Buddhist-Christian Dialogue in Korea: a case of back to basics

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In this paper I will attempt to investigate the relative health of what is commonly presented as Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Korea. In what follows I will claim that interreligious dialogue at a truly authentic level is still a future goal to be aimed at and not an already existing reality. After briefly examining the state of dialogue in Korea I will conclude that there still remains a huge amount of work to be done if the goal of dialogue is to be achieved, even at a rudimentary level. At the moment, interreligious dialogue is being interpreted so loosely so as to make it almost meaningless. If we are to move away from this destructive practice, it is my belief, we must move back to the basics of dialogue, and begin by defining such things as motivations, concepts, terms, and our attitudes towards other religions. Only when we move back to the basics will we be in a
position to truly begin the journey of authentic interreligious dialogue.

It would seem that on the face of it all is well on the interreligious front in Korea, and that interfaith dialogue is progressing ahead at a slow but reasonable pace. Naturally, there still remain problems and difficulties to overcome. For example, in the area of Buddhist-Christian relations one often hears of verbally offensive behaviour on the part of Christians, usually individuals, but on occasion this form of behaviour can turn into a more violent form of abuse.\(^1\) On the positive front, there have been concerted efforts on the part of many religious traditions to overcome feelings of animosity. Interfaith groups such as the Korean Conference of Religion and Peace (KCRP) have made strenuous efforts to build cordial relations among the various religious traditions, and they have also encouraged different religious traditions to partake in common social and charitable campaigns. The KCRP's monthly newspaper, Religion and Peace [종교와평화] provides a fine example of interreligious cooperation and bridge building. On a concrete level, one example of the improving state of relations between different religious traditions can be glimpsed through the simple convention, as has developed in recent years, of sharing greetings with neighbouring churches.

\(^{1}\) See Frank Tadesco's article outlining such violent incidents during the 80s and 90s. However, some caution is advised since it is all too easy to make a jump from the particular to the general individual cases do not necessarily prove institutional sectarianism nor institutional approval. Accessed at [http://www.geocities.com/~iarf/tedesco1.html](http://www.geocities.com/~iarf/tedesco1.html) (June20, 2008).