, the unrivalled leader and unique Lord, composed for the benefit of the faithful [believers] I have shown the seven precious separate topics which can generate [that aspect of] faith that has the power to build expectation.

[41] **The seeker:** Now please kindly explain in an orderly fashion those things that I may, with complete faith, focus my thoughts upon in order that faith which has the ability to build up expectation may be generated.

**The Pandit:** Having confidence in the One in whom we have taken refuge there must necessarily be faith. As a result of [one's] recalling in remembrance the qualities of the One in whom refuge is taken the faith that has the ability to build up confident expectation is generated. As for that One in whom one takes refuge, it is [none other than] the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the unrivalled leader and unique Lord. Even though it is true that he is the essence of all great qualities, nevertheless through taking refuge in him there are two particular attributes to remember:

[1] [His] all-pervading, immeasurable and incomparable power.

[2] [His] all-pervading limitless compassion which is for all.

If one meditates frequently upon these two distinctive attributes it is a foregone conclusion that the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* will definitely establish all converts [*gdul thams cad*] in whatever is good. And [similarly] he will definitely protect [*skyob pa*]<sup>191</sup> them from all fear. Once an unshakable faith has been generated [we believe] that whatever we have prayed for earnestly [in accordance with God's will]<sup>192</sup> will undoubtedly be established.

Furthermore, the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* promised to permit the visible manifestation of the supplications that the faithful have made in regard to the attainment of the ultimate goal of Highest Good as well as that which has the aim of benefiting the *sems* [mind/soul/spirit]. In order to benefit whoever are believers - Jesus Christ, by means [of his]

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<sup>191</sup> Here the word *skyob pa* means 'to save', 'to deliver', and 'to preserve' us from all fear.

<sup>192</sup> Desideri does not actually use these words but they would be in full accordance with his theological position.

accumulated incomparable righteousness - looked to the establishment of our good and our protection from fear. After recalling [his] possession of incomparable power the faith that is able to produce confident expectation will be generated.

*Why some Christians pray to Mary*

**[42] The seeker:** I [understand that] [1] there is no other apart from the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* that is established without partiality. [2] By means of his matchless, boundless, power his limitless, mercy is all pervasive.<sup>193</sup> [3] There is not even one other, apart from the inherently existent *dkon mchog* that is worthy to go to for refuge and [4] as far as generating faith that has the ability to build up expectation is concerned, the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* is the only one on whom to focus - there is no other.

If this is so why do you Christians offer requests – if not many times a day then at least three times a day – to Mary, the thoroughly good mother of the unrivalled deliverer and unique Lord, Jesus Christ?

**The Pandit:** Although it is true that he is the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* who [1] is the only unrivalled and unique Lord who establishes all converts [*gdul thams cad*] in whatever is good, and [2] he is the One who protects us from all fear by virtue of his impartial qualities and his great limitless compassion which is everywhere, nevertheless, there are various distinctive and pure spirits [*sems*] which are called angels [*an rje li*] who possess the characteristic of having no body. There are [also] an inconceivable number of purified souls [i.e. people] who have attained the ultimate goal and see the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*

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<sup>193</sup> His mercy pervades everything and is everywhere.

'face to face'. Then in particular, there is the thoroughly good and precious Mary, the mother of the precious Jesus Christ. [Content Abridged]

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A TRANSLATION OF DESIDERI'S CATECHISM continued:

#### 4. The Ten Commandments.

[43] **The Seeker.** To begin with please explain how that aspect of faith which is charitable [or] loving is generated through an unflawed mind.

**The Pandit.** The object to be focused upon in order that loving faith may be produced is without question the [one and only] intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*. Even though it is certainly true that there are many good ways in which a loving faith may be generated [nevertheless] there is a [single] way that is readily accepted by all those who are without partiality or bias. [It is] the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog's* path of acceptance and abandonment in accordance with that which has been revealed.<sup>194</sup>

[44] **The seeker.** In that case, please tell [me] about the path which the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* has revealed to all mankind concerning those [actions] that should be done and those which must be avoided.

**The Pandit.** The intrinsically existent *dkon mchog's* Ten Commandments for all mankind show what must be accepted and what must be avoided. If you ask me what these ten are, they are [listed below]:

[1] I am your powerful intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*. With the exception of myself do not take refuge in any other object of veneration.

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<sup>194</sup> There are actions that need to be done and actions that need to be abstained from.

- [2] Do not take my name in vain.
- [3] On the days that are taught to be special festivals, observe those festivals' ceremonies correctly.
- [4] Honour both parents.
- [5] Do not cut off the life of a man.
- [6] Avoid fornication.
- [7] Do not steal.
- [8] Do not bear false witness.
- [9] Do not generate a mind that covets other peoples' things – no matter what they are.
- [10] Do not generate a mind that desires a woman who belongs to another person.

This is the last commandment.

Thus have I replied.

*The first commandment*

[45] **The seeker.** Please explain the significance of the first commandment.

**The Pandit.** If we analyse this commandment [we find] the kernel<sup>195</sup> of it is that there is one thing to be accepted and two things to be avoided.

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<sup>195</sup> The literal translation is 'in the palm of the hand'. This implies that something is within the bounds of your being able to achieve or attain it.

As for that thing which is to be accepted, there are two aspects which relate to faith in the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the unrivalled leader and unique Lord:

[1] He is unchanging

[2) He is truly existent

The first thing to abandon [or] avoid is:

[1] The taking of refuge in any other person or religious Dharma other than the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*.

[2] The second thing to abandon is taking refuge in man produced idols.

**[46] The seeker.** Please clarify the kernel of the commandment regarding the meaning of that which is to be accepted.

**The Pandit.** From the point of view of that which is to be accepted there are [four] aspects [to consider]:

[1] The virtue of the generation [of that aspect of faith] which is trusting belief.

[2] The virtue of the generation of faith which hopes with expectation.

[3] The virtue of the generation of faith which is charitable [or] loving.

[4] [Finally there is] the most excellent virtue of giving honour in total sincerity to the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*.

[A detailed examination of these four points now follows:]

[1] Through the virtue of the generation of believing faith it is perceived that the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the unrivalled leader and unique Lord, is not an illusion and [he] is without deceit. If we believe in [his] essential teachings most excellent virtue will be generated. [But] if we go against the stainless teachings he revealed [then] the sin of not keeping the first commandment will be generated.

[2] Through the virtue of the generation of expectant faith [we understand] that the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* - by virtue of the strength of [his] unsurpassed and limitless power – [possesses] an all-embracing great compassion which is impartial and extends everywhere. At the same time, being unchanging, he possesses the attribute of never being able to go against his word [i.e. against that which he has promised]. [However] if we believe that he cannot save us from fear, or wonder if he is able to manifestly establish good [on our behalf] is it possible for most excellent virtue to be generated? [No! It is not possible.] If we hold an opposing view, even though he looks upon us mercifully, and even if we take refuge [in him], it will be of no benefit. It will not be able to give us strength and thus the sin of not observing this [first] commandment is generated.

[3] With regard to the virtue of the generation of loving faith, reliance upon thoughts which pertain to all the unsurpassable qualities that are attributes of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* [is necessary]. He is unrivalled, unlimited, beyond speech and thought and is absolutely faultless. [As a consequence of] delighting in him from the very depths of our heart, [and] through employing all our knowledge, thoughts and capabilities we [deliberately] and completely avoid those things [he] does not like. If we strenuously by exerting all our effort, exhort [ourselves] to be totally devoted to him, the most important virtue which is above all other virtues is generated [namely that of love]. But [i] loving other things, no matter what they are, in equal measure compared to [our love] for the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* - to say nothing of loving them more; or [ii] not loving the intrinsically existent



*dkon mchog* at all; or [even] rebelling and going against him – the generation of the intolerable and very serious unseemly sin of breaking the first commandment [occurs].

[4] Regarding the virtue that results from honouring the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, [understand that] a most excellent virtue is generated if we offer verbal praise or when the matchless offering is presented to the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*.<sup>196</sup> [But] if we show contempt towards the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*; or to his church; or to the things that are offered to it; by disrespectful actions, words or gestures – whatever they might be – the unseemly sin of not keeping the first commandment is generated.

[47] **The seeker.** Please clarify the meaning of the first thing to be abandoned which is the kernel of this [first] commandment.

**The Pandit.** The intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* gave the command which said: ‘[You] must completely abandon the taking of refuge in any other objects whatever or whoever they are apart from me’. [Therefore do not take refuge in]:

[1] [Persons]. It does not matter whether the person is still here or has passed over to the other world.

[2] [Things]. The taking of refuge in or the [presentation] of offerings to those things that one has developed faith in as though they are *dkon mchog* [i.e.] to phenomena, no matter what they are which are dependent on something and are impermanent compounded [things].

[3] [Demonic forces]. The [i] placing of one’s faith in serpent spirits, evil spirits, goblins and ghosts [or] the devil no matter what they may be called, and [ii] [seeking to placate them by] the presentation of offerings or the taking of refuge in them.

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<sup>196</sup> Desideri does not explain ‘the matchless offering’ but he is probably referring the Eucharist.

4] [The Occult]. The practice of any kind of black magic must be avoided. [These will all] generate an unseemly and a very [negative] power in addition to the sin of not keeping this commandment.

**[48] The seeker.** Please clarify the meaning of the second thing that is to be abandoned which is the kernel of this commandment.

**The Pandit.** The taking of refuge in all man-made images is to be abandoned. As far as the illusory sphere is concerned it is something that has been put there by a mere deceitful lie, it really doesn't exist at all. Taking refuge in, giving offerings and making prostrations to illusory objects – it does not matter what they are – that are intrinsically empty, [e.g.] images, or religious pictures etcetera generates the sin of not keeping the [first] commandment. A consequence of this is the generation of a power that is extremely [negative] and unseemly. I have now replied by describing and explaining the first commandment.

#### *The second commandment*

**[49] The seeker.** Kindly explain the intention in giving the commandment which says: ‘Do not make my name meaningless’.

**The Pandit.** Having developed faith in the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, who is unrivalled and the unique Lord, [it becomes clear] when analysing this commandment, there are four kinds of non-virtuous speech to be abandoned. These contradict and counteract the four kinds of virtuous speech which are really respectful. Having developed faith in the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the unrivalled and unique Lord, if you should ask: ‘What are these four virtuous kinds of speech that are really respectful?’ [I would reply]: having

admired the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* and pondered [deeply] on his unsurpassable qualities, a faith that loves totally is generated. As a result of its power [the following kinds of speech occur].

[1] [Virtuous speech]. One holds his good name [with great respect] as a result of honouring and worshipping of him in the mind.

[2] [Truthful speech]. The intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* possesses the quality of omniscience. Because he is completely without illusion [or] deceit he possesses the quality of being suitable to be taken as an authentic witness at any time. He has the characteristic of being the protector of pure truth. Having considered this respectfully [you can see] the virtue of [not] swearing or taking an oath, [by] calling upon the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* as [your] witness that you are speaking the truth.

[3] [Speech with purpose]. Having generated thoughts that please the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* one utters a virtuous promise [or vow] with the request, ‘May I voluntarily or deliberately avoid such and such non virtuous action, and may such and such a virtue be established.’

[4] [Speech without blasphemy]. Having recalled the boundless qualities of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, let us offer the praise of virtuous speech.

If you should ask me what are the four kinds of non-virtuous speech that are the opposite of the four kinds of virtuous speech I would reply by saying it is non-virtuous:

[1] To take the good name of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* in a manner that is angry; or with amusement; or without any meaning.

[2] To take the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* as your witness and [then] make an oath that you are speaking the truth when in fact you are lying. Also speaking words [such as]: ‘Let us do such and such non-virtuous action(s)’ [is to speak non-virtuously].

[3] To swear with an oath or to make a pledge, [by calling on] the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* as a witness to [your words] which are [in fact] meaningless and have no purpose.

[4] [It is non-virtuous] to have thought about pleasing the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* [and then], irrespective of where one is, one fails to submit to [speaking virtuously] but utters blasphemy to the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*.

#### *The third commandment*

[50] **The seeker:** Please elucidate the intention in giving the command that says to observe the religious rites regarding special times, on those days that are taught to be special.

**The Pandit:** As for honouring religious ceremonies on those days that are taught to be special: [1] avoid all tiring work that stresses the body and all activities that are related to one's employment and [2] having bowed the body listen reverentially to the prayer of presentation of the incomparable offering to the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*.

#### *The fourth commandment*

[51] **The seeker:** Please elucidate the intention in giving the commandment that says honour both your father and your mother:

**The Pandit:** There are three [aspects] to honouring [one's] father and mother.

[1] To serve [one's parents gratefully] showing kindness according to their needs.

[2] To respond according to their requests.

[3] To [show them] respect through both our speech and actions.

It is necessary to do these three things and apply ourselves earnestly to this command which was given by the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*.

### *The fifth commandment*

**[52] The seeker:** Please explain the intention in giving the commandment that says, 'Do not take the life of a man'.

**The Pandit:** If we analyse this commandment there are two things that must be avoided:

[1] Avoid beating or harmfully wounding peoples' bodies.

[2] Avoid cutting off a person's life.

However, it is like this. If the king or a judge takes the life of a robber in conformity with whatever is the law, it does not violate this commandment. This is because the intention of the king and the judge is virtuous in enforcing the law and their taking the life of criminals is for the purpose of exercising authority over their subjects. If you should ask the reason why the commandment says one should not take the life of a man, as opposed to [the statement that] one should not take life in general I will explain.

The significance of [things] such as trees, woollen cloth and fire is that these are all entities that are merely established [conventionally] and are meaningful in the promoting of man's welfare. The cutting of a tree, the tearing of woollen cloth into pieces, and the putting out of

fire do not constitute or form the basis [i.e. a ground] for the generation of sin. Similarly the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the unrivalled and unique Lord, caused to be established everything that there is. With the exception of man he has established all other living things to be beneficial for mankind. [So] if the purpose is for establishing the necessities of life – for example obtaining food, clothing and medicine [then] taking the life of birds, wild animals and domestic animals is considered to be without any grounds for the generation of a non-virtuous action.

### *The sixth commandment*

**[53] The seeker:** Please explain the intention in the giving of the commandment that says, ‘Avoid fornication’.

#### **The Pandit:**

[1] There are no grounds for abandoning the woman whom one has taken for a wife. [Do not] join together with someone else's wife. Having submitted oneself to adopting pure [chaste] thoughts [one must] totally avoid all sexual activity and protect that woman's reputation in a pure manner.

[2] Intercourse with a woman who is not your [wife], or [with a woman] who is not someone else's wife – even though she is not protective of her reputation – must not to be carried out.

[3] It is necessary to recognise the grounds for fornication. The sin of fornication is generated on the basis of the following: inappropriate place; inappropriate time; inappropriate member; inappropriate object. There is great shame in these four grounds. [But] without

going into great detail, in general, by merely looking at the desired object with a lustful mind, the sin of breaking this commandment is generated. Never mind saying anything more!

*The seventh commandment*

**[54] The seeker:** Please explain the intention in the giving of the commandment that states ‘Do not steal’.

**The Pandit:** If we analyse this commandment there are two non-virtuous [activities] that are to be avoided, namely theft and robbery. The abandonment of theft [involves]:

- [1] Not taking things that have not been given to you.
- [2] Not deceiving; tricking; or failing to understand the other person when carrying out a financial transaction.
- [3] Not damaging another’s possessions, or burning them in a fire, or destroying them.
- [4] Not failing to repay that which you owe.
- [5] Not failing to pay when trading.
- [6] Not failing to return property that [you] have found which belongs to someone you know. And instead [of returning it you] keep it for your own use.
- [7] Not surreptitiously taking public property for your own use.
- [8] Not carrying out acts of robbery.
- [9] Not damaging or destroying goods, no matter what these are, in the presence of the owner
- [10] Not taking for your own use, possessions that evidently belong to society whatever they might be.

*The eighth commandment*

[55] **The seeker:** Please explain the intention of the commandment which was given that says, 'Do not bear false witness'.

**The Pandit:** According to this commandment the following [kinds of speech] are to be abandoned: slander; lies; insulting words; and wishing or praying for harm [to affect someone]. The three types of lies are:

[1] The bearing of false witness with the intention to harm another innocent person by saying they are at fault. It does not matter whether it is in front of a judge or not [or if it is] in front of another person, no matter who that person is.

[2] Telling lies in order to benefit others.

[3] The [habitual] speaking of lies in the form of idle chatter, even though there was never any intention to harm another person, and even though no harm was done to the other person.

In regard to the classification of non-virtuous [speech] the first is generally considered to be very serious in comparison to the second and third points.

There are two types of slander:

[1] The telling of lies saying that another has this fault or [has done a particular] crime even though he has done nothing wrong or is not at fault [is slander].

[2] Even though a person has done wrong, you [on account of your] anger [and desire to harm them] disclose the truth about their faults to a third person who was unaware of them.



Just as there is a difference in degree of causing harm to another's reputation so there is a difference concerning the degrees of seriousness of non-virtuous speech in regard to both the earlier and the later [slandering lies].

If you ask what is non-virtuous speech with evil intent [it is speech] which induces others to fall back in fear. [For example] being angry with another person [you] cause them to turn back [in fear] by binding them with a death threat such as 'May you die soon'. [Alternatively] speaking in a similar way, [and thereby] abusing a person [is speech with evil intent].

[There are two degrees of seriousness].

[1] In a moment of anger one consciously desires that one's words will come to pass.

[2] The uttering of curses [or] abuse without even considering what one is saying.

The first one is very serious indeed [i.e. very heavy non-virtue is generated in comparison to the degree of non-virtue that is generated by the second one].

### *The ninth and tenth commandments*

**[56] The seeker:** Please explain the intention of the commandments which were given that say:

[1] Do not covet another person's things.

[2] Do not lust after the wife of another.

**The Pandit:** There are three things [to consider] in regard to virtuous and non-virtuous actions: [1] their basis [or] foundation. [2] The doer's intention. [3] The result of that action.

Earlier it was shown that the final goal of both adultery and theft is to be renounced. Both the ninth and tenth commandments teach that if [a person] considers taking something that has not been given, or imagines an attachment to a married woman even though it is [only] in thought and has not actually happened – then the sin of theft and the sin of adultery has occurred.

**[57] The seeker:** Please tell me in a summary form - that which is to be practiced and all [those actions] which must be abandoned [or] avoided.

**The Pandit:** As far as a summary regarding that which is to be practiced, as well as that which is to be avoided, [you should] understand the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the unrivalled and unique Lord, has shown to all who possess a mind to differentiate between good and evil - regardless of their rank or the time or the place - that which is to be abandoned and that which is to be accepted.

There are two things to accept:

[1] After rejoicing sincerely - from the depth of one's heart and by means of all [one's] knowledge and strength - in the incomparable qualities of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* who is the unrivalled unique Lord, [the aspect of] faith which loves is generated through a pure mind.

[2] [One must] cherish all other people as though they were ourselves.

There are two things to reject:

You must avoid all actions of body, speech, and mind that are in opposition to the two things [above] which are to be accepted [and] carried out.

## **5. Some central teachings of the Catholic Church**

### *(A) Church Precepts*

[58] **The seeker:** [I understand one must] do those actions which are in accordance with the commandments given by the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* and refrain from doing those actions which are not. Please tell me if in the Christian religion there is an additional path that may be readily adopted concerning virtues that are to be adopted and non-virtuous [actions] that are to be rejected.

**The Pandit:** [You] should be aware there are six other instructions [or rules] which are referred to as ‘the precepts of the church’. If you ask what these six are [I will tell you].

[1] On those days which are taught to be religious holidays [one] should, having humbly bowed both the body and the mind, listen to the liturgical presentation of the sublime offering to the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the unrivalled and unique Lord.

[2] Observe the fasting [rituals] during the time called Lent, as well as annually at the time of each of the four seasons, and on the eve of important religious festivals. On both the sixth and seventh days of every week do not eat meat.

[3] During the year, if not many times then at least once, speak into the ear of a confessor and verbally declare whatever evil actions of body, speech and mind you have done, and of which you have repented of and vowed not to repeat.

[4] Every year humbly present a special material offering to the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*.

[5] Pay any religious tax [that is due].

[6] Do not celebrate marriages from [i] the first day of that which is called Advent – which signifies the coming into the world of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* – up until the festival which is called Epiphany. And [ii] from the first day of the great fast called Lent up until the eighth day of the festival called Passover.

[59] **The seeker:** Please clarify the meaning of the six precepts.

**The Pandit:** The individual Christian lama [spiritual teacher] will, during the time of religious instruction, clarify the time and proper way of visibly complying with each and every festival. In regard to all this there is necessarily much more that could be said [but] I will refrain from doing so and will not elaborate any further.

(B) *Virtue and Non-Virtue*

[60] **The seeker:** When you explained the path of renunciation and acceptance [you] pointed out the course of action in regard to both virtuous and non-virtuous [behaviour].<sup>197</sup> Finally, please explain the fruit of both virtuous and non-virtuous [actions].

**The Pandit:** The fruit of doing good works is threefold:

[1] They form a basis of pleasing the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*<sup>198</sup> and increasingly contribute to [one's sanctification whereby] a person [is made] worthy of attaining the ultimate goal.

[2] There is power to accomplish an objective.

[3] There is the possibility of purifying defects.

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<sup>197</sup> See Paltseg (2003: 4-11) for a description of virtuous and non-virtuous factors from a Buddhist perspective.

<sup>198</sup> Literally: 'before the eye of'.

The first effect: According to the customs of the world if some servants of a king perform a good work which greatly pleases him, then on account of their excellent performance, he will [reward them]<sup>199</sup> and grant them a higher status and much greater fame and fortune than they had before. Likewise, the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* bestows on people possessing faith and a purified mind [his] blessing of endless compassion and performs actions which benefit them. It is as though he is rewarding them ‘with a diploma’ and [their good actions] are the basis for his delighting [in them]. Having become more and more worthy, on account of his [God’s] increasingly encompassing grace and mercy, they will after death enjoy incomparable happiness and see him ‘face to face’ in the heavenly realm. [On account of God’s] limitless compassion, the first fruit that is produced is that of good actions. Generally speaking the actions one performs are not to benefit others but are solely for the benefit of the one who does the good actions.

The second effect: If a much loved only son very diligently and repeatedly does whatever his parents say they will be extremely happy. They will not oppose [or] hinder the wishes of their boy concerning those things he desires and has need of. Similarly if a person who has faith and possesses a purified mind, openly renounces [sin] and visibly does what the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* commands or [if that person behaves] according to the instructions that were taught [then] the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, who is himself great immeasurable compassion, [on account of his] delighting in [that person’s] good actions will permit the fulfilment of whatever worthy objectives the one who is the doer of good works may conceive. In general, the results or fruit of these worthy ends should be dedicated to [benefit] others. Such [worthy activities] have the power to be of benefit to both one's self as well as others.

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<sup>199</sup> Desideri explains it is though they are given a certificate or diploma.

The third effect: Having drunk bad poison if you don't immediately take an antidote you will die. If you take a good antidote, although your life is not threatened, the antidote is unable to completely wipe out the power of the poison at its very root and consequently the body will repeatedly suffer discomfort and pain. Similarly, having accumulated bad deeds, if [one's] shortcomings [i.e. non-virtuous actions] are not confessed through the power of full repentance [accompanied by] a whole hearted resolve [not to repeat them] then one will necessarily have to endure the inexhaustible suffering of a hell which never ends.

But if [one] without any procrastination, due to laziness, confesses [their] wrongdoing and even though the power to alleviate those sufferings [that are associated with an] endless hell reaches its limit [nevertheless if there should still be] any suffering remaining<sup>200</sup> [it] will not have been ripped out at its [very] root and so one will necessarily have to undergo the many great sufferings that [still] remain. To illustrate this further: it is not enough just to take an antidote [on its own]. If one also repeatedly takes nourishing food and restorative medicine not only will the life of the body be preserved but the power of the poison will gradually dissipate, and [eventually] all the bodily pain and suffering will be pacified.

Likewise in a similar way, if one is not relieved [satisfied] by absolution due to the [repeated] power of repentance; the determination [not to sin again]; and the confession of wrongdoing [then] by the repeated doing of good actions [i.e. through the accumulation of virtuous actions] not only is the power of the inexhaustible sufferings of an endless hell overcome, but even the power of the remaining suffering which is yet to be exhausted, is gradually overcome. It becomes weaker and is [eventually] destroyed without a trace.<sup>201</sup> Having dedicated [one's good] actions for the [benefit] of others, generally the fruit is not only for others' benefit but you yourself also benefit.

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<sup>200</sup> Desideri is describing the power of wrongdoing that has not yet been exhausted.

<sup>201</sup> Desideri seems to be saying that good deeds are effective in exhausting the *power* of wrongdoing.

**[61] The seeker:** Now please explain the effects that derive from evil deeds.

**The Pandit:** For example: [just as] different fruits are produced from various kinds of trees, so too different kinds of sufferings arise from various kinds of negative actions. For this reason, negative actions [and their consequences can be examined with respect to their]:

[1] general characteristics, [2]) particular kinds or divisions, [3] the fruit [of such actions].

[1] General characteristics: If one does not openly give up those actions which are to be abandoned or if one fails to do in actuality what should be done - by whatever means it may be accomplished - one willingly abandons that Good Path which has been revealed in accordance with the commands of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*.

[2] Particular divisions: there are two kinds of negative actions [or faults]:

[i] The obscuration at the root [i.e. original sin]

[ii] The evil that one does oneself.

However in regard to the last one there are two levels of gravity. If you should ask me what is the fault that is ‘the obscuration at the root’, I would explain that the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the unique and matchless Lord, is permanent and not without qualities. He is without beginning and has the distinguishing characteristic of being [intrinsically and] spontaneously ever present. His identity is that of great boundless compassion and by his limitless power and unsurpassable strength he created at the beginning of time [everything there is] from nothing at all [*ex nihilo*]. He created:

[1] The four great elements.

[2] The heavens and the earth.

[3] An inconceivable huge number of great spirits in the heavenly realm who have the characteristic of not possessing any material form.

[4] The sun, moon, planets and all the stars.

[5] Numerous kinds of birds; an innumerable number of inanimate things; living creatures – apart from man – were [all] created and they filled the whole wide world.

[6] [Last of all] he created the first two human beings - a man and a woman. The man was called Adam, and the woman was called Eve. When these two were made [both] their bodies and minds [*sems*] were simultaneously adorned with eight external and internal ornaments.

*The unique characteristics of the original couple*

[1] They were a cause of delight to the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* and they each possessed a pure unblemished form.

[2] They possessed [as individuals] a very great ability [or] power which was associated with their intellect to distinguish between good and evil but without any mental darkening.

[3] They departed themselves doing whatever activities that should be done without any striving and being led in accordance with their thoughts and with very clear minds, which possessed an abhorrence of evil behaviour, their focus was inclined in the direction of good behaviour, and this was without any addictive obscuration(s).<sup>202</sup>

[4] Their minds had the very definite quality of being able to pursue very diligently and without any hesitation at all, in the direction of worthy actions.

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<sup>202</sup> Their behaviour was characterised by a total lack of attachment.



[5] It was not necessary for them to plough the land. The crops grew [spontaneously] and they were not harmed by any living things or by any inanimate things.

[6] Adam and Eve's bodies possessed attributes of not suffering feelings of fatigue, fear or difficulty. They possessed unquestioned authority over the animals.

[7] They possessed the attribute of having bodies that would not decay. [Moreover] provided they really shunned evil they would not suffer [the three experiences of] illness, old age and death.

[8] They possessed the quality of being able to pass into the spiritual realm, after having spent a long time here [on earth], without discarding their bodies, where one receives the unsurpassed and never-ending enjoyment of meeting ['face to face'] the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*.

#### *How sin entered the perfectly created world*

Subsequently [having been created without any blemish and placed on a completely good earth] Adam and Eve were given a single command whereby they could exercise their authority and demonstrate the advantages of obeying that command and the drawbacks of not behaving in accordance with it. The intrinsically existent *dkon mchog* said: 'I created you both at the beginning of time [if you do what I have taught you] then you and your innumerable children and their descendants<sup>203</sup> will be without limit and there will be too many to count. They will not only be without any impoverishment in regard to their internal and external qualities<sup>204</sup> but having become my dearly beloved children, they will in the

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<sup>203</sup> Literally: your children, grandchildren and great, great grandchildren who will be born in the future - according to their generations.

<sup>204</sup> This implies that they will continue as good as they were at the beginning.

future receive incomparable happiness and all the objectives of never-ending Highest Goodness [*nges legs*].

But if you two fail to obey and comply with what I have taught, not only will both you and your innumerable descendants suffer the impoverishment of external and internal qualities, but on the grounds of my displeasure – for as long as you live in the world – you will experience very many sufferings of anxiety, unhappiness, fear, illness, old age and death. Also after death you will be unable to cross over into my [heavenly] realm and the attainment of supreme happiness will be impossible’.

After a short time those first two people were deceived by a demon and they failed to obey the command of the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*. Because of this first sinful action they and all their children [that were born later] degenerated. [The consequences] of the first occurrence of [Adam and Eve’s] evil behaviour touches us all who are born in the lineage of these two original people. Therefore we [too] are not unaffected by the first sin’s power and as a result [we are all] born with a defect. This defect with which we are simultaneously born is called the ‘root defect’ [original sin]. I have now pointed out the origin and significance of that which is called the ‘root defect’. [It is the root of delusive obscuration].<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> From now on, I will refer to the ‘root defect’ as original or source sin.

*Non-virtuous actions*

[62] **The seeker:** How can I discern the levels of seriousness concerning the faults which I myself have committed? How do I distinguish between the ones that are heavy and those which are light?<sup>206</sup>

**The Pandit:** As I said earlier, generally there are three aspects that relate to non-virtuous actions. They are:

- [1] The basis, ground or foundation [of an action].
- [2] The intention or thought [behind an action].
- [3] The actual doing of the deed itself.

According to the manner in which the difference between the basis and the intention come about, so the difference in the seriousness of non-virtuous actions arises. If one behaves non-virtuously, for example stealing something that has not been given, the basis [of that non-virtuous action] is the appropriation of a possession which belongs to someone else and which has not been given [to you]. The intention relates to the thought of appropriating that thing for oneself. [However] there is a difference in the degree of intention towards the property of others in regard to the principle [the basis] of taking something which has not been given. If the mind was not: [1] completely clear or [2] if there was not an overwhelming desire to steal or<sup>207</sup> [3] if the person was absentminded and lacked any sense of a disturbed

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<sup>206</sup> I interpret the word 'heavy' to refer to sins are considered to be very serious (i.e. mortal sins) whereas 'light' or venial sins are serious but not fatal as far as one's spiritual status is concerned.

<sup>207</sup> For example, in the case of a man who steals in order to feed his starving family. The action itself is wrong but the offense is less serious because his intention was good.

[conscience] when the idea of taking ‘something not given’ was conceived, then [the degree of intention] is very different from the person who [deliberately] decided to steal something.

If one applies oneself to an examination of the intention behind an act of wrongdoing, then it is easy to ascertain the degree of severity in regard to non-virtuous behaviour or wrongdoing.

If one innocently and without any arrogance takes something belonging to someone else, or [does so] while the mind is not clear, or if the mind was not overcome by the thought of desiring to steal someone else's possession, then a lighter sin is generated. Thus I have shown the difference between very serious and [less] serious non-virtuous actions.

### *The Seven Deadly Sins*

**[63] The seeker:** I have heard that there are some sins, which belong to the class of very serious sins [*nyes lci*] that are so powerful they act like poison and destroy pure minds [*sems*]. Please teach us the specifics about these [very heavy faults].

**The Pandit:** The sins which are called ‘pure mind destroying sins’, [i.e. mortal sins] are described as the root and the source of all other sins. There are seven in all: [1] pride, [2] avarice, [3] lust, [4] anger, [5] gluttony, [6] envy, [7] idleness.

**[64] The seeker:** Please explain the characteristics of **pride** and all the sins<sup>208</sup> that arise as a consequence of it; and the crux [or] cure of the matter.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> A Buddhist reading the word *nyes pa* would understand it to mean ‘fault(s)’ rather than ‘sin(s)’, as understood from a Christian perspective.

<sup>209</sup> Desideri uses the word *snying po* meaning essence or core. The word can sometimes – but not commonly - imply ‘cure’ in the sense of coming against something in the opposite spirit – like an

**The Pandit:** Concerning pride its defining characteristic is exaggerating one's own goodness and permitting an inflated sense of superiority. As for the sins that arise from [pride] they are as follows: conceitedness, arrogance, contempt for others, being contentious and rebelling.

The cure [or] antidote of pride involves:

- [1] The striving to establish the attribute of humility [e.g.] by adopting the lower place.
- [2] Seeing oneself as faulty and regarding others as possessed of good qualities.
- [3] Contemplating the sin of pride.
- [4] Not speaking on the spur of the moment.
- [5] In spite of other peoples' disrespect to oneself, nevertheless to sincerely hold them to be worthy of respect

**[65] The seeker:** Please explain the characteristics of **avarice** [or] covetousness, the sins that arise from it and the cure of the matter.

**The Pandit:** Covetousness [or] avarice greedily desires for oneself the property of others and fails to see whatever disaster is coming because of a lack care for one's own true welfare. [Such people] are pre-occupied with their own possessions and never being satisfied 'stand guard' over their wealth and so become increasingly devoted to it. The sins that arise from avarice are: theft, robbery, enticement, and lack of compassion. The cure for covetousness lies in the giving of alms [i.e. in generosity] and in viewing gold and silver as being the root cause of many evils and unhappiness.

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antidote. However, the actual word for antidote or remedy is *gnyen po*. Given the context this would have been a more appropriate word to use in the place of *snying po*.

**[66] The seeker:** Please explain the characteristics of the desire for **lust** [or] ‘unclean behaviour’, the sins that arise from it and the cure [or] antidote for it.

**The Pandit:** With regard to the desire for unclean behaviour – on account of being totally enraptured with the object of sexual intercourse - the mind takes in [i.e. searches for] the pleasing delights of the body and, desiring an encounter with [the other person], is fearful of being separated from them. The following evil results arise from [lust]:

[1] An intense clouding over of a deluded mind.

[2] An unstable mind.

[3] Dishonesty.

[4] Adultery.

[5] Impure speech.

[6] A lack of any sense of shame.

The cure for unclean sexual behaviour involves: the cultivation of tranquillity; the performance of austerities; the practice of mental quiescence [*zhi gnas*]; the visualising of phenomena as having no essence or substantiality, and controlling the senses.

**[67] The seeker:** Please explain to me the characteristics of **anger**, the evils that arise from it and the cure for it.

**The Pandit:** Anger is impatience with anything [or anyone], that obstructs or gets in the way. Anger desires revenge. The sins that arise from anger are: quarrelling, harsh words, insults, and madness. Its cure is patience.

**[68] The seeker:** Please explain the characteristics of **greed**, [i.e.] not estimating the proper proportion of food or drink, the evils that arise from it, and its cure.

**The Pandit:** Greed is characterised by:

- [1] Eating and drinking without a sense of proportion and not being satisfied.
- [2] A [manic] searching for food – both good and bad.
- [3] Eating outside regular mealtimes.
- [4] Considering the delights of food and drink to be all-important [i.e. out of all proportion compared to other things].

The evils that arise from greed are:

- [1] Stupidity.
- [2] Taking delight in songs of pleasure [carousing] and extreme talkativeness.
- [3] Desire for unclean behaviour.

The cure for these evils is:

- [1] Temperance [i.e.] knowing how much to eat and drink.
- [2] Fasting.
- [3] Meditation on the benefits of both of these, and [also] on the sins of greed.

**[69] The seeker:** Please explain the characteristics of **envy** and the sins that arise from it, and its cure.

**The Pandit:** Envy is the generation of an attitude of mind that is not pleased with others and [as a result] one fails to enjoy the other person's reputation [or fame], no matter what it is. [You become] fearful lest whatever you enjoy regarding your own reputation should be overshadowed by another person's increasing fame and enjoyment of that fame, whatever it might be. The sins that arise from envy are: slander, revilement [defamation], and murder. The cure of envy is: loving-kindness; a generosity of spirit and embellishing the other person with loving affection.

[70] **The seeker:** Please explain the characteristics of **idleness**, the sins that arise from it, and its cure.

**The Pandit:** Idleness considers the practice of virtue as burdensome. Coming under the power of laziness that is associated procrastination, weariness is generated, [consequently] one fails to do the things that should be done right now and puts them off for a future time. The sins that arise from this are in opposition to the good path of virtue. There is no sense of shame regarding non-virtue; there is a lack of [genuine] repentance; and even on reaching death there is no confession of one's non-virtuous behaviour [because the idle person] is not the least concerned about achieving the ultimate purpose of life. The cure for idleness is diligence.

*Three categories of sin (original, mortal and venial).*

[71] **The seeker:** You have taught us about three [specific] categories of wrongdoing: [1] original sin, [2] heavy [or] mortal sin, and [3] lighter [or] venial acts of wrongdoing that one commits. Please explain the effects of each one of these.



The Pandit: The effects of original sin are [manifold]:

- [1] It is the basis of displeasure to the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*.
- [2] It causes a deep darkening of the mind.
- [3] One prefers to go in a wrong direction rather than pursue wholesome ways.
- [4] It is the original source of disturbing emotions [afflictions].
- [5] One has to struggle in order to obtain food and drink etcetera.
- [6] It causes fear and the suffering of illness, old age, and death.

[Therefore] it is impossible for one to reach the ultimate goal if the effects of original sin are not dealt with before death [by being cleared or wiped away].

The effect of mortal sin [is two-fold]:

- [1] It is foundational in bringing displeasure to the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*.
- [2] It results in unhappiness and sadness.

If one does not confess [repent] and wholeheartedly resolve [not to sin again] then it is inevitable that after death the suffering of an endless and an inescapable hell will be experienced.

The effects of venial sin are:

- [1] It causes a decrease in diligence pertaining to [the cultivation of] a virtuous mind.
- [2] The seeds of affliction increase in strength.
- [3] One must necessarily undergo the sufferings that are still to be exhausted.

[72] **The seeker:** You have shown the consequences of virtuous and non-virtuous actions.

Now please explain about the power that is able to:

[1] Generate a trusting confidence that will cause one to lean towards and take delight in virtue – similar to that of a flowing stream which increases without any interruption.

[2] Visibly cleanse accumulated evil actions, and produce a fear of non-virtuous actions coupled with [a desire to] avoid evil.

*(C) The Seven Sacraments of the Catholic Church*

[Content Abridged – an unabridged copy of the thesis is available in the British Library]

### **The Finale**

Once again, according to what was said earlier, the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*, the unrivalled and unique Lord, has demonstrated very clearly what the path of acceptance involves and what the path of abandonment [or] renunciation is about. [I have also explained]

[1] How one can generate an ever increasing faith which will bring delight to the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*. [2] The healing cure for sins in regard to the [particular] words and actions that relate to the means of giving the various sacraments.

If one behaves virtuously in a visible manner then a grounded foundational faith will be generated, [and such faith] will delight the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*. In addition to [1] that aspect of faith which believes and [2] the aspect of faith which is established in hope and confidence [3] there is an indescribable faith of love with all knowledge and power [that will be] generated through a mind that is unblemished.

As long as these things are not damaged, and if we never lose sight of them during our lifetime then, having proceeded along the path without turning back, it is impossible that one will not reach the final end of that path, [and so] after death one will attain in actuality the ultimate goal of seeing 'face to face' the intrinsically existent *dkon mchog*.

## CONCLUSION

Desideri's introduction to *The Essence of the Christian Faith* is a record of an encounter between Desideri and<sup>210</sup> a dGe lugs Buddhist reader. The Buddhist reader is a literary device whereby the character acts as a defender of the dGe lugs thesis, maintaining firstly that all things are dependent and also that nothing exists independently. Desideri appeals to him to review, with an open and unbiased mind, the dGe lugs view on the origins and concepts of emptiness which previously the defender has accepted without any critical examination as to whether such a view is true or false.<sup>211</sup> However, Desideri's appeal is not just for the defender. He implores intelligent Tibetans to consider his arguments and adds 'if there is no one now who has the ability to discern the unreliable nature of the view which maintains there is absolutely no intrinsically existent entity [anywhere], then in the future someone will arise who will have the ability to decide this is the case.'<sup>212</sup>

Almost three hundred years have passed since Desideri wrote the above words. To date it seems no dGe lugs pa Tibetan has stepped forward and published a paper questioning the reliability of the view that maintains there is absolutely no intrinsically existent entity.<sup>213</sup>

Desideri considered that the dGe lugs pa's adamant refusal to accept the existence of an

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<sup>210</sup> We cannot tell if the encounter actually took place in the manner in which Desideri describes it or if it is a theoretical account. We know he was preparing for a debate with the lamas about Tibetan Buddhism but due to the king's assassination it never took place. He presents his arguments to one person whom I refer to as both 'the reader' and 'the defendant'. (This is because he holds or defends a particular view that is associated with the dGe lugs school of Tibetan Buddhism).

<sup>211</sup> Desideri pointed out 'if it is considered inappropriate to test the view that maintains the non-existence of an intrinsically existent entity, how [then] will it be possible to decide whether the whole system of [Mādhyamika] thinking is flawed or not?' (Part One, Section 29).

<sup>212</sup> Part One, Section 29.

<sup>213</sup> Desideri considered such research would entail an accurate and detailed analysis, accompanied by a rigorous discussion, on the theory and the logic that lies behind the dGe lugs reasons for denying the existence of such an entity.

entity which has the nature of intrinsic existence fatally undermined their presentation of ‘emptiness’ – with the consequence that they end up ‘entrapped in the mire of nihilism’.

### **A brief summary of Desideri’s Arguments**

It has been demonstrated in the thesis that Desideri’s assertion concerning the existence of a Supreme Entity who exists in his own right (i.e. is intrinsically existent) is the central focus of his essay *The Essence of the Christian Faith*.

Desideri wanted to show his Buddhist reader the acceptance of an intrinsically existent entity is not only logical; it is foundational to a Christian’s understanding of God. He developed his arguments gradually and frequently repeated earlier points in a style Tibetans were familiar with.

I began the thesis with a detailed examination of Desideri’s arguments contained in his lengthy introduction. These constituted the first part of my thesis (i.e. Part One A, B & C: Laying the Foundation). I subdivided these further into 37 sections. Part Two of the thesis contains Desideri’s unique catechism.

In Part One A I highlighted the fact that Desideri began his essay with a personal dedication to *rang grub dkon mchog* ‘God’.<sup>214</sup> The dGe lugs pa maintain ‘*all things without exception are empty of intrinsic existence*’ and I have drawn attention to the fact that Desideri considered such a view was contradictory, false, and results in the non existence of everything (nihilism). He maintained his teaching actually supported and enhanced the dGe lugs system of ‘inter-dependence’. I also explained that Desideri did not agree with their

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<sup>214</sup> Part One, Section 1.

assertion that things lack ‘substance’.<sup>215</sup> By this he did not mean things have the nature of intrinsic existence, but rather that things have ‘*more reality*’ than the dGe lugs pa were willing to attribute to them. I pointed out that Desideri understood the dGe lugs system to view all cognizable conventional phenomena as being ‘mere mental fabrications’ which arise dependent on their parts and the thought that designates them. Hence they are described as being *like* a reflection, or a dream etcetera.<sup>216</sup> Desideri used the well known Buddhist analogy of the moon’s reflection in the water of a lake, but reminded the reader there can only be a reflection in the clear water if there is an actual moon elsewhere.<sup>217</sup> He criticised the dGe lugs assertion that things have no beginning because he considered nihilism to be the end result of maintaining an endless regress of a backward series of causes. Such a charge is firmly denied by dGe lugs philosophers because they consider their interpretation of the conventional existence of things means they avoid the extreme of annihilation. They maintain things exist – albeit conventionally – and that they are not illusionary.<sup>218</sup>

Desideri considered the dGe lugs philosophers’ argument circular and therefore faulty.<sup>219</sup> They assert that something which arises dependently is empty of intrinsic existence; they also assert that because something has the nature of emptiness of intrinsic existence it is characterised by dependent arising.

I pointed out Desideri’s arguments against the dGe lugs interpretation of emptiness form the backbone of his long introduction. He briefly discussed the topic of ‘causes and conditions’

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<sup>215</sup> Part One, Section 2. See *Origins* OT3: 189-90

<sup>216</sup> Part One, Sections 1-4.

<sup>217</sup> Part One, Section 5.

<sup>218</sup> The dGe lugs maintain there is a ‘real basis for positing’ for example, the past, present and future; cause and effect; the law of karma; and rebirth. Because of this they consider all entities that are undeniably established to conventional cognition do exist. They are not considered illusory but are said to be *like* an illusion (See Part One, Section 21).

<sup>219</sup> Circular reasoning is when A is said to be true because B is true; and B is true because A is true.

and referred to the birth of a person in order to illustrate why dGe lugs reasoning was flawed. We examined his example of a heavy stationary object which could only move after *contact* was made by another moving object and that such contact involved the transmission of power (i.e. an energy force) from the moving object to the one which was stationary.<sup>220</sup>

I drew attention to Desideri's several references to the birth of a person occurring in the present time. He pointed out it would be contradictory to claim that birth had taken place in the absence of contact. We observed him strengthening his argument against the concept of an endless regress of causes, by referring to a traveller on the road that leads from Lhasa to India and commenting that it would make no sense to say that road had no limits. This would mean that it was endless, and, clearly, if this were the case a traveller on that road would never be able to reach their destination. I examined Desideri's application of this illustration: he argued that, if the series of 'causes and conditions' that affect a person being born are infinite then it would have been impossible for the person to have been touched by the 'causal efficiency force' of the preceding causes and conditions, and so it would be absurd to claim the person had actually been born.<sup>221</sup> Thus the birth that was claimed to have occurred would only be a mere 'appearance' of birth and not an actual birth.<sup>222</sup>

Attention was drawn to the reminder Desideri gave his reader that dGe lugs pa thinkers believe that phenomena cannot be established 'apart from depending upon something' and that emptiness of intrinsic existence can only be established as a result of dependency.<sup>223</sup> Therefore there needs to be a coherent basis for 'dependent origination'. I pointed out that Desideri's illustration of a king and his vassals was to show one cannot be a ruler if there are

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<sup>220</sup> Part One, Sections 5-8.

<sup>221</sup> Part One, Sections 9-11.

<sup>222</sup> It would be a fictional birth.

<sup>223</sup> Part One, Section 12.

no vassals to rule!<sup>224</sup> The dGe lugs pa school accepts that entities originate dependently, but argue that they do so without the need for an intrinsically existent entity. It was made clear that Desideri considered the dGe lugs' denial of a primary (or first) cause was illogical since it implies that something with the nature of depending is not established on anything, and therefore one would have to assume it was established upon itself, which would be incoherent.<sup>225</sup> The dGe lugs pa would also agree this would make no sense. Desideri reminded the reader that 'if the entity with the nature of dependency has nothing to depend on' then it is not established at all (i.e. it does not even exist). He emphasised the topic of dependency needing a support by referring to the relationship between 'high' and 'low' and pointed out one cannot assert that everything is 'lower' without there being even one thing that is 'upper'.<sup>226</sup> Desideri reinforced his point by arguing that it would be unreasonable to claim that everything, for example, is manufactured and there is not one thing that is not manufactured.<sup>227</sup>

Desideri wished his reader to grasp the contradictory nature of the dGe lugs pa claim that 'emptiness cannot be established without depending on something', coupled with the assertion 'there does not exist even a single entity which lacks the property of emptiness'.<sup>228</sup>

In Part One B the concept of a search for an excellence that exceeds all others (i.e. conventional things) was discussed. Desideri briefly referred to the dGe lugs understanding of two different forms of cognition, namely, conventional (everyday sense-related) cognition and superior (supreme certain-reasoning) cognition, which seeks to establish the ultimate

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<sup>224</sup> Part One, Section 13.

<sup>225</sup> Part One, Section 31.

<sup>226</sup> 'Lower' is not established independently of 'arising in dependence upon another'. If all is 'lower' and nothing is 'upper' then 'lower' must have been established upon itself.

<sup>227</sup> Part One, Sections 14-16.

<sup>228</sup> Desideri considered an intrinsically existent entity is necessary to serve as the initial or primary support for things which arise in dependence upon something.



nature of things by analysing a dependently arisen thing to ascertain whether it is established with the nature of intrinsic existence. However, it is a foregone dGe lugs conclusion that nothing is established with intrinsic existence and thus, only its emptiness is ‘realised’. A discussion concerning the need to ‘find’ some entity which is established with intrinsic existence and which exceeds all those other conventional dependent things followed.

We saw that Desideri considered unreasonable the dGe lugs assertion that since they had been unable to ‘find’ (i.e. realize) an intrinsically existent entity,<sup>229</sup> such an entity does not exist. He maintained that, in the absence of an uncaused independent entity (one that is not part of the cause and effect process), conventional inter-dependent things would have to be considered to exist intrinsically. However, such a statement would be a contradiction and one which both Desideri and the dGe lugs pa would firmly reject.<sup>230</sup>

Desideri then moved the discussion forward. He reiterated the dGe lugs view concerning cognitive objects and cognition. He pointed out that objects are either existent or non-existent (fictional) and that there are conventional cognitive objects and ultimate cognitive objects.<sup>231</sup> He repeated the dGe lugs pa position that if an object is non-existent (i.e. is not established conventionally) there would be no need to investigate its ultimate nature by subjecting it to ‘superior/supreme reasoning analysis’ in order to realize (‘find’) whether it exists intrinsically. Desideri briefly referred to the dGe lugs understanding of general (ordinary) cognition, and pointed out there are two types: firstly, cognition involving the five senses and, secondly, cognition which is associated with the mind. The rational or intellectual reasoning process that is associated with the mind is necessary in order to establish whether something exists intrinsically or not. He closed the discussion in a forceful manner by

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<sup>229</sup> The contacting of which brings true and lasting happiness.

<sup>230</sup> Part One, Sections 17-19.

<sup>231</sup> Part One, Sections 20.

declaring, ‘The system of assertions established by reasoning which maintains there does not exist at all any entity that is *resistant to analysis*<sup>232</sup> by reasoning is necessarily established as a mere system of delusion in which one can have no reliance.’

Again, we saw Desideri appeal to the reader to be open-minded and to listen without prejudice both to his arguments concerning the necessity of the existence of an uncaused entity that has the nature of intrinsic existence and to his explanation of why the dGe lugs system which maintains there is nothing that is ‘resistant to analysis’ ultimately leads to nihilism.<sup>233</sup>

I drew attention to a phrase that Desideri used at the beginning of one of his sentences (my emphasis),<sup>234</sup> ‘*If there is no most excellent entity which is resistant to analysis existing conventionally* [and] should you ask the reason for the necessity of maintaining that the birth of person(s) established to conventional cognition is merely established without causes and conditions, I will also explain this.’ The second part of his statement is clear, but the phrase ‘an entity resistant to analysis existing conventionally’ is a challenge. Perhaps Desideri simply intended to emphasise that the dGe lugs denial of an intrinsically existent entity was not held by all schools of Buddhist thought; the Autonomists, for example, maintained that things do conventionally exist intrinsically, albeit not ultimately. Because it is not clear what Desideri meant by this phrase we are left in the dark. Perhaps his intention in using it will become clear when his other manuscripts are translated into English and examined. Desideri employed several debating terms and their significance has been explained in the thesis.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> If something is shown to be ‘resistant to analysis’ it would be intrinsically existent.

<sup>233</sup> Part One, Section 21.

<sup>234</sup> Part One, Section 22

<sup>235</sup> Part One, Sections 22-23

Next, Desideri resumed his discussion as to why he considered the dGe lugs view of the mentally fabricated nature of things to imply that birth is only a ‘mere appearance of birth’. He argued that because the dGe lugs pa believe in an endless regress of a series of causes, the birth they claim to occur at the present time must have been established in the absence of causes and conditions, hence it cannot actually have occurred. He challenged his reader to consider whether the series of a person’s backward causes and conditions are ‘beginningless’ (infinite) and asks if birth has a beginning. Nāgārjuna wrote,<sup>236</sup> ‘Those who have come to understand that dependent co-origination is devoid of origination and destruction have crossed the ocean of existence, consisting of dogmas.’ Desideri discussed the impossibility of a person who has already ‘been born’ being ‘born again’. He maintained that birth exists with an actual beginning and not only is the event of birth referred to with words such as: ‘before birth’; ‘during birth’; ‘after the birth’, but also the series of causes and conditions that lead up to the birth of a person in the present also have a beginning. Desideri introduced the concept of primordial non-existence for all dependently arisen (empty of intrinsic existence) entities and asked the reader whether anything existed at the ‘time’ of primordial non-existence of all entities that are established to conventional cognition. He pointed out that the consequence of a denial would mean there would be nothing now.<sup>237</sup> However, to assert there was something, but that it was established with the nature of being empty of intrinsic existence would mean things must have been born without causes and conditions. This is because it is impossible for dependently originated entities to be produced without causes and thus, nihilism would be the result. Desideri then pointed out there was indeed something ‘there’, but that it *must* have been established with intrinsic existence.<sup>238</sup> He briefly reverted to the illustration of the

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<sup>236</sup> Part One, Section 23

<sup>237</sup> There would be nothing at all - no cause and effect, entities and so forth.

<sup>238</sup> Part One, Sections 24-26.

moon's reflection appearing in the waters of a clear lake and explained that the reflection has the nature of being deceptive in that it 'appears one way but exists in another'.<sup>239</sup>

Part One C: Desideri began with a long list of things and their opposites, for example high and low; wet and dry; heavy and light.<sup>240</sup> Nāgārjuna explained that things exist in relation to other things. Desideri applied this to the concept of emptiness and pointed out that one cannot say *all* things are characterized by emptiness and that not even one thing is *not* empty of intrinsic existence. The dGe lugs pa are adamant it is not possible to impute error to their system, and Desideri appealed to his Tibetan reader, and to future readers, to remain unbiased and thoroughly examine the logic behind the dGe lugs assertion (that denies the existence of an intrinsically existent entity) in order to see why it is unreliable.<sup>241</sup>

We saw that Desideri's main focus was not on the individual parts that constitute an object, as is that of a Tibetan Buddhist. He sought to initiate a deeper discussion on the nature of the totality of a given object.<sup>242</sup> He referred to a wooden chariot, a common example used by Tibetan Buddhists when discussing an object's aggregation of its constituent parts. He finally drew attention to the 'totality of all those individual totalities' and asked the reader if this too was empty of intrinsic existence and if it had the nature of dependency; the dGe lugs pa would concur with such a statement. However, Desideri wished to extend the discussion and challenge them to consider the nature of the cause that the totality of totalities is dependent upon.<sup>243</sup> It is important to note that Mādhyamika Buddhists do not ask such questions because their focus mainly centres on the parts that constitute an entity and as they consider any

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<sup>239</sup> Part One, Section 27. The dGe lugs maintain that in the case of unenlightened people objects 'appear in one way' (they appear to exist intrinsically) but they actually 'exist in another way' (i.e. they are empty of intrinsic existence)

<sup>240</sup> Part One, Section 28.

<sup>241</sup> Part One, Section 29.

<sup>242</sup> Part One, Sections 30-33.

<sup>243</sup> Desideri wanted them to understand the uncaused intrinsically existent God is that support.

totality a conventionality and therefore lacking intrinsic existence, they would conclude that if x is a totality then any discussion concerning a search for ultimate existence is over.

Desideri commented that even though the dGe lugs may be able to refute the ‘four possibilities of production’ (*mu bzhi*), who can refute the event of birth?<sup>244</sup> He introduced the concept of a ‘time’ of primordial non-existence for all entities established by conventional cognition and asked whether there was some entity established ‘there’. He argued that if the reader concurred that there was, but that it was empty of intrinsic existence, then the reader would be contradicting themselves.<sup>245</sup> He explained there was indeed an entity which had the nature of intrinsic existence and this particular entity is the support for conventional entities that arise dependently. If one denied this and maintained that the primordial support was not intrinsically existent, then things that appear to exist would be mere mental fabrications and so would not exist at all. Because Buddhists maintain an endless regress of causes and conditions they do not accept a ‘time’ of primordial non-existence when there were no dependently arisen phenomena. Desideri considered dependently arisen supports can only exist because of the existence of an uncaused intrinsically existent primordial entity.<sup>246</sup>

Desideri provided a simple illustration of a dot and a circle, representing a geometrical centre point upon which a circumference depends. If the circumference is removed the dot remains unchanged as it does not depend on the circumference for its existence. Buddhists believe that a cause has to change by virtue of being a cause; however Desideri’s example demonstrated that one can have a cause that does not change. Desideri explained that the ‘act of creation’ was brought about by means of an intrinsically existent Supreme Entity’s power

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<sup>244</sup> Part One, Sections 30-32.

<sup>245</sup> ‘It would be akin to speaking only senseless babble!’

<sup>246</sup> Part One, Section 33. Desideri argued that although the intrinsically existent Supreme Entity served as a support for conventional entities that arise sequentially and in dependence upon something, the manner by which it functions as a support is entirely different from dependently arisen supports.

of compassion and on account of his incomparable strength (power). He also argued that although, the intrinsically existent Supreme Entity served as a support for conventional entities that arose sequentially and in dependence upon something, the mechanism by which the uncaused Supreme Entity functions as a support is entirely different from dependently arisen supports.

Desideri briefly commented on what he sees as the fallacy of rebirth and the Buddhist understanding of karma. He considered the dGe lugs view on rebirth as delusory and dangerous since holding such a view would necessarily result in the ‘extreme of annihilation’ of all things. He therefore encouraged his reader to re-examine his own Buddhist scriptures, without partiality or bias, and to decide if the theory of an endless continuum of rebirths is correct and if the dGe lugs denial of an intrinsically existent initial or primary cause is sustainable.<sup>247</sup>

Part Two. The final section of Part One<sup>248</sup> serves as an excellent transition to Part Two, Desideri’s catechism. He considered his catechism presented as a more coherent explanation of the world compared to that offered by dGe lugs philosophers. We may assume Desideri’s reader became an earnest enquirer as a consequence of Desideri demonstrating the fragility of the Buddhist philosophy he followed. He began to ask questions that have relevance to the Christian Faith and Desideri, taking the role of a learned pandit, patiently replied to each of the eighty two questions ‘the seeker after the heart of wisdom’ asked. Thus, Desideri’s catechism, which constitutes the main part of his manuscript, gradually took shape. We looked in chapter one of Part Two at the nature and character of the intrinsically existent God (*rang grub dkon mchog*). Chapter two gave a detailed account of the articles of the Christian Creed. My English translation of Desideri’s Tibetan manuscript was located in chapters 3 and

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<sup>247</sup> Part One, Sections 34-36.

<sup>248</sup> Part One, Section 37.

4. Desideri covered topics such as the Lord's Prayer; the Ten Commandments; the precepts of the Catholic Church; and virtue and non-virtue, which included teaching concerning Adam and Eve and how their disobedience spoiled their relationship with God and consequently his perfectly created world. Desideri discussed three types of sins (original, mortal and venial) and explored the meaning of the Seven Deadly Sins. He frequently sought to contextualise what he was saying, thereby making it more appropriate for a Tibetan Buddhist reader. The Seven Sacraments of the Catholic Church were briefly dealt with as the last topic, but the absence of contextualisation was noted in these final pages.

### **The relevance of Desideri's manuscript.**

For a non-Tibetan, the accomplishments that Desideri made in the five years he was in Tibet are truly extraordinary. The speed and fluency with which he learnt the language and acquired his knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism are breathtaking. Desideri conversed with learned scholars about Buddhism, reading their books and made notes accordingly. Apart from his first book, which he wrote and presented to the King of Tibet in January 1717, his other writings, including the extensive notes that he wrote in Tibetan were in draft form. *The Essence of the Christian Faith* appears complete in itself and the catechism would be readily comprehensible by Tibetans where the sentences are short and descriptive. However, we need to remember Desideri's remarkable compilations were a work in progress. His discussion of more complicated theological subjects, for example the Trinity, would be difficult for a literate Tibetan reader to understand in their entirety. Those sentences which are exceedingly long are particularly difficult to comprehend and would be especially difficult for a Buddhist reader who is unfamiliar with Christian doctrine; thus the full impact of what Desideri was trying to say would be missed. If he had been permitted to remain in Tibet and continue his

studies there is no doubt he would have revised and improved his entire collection of essays and eventually made them ready for publication. Desideri's Tibetan spelling is very good and the few errors that are in his texts he would presumably have corrected. But the publication of an unrevised account of Desideri's *The Essence of the Christian Faith* would not be readily comprehensible to a twenty first century Tibetan reader. Furthermore, if a modern Christian were to seek to use Desideri's text in dialogue with Tibetans there would also be a need to explain and amplify Desideri's choice of Tibetan vocabulary, which he used for Christian terms such as, God; the Holy Spirit, blessing; forgiveness and so forth.

Certainly Desideri left behind hundreds of pages in the Tibetan language, and now for those engaged in Christian-Buddhist dialogue with Tibetans others can build on what he has written and thereby move the discussion forward. I hope my translation (which represents only ten percent of what Desideri wrote in Tibetan) will serve as a brief introduction to his various thoughts and arguments. I would be delighted if it facilitates a greater interest in the contents of the entire collection of Desideri's Tibetan writings. If others are encouraged to embark on a journey of research and discovery that will contribute to the fulfilment of this young Italian Jesuit missionary's prayerful hopes for the people of Tibet, then my small contribution will not have been in vain.



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