

AMERICA SMILES ON THE BUDDHA—PART 3

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Buddhism vs. Christianity (continued)

The following discussion further illustrates how Buddhism seeks to eliminate that which Christianity sees as foundational: 1) the glorification of God and Christ, 2) a real permanent existence, and 3) personal individual salvation:

1) Buddhism rejects the God of Christian worship

In his three volume *Hinduism and Buddhism*, Sir Charles Eliot acknowledges that: “On the whole it is correct to say that Buddhism (except perhaps in very exceptional sects) has always taken and still takes a point of view which has little in common with European theism. The world is not thought of as the handiwork of a divine personality, nor the moral law as his will.”¹⁸ As several Buddhists have told us, “the Christian God is entirely irrelevant.” A former Buddhist told us, “One of my favorite Tibetan Lamas told me: ‘We simply don’t have a clue what these Jews and Christians mean when they talk about their God.’”

2) Buddhism rejects real, permanent existence

While Theravada believes normal reality is temporarily “real,” it is nevertheless insubstantial, impermanent, in a continual state of flux. It is not eternally real, permanent or absolute. Thus, Theravada would deny the universe will have an eternal existence, as Christianity teaches, because only nirvana is permanent. For Theravada *nirvana* is set in contrast to *samsara*, which is the world of impermanent existence as we know it.

The Mahayanists, on the other hand, believe that in addition to its constant flux, the universe is “empty”—that is, broken down to its smallest components, the universe is “nothing” in and of itself and ultimately “non-existent.” We see this Mahayanist perspective in *Buddhism: Its Doctrines and Methods* by Tibetan Buddhist Alexandra David-Neel:

The elements called illusion, desire, karma, and birth, which constitute the individual life, have no real existence in the absolute meaning of this word; they have none even in the restricted sense as regards the conditions of life in samsara. The rope which was taken for a snake is not in itself a snake, nor is it ever a snake, either in the darkness or in the light. What is it, then, that is called phenomenal reality (samsara)? Obsessed by the unreal demons of their “ego” and their “mind,” stupid people—those who are of the world—imagine that they can perceive separate entities, whereas in reality these do not exist....¹⁹

3) Buddhism rejects Christian salvation as ignorance

Buddhists have no concept of a personal creator in the Christian sense and no concept of a savior in the Christian sense. In Buddhism, the concept of salvation in a Christian sense is not only irrelevant, it is even spiritually dangerous. Why? Because it seeks to save and perpetuate an illusion, the false self.

Christianity thus “glorifies” the “lower self,” i.e., man created in the image of God. But according to Buddhism, any desire to affirm this image and perpetuate it eternally would logically be considered evil: “Desire in itself is not evil. It is desire to affirm the lower self, to live in it, cling to it, identify oneself with it, instead of with the Universal self, that is evil.”²⁰ But this is the essence of what it means to be human according to Christianity.

In a clinging to temporal existence, to the personal desires which Christianity finds good (e.g., the desire to glorify God and to live the Christian life), in hoping for personal immortal-

ity—and much more that is Christian—all these, according to Buddhism, constitute an ignorant approach to life preventing enlightenment, or true salvation.

By definition then, Christianity insulates against and *prevents* Buddhist enlightenment through its belief in God, dualism, an individual spirit, the importance of Christian living, in its trust in an atoning Savior, even in the utility of suffering for salvation and sanctification (e.g., Romans 5:3-11; 1 Peter 4:19; 1 John 2:2), etc. The reverse is also true; Buddhism insulates against and *prevents* biblical salvation. Where God, Christ and the atonement are denied, there can be no salvation. How then can Buddhism look with favor upon a Christianity which opposes its first loves? More graphically, how can the serene and compassionate Buddha sit and smile unperturbed at the bloody cross? In Buddhism: "Ignorance, then, is not only lack of knowledge, but wrong knowledge; it is that which hides things and prevents one from seeing them as they are in reality."²¹ And, "There is no mention of a Supreme Divinity, nor any promise of superhuman aid for suffering humanity."²²

In *Conversations: Christian and Buddhist*, Father Dom Aelred Graham (author of *Zen Catholicism*) talked with various Buddhists, in this case Buddhist instructor Fujimoto Roshi. Roshi is speaking:

Father Graham asked whether it is possible for a Christian to attain Enlightenment. I would say that it is. However, as long as Christians are attached to *the* Christianity [i.e., exclusivistic, doctrinal Christianity], as they have been, it is *not* possible.²³

In light of our discussion to date, we must conclude that Buddhism and Christianity are antagonistic to one another; only when this fact is accepted will Christians feel the necessity to uncompromisingly share the truth of Christ with Buddhists; only then will Buddhists recognize an urgent choice is to be made:

Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me." (John 14:6)

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent. (John 17:3)

The one who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the witness that God has borne concerning His Son. And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. (1 John 5:10-12)

Notes:

18. Sir Charles Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, Vol. I. (NY: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1971), p. xcv.

19. Alexandria David-Neel, *Buddhism: Its Doctrines and Its Methods* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977, p. 247.

20. Stephen Neill, *Christian Faith and Other Faiths* (2nd ed.) (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 117.

21. Ibid., p. 51.

22. Ibid., p. 28.

23. Dom Aelred Graham, *Conversations: Christian and Buddhist* (NY: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1968), p. 104, second emphasis added.