

聖書とダマパダ：仏教とキリスト教思想*

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The Bible and the Dhammapada: Thoughts on Buddhism and Christianity

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1. The Author's Introduction

The author, as an agnostic, has had an innate interest in world culture and religion since his early youth. Having served as both an advocate and a skeptic to the concept of religious belief, the author has resigned himself to religious studies only to supplement his studies on cultural anthropology. In addition to the historical information concerning Buddhism, the author has chosen to write a comparative study between the doctrines of Buddhism and Christianity—a summary of information obtained through experiences and personal study on the subject. The author introduces this topic of religion and reflection to the audiences of Nagasaki Wesleyan University to promote further study of cultural views and concepts.

2. Overview of Buddhism

Buddhism and Asia are synonymous in many ways. Buddhism has been the most important religious force in Asia for nearly two thousand years. No other religion has affected the thought, culture, and politics of so many people. In architecture, science, drama, arts, and music Buddhism has been the single most important influence in the Eastern world.

The founder of Buddhism, Siddhārtha Gautama Shakyamuni सिद्धार्थ गौतम was born about 563 BCE in the Himalayan foothill region of Nepal. The title “Buddha” means “the enlightened one”. Buddha’s name in Sanskrit was Sakkyamuni

which means “Sage of the Sakyas”. Sakkyamuni is also spelled “Sakamuni” in some texts. Siddhārtha or Siddhartha, the Buddha’s given name means “to do meaningfully” is a shortened form of Sarvartthassiddha, meaning the “realization of all desires”. Gautama or Gotama, commonly accepted as a middle name, is based on the Sanskrit translation of the Buddha’s family name which means “on earth the most victorious”. Until Gautama Siddhartha was 29 years old, he led a conventional life as a prince, then he became “enlightened”, acquired disciples, and wandered and taught for many years until he died about the age of 80, somewhere between 485-480 BCE.

Gautama rejected all of the Hindu gods and objected to the prejudice that hereditary should control social positions. He supported a doctrine of enlightened equality. People questioned him as to who he was and if he claimed to be a god. He answered them by saying, “I am neither a god nor an angel, I am awake.” His answer became his title, for “Buddha” means the “Awakened One”. Buddhism in its various forms, the Buddha suggests a profound philosophy concerning the nature of man and the world. He discovered a path which he felt helped humanity deal with the deepest questions of life. Such things as the meaning of suffering, the importance of compassion, and the meaning of life are answered by the Buddha. However, it is also necessary to recognize that there is no “pure” Buddhism in the world today. The highest official Buddhist teachings have been interlaced in practice with many superstitions, folk deities, charms, and re-interpretation of Buddhist doctrine. There is a wide gap between

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the Buddhism that was originally a philosophy of Siddhartha Gautama and the Buddhism that is practiced in the various Buddhism influenced cultures in Asia. Also, it is ironic, that Buddhism has vanished in the land of its origin, India, where the faith became extinct during the thirteenth century.

Buddhism spread to all the countries surrounding India at an early date. It was accepted by the Tibetans, and then found acceptance in China where it was endorsed by the Mongolians in northern Asia. The influence of Buddhism made its way to several southeast countries of Asia such as the island of Sri Lanka. Buddhism spread through Korea and was introduced to Japan via Korea after the sixth century. More recently, Buddhism has also reached the United States and other Western countries.

During the time of the rule of Ashoka in India, Buddhism was divided into two major schools. Hinayana (Theravada), which remained closer to the original faith and practiced faith in “karma” and other Buddhist doctrine. Whereas, Mahayana Buddhism, which is also known as the greater vessel of Buddhism, developed a little later, during the Kushan period in India between 100-200 ACE. This sect of Buddhism introduced new Buddhist deities known as “Bodhisattvas”. These deities were often combined with different folk deities as Buddhism spread to other countries and cultures. It is the Mahayana Buddhism, known as Teisunbugyo to the Koreans, which has spread through Korea and into Japan. The Hinayana Buddhism, which is known as Sosunbugyo in Korea, has spread into Thailand and Laos. Concepts of worship differ between these two branches of Buddhism. Sosunbugyo dictates that the individual must change themselves through constant meditation whereas the Teisunbugyo belief is that the community is saved by the merits of the Bodhisattvas.

The doctrine of Buddhism in Korea has been dramatically re-written with the integration of Shamanism, Taoism, and Confucian philosophy. After Buddhism was introduced to Korea, it was immediately changed as various doctrine was introduced or removed to conform to the

concepts that the Koreans endorsed. Differences in the Buddhism philosophy soon divided Buddhism into different and ever-changing sects. As the Buddhist doctrine, philosophy, meditation, and spiritual practices were replaced with superstitions and intertwined with Shamanistic practices and Confucianism, the division between Korea’s Buddhism and the original Buddhism are apparent.

An example of Confucian influence on Buddhism would include the concept of ancestor worship. According to Buddhist doctrine kinship does not exist among humans or any other living organisms. All living organisms are on their own cycle of birth, death, and re-birth. Therefore, ancestors, parents, children, relatives, or other *blood ties* do not exist according to Buddhism. Ancestor worship is directly a Confucian doctrine. Reincarnation is a concept of Hinduism and adopted into Buddhism in an effort explain what happens after mortal death. The only way to escape from the continuous cycle of reincarnation, is to enter a state called “nirvana” or *jobutsu* 成仏 which is more appropriately described as a state of “extinction” or *non*-existence.

Japan also altered the Buddhist doctrine with the introduction of various Shinto beliefs. These days, Shinto and Buddhism are inter-mixed to the point that on a societal-level, most Japanese are unable to distinguish between Shinto and Buddhist practices. As Dr. Hlawatch (2000) of Kansai Gaikokugo University assessed, the Japanese Buddhist faith is not Buddhism at all, rather a faith known to cultural anthropologists as “Ryobu Shinto”. Sects within Japan are as different and ever-changing as the sects are in Korea. Kusha, Jojitsu, Sanron, Hosso, Kegon, Ritsu, Shingo, Tendai, Jodo, Dainichi, Jodoshinshu, Nichiren, and the list goes on as Ryobu Shinto Buddhism in Japan continues to change even in modern times with the creation of many modern religions such as Ma Hikari, Tenri, and Sokagakkai.

Between the years 399 and 645 ACE, Buddhism became even more complex as deities of Cosmic Buddhas and Cosmic Bodhisattvas were introduced as divine beings that were once human, but become Buddhas that postponed

their entrance into Nirvana by transferring their merits to others in order to help human beings of the present. Cosmic Buddhas include such deities as Vairocana, Akshobhya, Ratnasambhara, Amitabha, and Amogasiddhi. Among these, Vairocana, the Primordial Buddha known as the “Lord of the Cosmos” and Amitabha, the “Lord of Paradise” are well known and worshipped in Korea. Sakamuni is another Cosmic Buddha that is unique to Korea. Cosmic Bodhisattvas include Samantabhadra, Vajrapani, Ratnapani, Avalokitesvara, Visvapani. Avalokitesvara is known by the Koreans as Maifreya, this Bodhisattva promises a better world in the future and is worshiped along with the Bodhisattva entitled Kwanum (also spelled Kwansum), the Bodhisattva of unlimited compassion in the here and now. Other Bodhisattvas such as Kwanum, the “Bodhisattva of Compassion” and Yaksa Yora, the “Bodhisattva of Healing” are unique to Korea. These Buddhas and Bodhisattvas that were adapted by the Koreans made their way to the shores of Japan. The Koreans provided the Japanese the vocabulary for these Cosmic Buddhas and Cosmic Bodhisattvas and have re-named them with names such as Dainichi, Nyorai, Miroku, Amida, Kannon, and Yukushi-ruriko.

As an example of how the doctrine of the different Buddhist sects are controlled by these deities, the author will digress on the Cosmic Buddha called Amitabha, who is widely revered and worshiped throughout Korea and Japan. He is Lord of the Western Land and is a savior figure who dwells in a heaven in constant meditation. Amitabha is known in China as Omī’ofu and in Korea and Japan as Amida. This deity has had a strong appeal in Asia. Indeed, “Amidism” has become its own religion within Buddhism, where believers seek for enlightenment from Amitabha or Amida. Believers feel that the more frequently that his name is recited, the greater the spiritual benefit. This religion has no complicated rituals, teaching or doctrine—nothing except the saving merit from faith in Amitabha manifested through the recitation of his name. In Japan, Amida was often looked upon as being the great sun goddess

Amaterasu Mikami. However, the actual worship of Amida in Japan goes back no further than the twelfth century. Through the Amida Jodo Shu and Jodo Shinshu (Pure Land and True Pure Land) sects of Japan, belief in living in paradise and in salvation through faith in Amida has become widely popular. Amida of Japan is artistically represented as Amitagha in northern Buddhism. This is also a manifestation of Ryobu Shinto by the example of the combination of folk deities being mixed with Buddhism. Amaterasu Mikami is the goddess of the Shinto myth as found in the ancient Japanese text “Kojiki,” nevertheless, Amitabha is a deity of Mahayana Buddhism.

Such “bridges” between traditional folk beliefs and Buddhism can also be found in Korean Shamanism. Many Shamans call themselves Bodhisattvas and claim that they are deities as well as fortune-tellers relaying requests of spirits and ghosts and providing answers for reasons of misfortune. Most Shamans and their clients in Korea usually answer that they are believers of the Buddhist faith when asked which religion they belong to. This manifestation of lack of adherence to Buddha teachings of members who claim to be Buddhist followers creates some confusion as to who is really Buddhist in the true sense of the term. Shamans continue to bridge the gap between Shamanism and Buddhism in Korea as Shinto Priests provide a bridge between Shinto and Buddhism in Japan. By integration and adaptation, Buddhism has taken root in Asia to the extent that natives of each culture claim Buddhism as their own cultural manifestation and use Buddhism as a reference to establish national identity. Nationalism formed around Buddhism early on in Korean history, despite its international origins, and has been characterized as “hoguk” the “protect the nation” Buddhism. Likewise, Japanese have come to identify Buddhism as its national religion—especially in response to Christian proselyting efforts.

Meditation Buddhism, known as “Son” in Korea is better known in the West by its Japanese name of Zen. This form of Buddhism argues

that the individual must spend time in study and meditation in order to reach enlightenment instead of praying to the different Buddhist deities in an effort for salvation and enlightenment. Intellectual means for enlightenment is a relatively new variation of an old concept in Buddhism and is more representative of Hinayana or Sosunbugyo Buddhism. This new form of Buddhism is what is stereotypically accepted as the definition of Buddhism in the West.

Small mounds of pebbles can be seen throughout temple grounds and in the countryside in Korea. This is also a Buddhist worshiping practice that is specific to Korea. By placing pebbles on the top of each other, it is believed that this shows the individual's faith that the Buddha and Bodhisattvas will grant their requests. Korean Buddhism also displays a great paradigm shift as Buddhism in Korea is used for fulfilling desires instead of eliminating them.

3. Overview of Christianity

The history of Christianity and how it evolved out of folk tradition and oppression has created multiple theories concerning its true origins. Moreover, various interpretations of the Christian doctrine found in the Bible compounded by multiple translations of the Bible further determining doctrine differences and fueling division between sects has created a wide variety of Christian faiths. In addition to the traditional Judeo-Christian faiths, Christianity has evolved to include Catholic, Protestant, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Baptist, Lutheran, Puritan, Quaker, Methodist, Amish, Later-day Saint, Seven Day Adventist, Jehovah Witness, and multiple other sects. To explain each of the many sects of Christianity and the doctrinal differences would take volumes. When it comes to the differences, it is of less relevance when considering the history of Christianity in Asia. The author would like to focus on Christianity in Korea and Japan.

3.1 Christianity in Japan: The Legacy of Francis Xavier

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day

Saints boasts Japan as having the sect's oldest missionary legacy in Asia. In the summer of 1901, a few Mormon missionaries under the leadership of Heber T. Grant came to Yokohama to establish the first Japan mission which later spread to Korea and Taiwan. However, the LDS church history is quite short when compared with the older and more traditional branches of Christianity such as the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches. According to Stuart Picken (1983), the first attempt to carry Christianity's Gospel to "Cipangu" or "Japan" was made by Christopher Columbus. However, it was Marco Polo, a Venetian merchant, who provided Europe with information concerning Japan. This information served to inspire Columbus. Columbus hoped to extend Christianity to Japan and other lands that he might discover. Unfortunately, Columbus found disappointment with his travels and hope for spreading the Gospel in foreign lands.

It would be half a century later when Europeans actually reached Japan. Historically speaking, it is not determined who should be given the honors, but it has been extended to Mendez Pinto, a Portuguese mariner. In 1542, he and his crew were driven from the coast of China by a storm and happened onto the island of Japan. With Portugal there began an interest in Japan. This interest also reintroduced the idea of missionary work.

Francis Xavier was given the privilege of leading the first company of missionaries to Japan. The various events which lead up to this expedition are well remembered in Christian history. Francis Xavier was born at the castle of Xavier in Navarre on April 7, 1506. When he was eighteen years old, he entered the University of Paris. He later became one of the six who united to form what was called the "Society of Jesus" (Jesuits) in 1539, two years after Xavier was ordained into the Catholic Priesthood.

From its beginning, foreign missionary work was a major part of the Jesuit order. Because of this Xavier was quick to respond to King John III of Portugal who asked for a missionary to go to India. On April 7, 1541, Xavier left on a voyage to India to begin missionary work among the

people of Goa. His missionary activities took him from Goa into southern India to Ceylon and Malacca. In Malacca a ship from China docked and among the passengers was a Japanese named Yajiro (also spelled *Anjiro*). Yajiro became Xavier's first convert to the gospel of Christ. Yajiro was from Kagoshima on the Japanese island Kyushu. He was part of the Shimazu family, a wealthy and strong samurai family. As Xavier taught Yajiro about Christianity, they became good friends. Xavier suggested that they go to Goa. It was in Goa that Yajiro was baptized. Yajiro received the name "Paul of the Holy Faith" at baptism. Yajiro had two friends who were also baptized and given the names *Anthony* and *John*. Xavier's experiences with Yajiro made him want to go to Japan to preach the Gospel.

Xavier set sail to Japan in April 1549. He was accompanied by Yajiro and his two friends, and two Spanish Jesuits, Cosme de Torres and Juan Fernandez. Fernandez was very articulate in his sermons, yet Xavier's fame has eclipsed that of his companions, including Juan Fernandez. The drama of Xavier's journey to Japan is comical with a twist of irony. Because Xavier wanted to go directly to Japan, he passed up several ships taking less direct routes in favor of a Chinese ship whose captain promised to make a direct trip. This turned out to be a pirate ship, sailing on a mission of plunder, but it was blown off course and, on August 15, 1549, landed at Kagoshima in Satsuma. Kagoshima was the birthplace of Yajiro. Xavier's missionary work in Japan began immediately.

Xavier was impressed with the Japanese people and was well-received by Shimazu Takahisa, the daimyo ruler of Satsuma. Shimazu Tokahisa and Otomo Hachiro were tolerant to Christianity. However, later rulers such as Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1583-1598) and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1614-1640) were much less tolerant to Christianity which they regarded as a crime and worshipping resulted in exile, persecution, and murder of those who were of the Christian faith.

Xavier was successful in his missionary efforts in Satsuma and by the end of the year as many

as 150 persons were baptized in Kagoshima. Resentment by Buddhist priests forced Xavier to leave Satsuma and moved his missionary effort to the north in Hirado. There, Xavier continued to be successful and Catholic converts continued to increase.

Because of the success of his mission, Xavier decided to journey to Kyoto with the hope of being able to convert the Japanese emperor. In October of 1550, he set off with Fernandez and two Japanese Christians as Torres remained in Hirado. They stopped at Yamaguchi on their way to Kyoto, but after four weeks of unsuccessful mission work, they continued their journey. They traveled through bitter winter conditions, sickness, and danger and finally arrived in Kyoto in February 1551. Their trip had taken four times longer than they expected. The missionary work in Kyoto proved to be a disappointment. Civil war was raging at the time, so the capitol was deserted and the city was badly damaged. Xavier felt that his efforts in Kyoto were useless and reluctantly decided to retrace his steps to Yamaguchi.

On his way back, Xavier began to think about a new approach to preach to the people of Yamaguchi again. When Xavier was in India, he had lived and preached among the poor as if he was poor himself. He realized that in Japan the tattered robe he wore was not seen as a symbol of Jesuit's self-imposed poverty, but instead as evidence of his low rank. Xavier changed his approach. He sent for a new robe and, when finely dressed, made a good impression on the daimyo of Yamaguchi that he was permitted to preach.

The positive results of the Jesuit mission in Japan encouraged Xavier to continue his mission to Asia. He decided to leave Japan and take the Christian message to China. He first set sail on September 1551 for Bungo (currently Oita Prefecture in Kyushu). In Bungo, Xavier was received by the daimyo Otomo Yoshishige. Xavier, finely dressed, once again made a good impression. Otomo provided positive support for Xavier's mission in Bungo. Conversions were numerous, and he spent a lot of time baptizing new converts. Near the end of November 1551, Xavier finally boarded the ship

that was to take him on his journey to China. However, Francis Xavier never reached China. He became ill on the final stage of his journey and died on December 2, 1552 on a little island thirty miles southwest of Macao. Because of his active life and lonely death, a great deal of romanticism has grown up around his name.

Even during the days of Francis Xavier, Christianity was regarded as a foreign “contamination” to Japanese society. Christianity is still considered to be a religion that is foreign to Japan. The irony of such a statement is best explained by the words of Nobunaga. When the Emperor Nobunaga met with Padre Urugan, a Portuguese missionary, Nobunaga assembled all of his ministers together with Buddhist priests, Confucians and other learned individuals to decide if the missionary should be allowed to continue publishing religion. After the assembly criticized the missionary, Nobunaga thought to himself what the verdict should be. After careful consideration, Nobunaga said “...the religions that are prevalent in this country have all been brought from foreign countries... Buddhism was brought to this country from Chorea (Korea)... my mind is made up to allow him to spread it abroad as much as he pleases.” (Paske-Smith, 1979). Despite his justified reputation of being a vulgar, violent, and a rebellious individual, Nobunaga also played a role in the legacy of Christianity in Japan.

Francis Xavier lives on today in both Japanese and European history. His title as the *Apostle to Japan* or *Apostle of the East* are the titles that Francis Xavier has been remembered as. From the years after Francis Xavier first set foot on Kagoshima in the year 1549, Christianity and its own legacy has been a drama in Japan. The “hidden Christians” and the oppression that followed is also a part of the history of Japan. This author believes that although Korea and Japan were similarly exposed to Christianity, the growth of the Christian faith in Korea is a result of the monotheistic societal shamanistic beliefs. However, Shinto supports a polytheistic view of the world which counters the Christian monotheistic views. Moreover, rulers such as Hideyoshi and Ieyasu viewed Christianity as a

threat to political power as “all being equal in the eyes of God” and the lack of the Shinto connection of the emperor having divine lineage is viewed as a threat to the political landscape of Japan.

3.2 Christianity in Korea: Legacy of Faith

Only about two percent of the Asian population is Christian, and while Christians are to be found in virtually every Asian country, it is South Korea that has witnessed the most spectacular and historically significant Christian expansion, particularly over the past four decades, the period of the country's remarkable modernization.

Since the introduction of Catholicism in 1784, followed by the arrival of Protestant missionaries in 1884, Christianity has become second to Buddhism, the largest religion in the country. At the start of the 21st century, about one third of South Korea's 45 million people are Christian--11 million Protestants and 3 million Roman Catholics (Kim, 2003).

Since the early 1960s, when South Korean Christians scarcely topped the one million mark, the number of Christians, particularly Protestants, has increased faster than in any other country, doubling every decade. By 1994, moreover, there were over 35,000 churches and 50,000 pastors, making the South Korean church one of the most vital and dynamic in the world (Kim, 2003).

In reviewing the history of Korean Christianity, one may note certain peculiar circumstances of Korean history. Especially concerning Korea's long history of vulnerability to Chinese and Japanese military control. Japanese colonialism and the Korean War, afforded Christianity a unique opportunity to offer a compelling salvation ethos and promise of both personal and national empowerment.

One might also note that the profound social structural developments that marked the modernization process in Korea following WWII provided a cultural opening for the “selling” and “reception” of a Christian worldview that harmonized with the industrial transformation of the society.

The origins of Christianity in Korea parallels the origins of Christianity in Japan and other parts of Asia is a result of the initial impact of Western missionary proselyting efforts. These efforts became concentrated in the middle of the eighteenth century. However, shifting fortunes and misfortunes of the Korean people conditioned their receptivity to Christian evangelization (Kim, 2003).

Christianity has been a major influence in modern Korean history, particularly in the twentieth century under Japanese rule and more recently, during South Korea's rapid urbanization and economic development (Yi, 2002). The influence of Christianity before liberation from Japan, when it appealed to certain emerging communities as an alternative to traditional ideologies and Japanese imperialism serves to make Christianity a unique social phenomenon to South Korea. Both Protestant and Catholic sects are well-established in South Korea and new sects of Christianity have evolved from South Korea. Reverend Moon and the Unification Church as well as more recent sects claiming divine lineage have emerged in South Korea. This author correlates such development to be similar to how the Mormon Church and Jehovah Witnesses evolved out of Christian churches in the United States. Religion ultimately perpetuates itself while recreating its narrative and doctrine to conform to society and to attract membership.

4. Comparisons between Buddhism and Christianity

Individuals who call themselves *Christian* or *Buddhist* make the claim under a broader definition that includes a full range of faith groups under both schools of philosophy. Christians include members of the Assemblies of God, Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, Southern Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, United Church members, etc. Likewise, Buddhism includes both the schools of Mahayana and Hinayana and the different regional and modern sects within each of these Buddhist schools. Although the author's intention is to write at length concerning

the similarities, it must be known that Buddhists do not *share* the core beliefs of Christianity much less the culturally critical beliefs accepted by some Christians. Buddhism does not teach the following Christian core beliefs:

- The fall of humanity based on the concept of an original era in the Garden of Eden counters Buddhist scripture routinely referring to the “beginning-less” Samsara.
- Original sin derived from Adam and Eve
- Human genocide from a world-wide flood in the time of Noah
- The need to be sinless or obtain salvation through the atonement of a savior
- The belief in the soul or an essence of a person that lives on after death for all eternity
- A future return of a savior to the earth
- The end of the world or genocide through Armageddon
- A permeating belief that the whole world should be Christian

With the above differences stated, it is possible to write briefly on some shared beliefs. Perhaps most importantly and easily stated is the basic belief that life continues in some form after death. However, Buddhism and Christianity perceive life after death quite differently. Buddhism endorses the Hindu belief of reincarnation that humans are trapped in a repetitive cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth. One's situation is potentially improved depending upon a person's *Karma*, or results of merits and demerits one has obtained over a lifetime. The ultimate goal is to escape the cycle of reincarnation through Nirvana—a liberated existence of *non-being*.

Christianity historically teaches that humanity is only offered a single life on earth and after one's death, one will be evaluated for their actions or the amount of *sin* in their lives. Moreover, Buddhism also has polarizing doctrine. As an example, *grace* is part of the Christianity's theology, in Theravada Buddhism, no deity can interfere with Karma, making the notion of any type of grace is not granted. However, Mahayana Buddhism offers some concept of *grace* to its members. The merits of the “savior-like” Bodhisattva “Amida” is an example.

To understand both the similarities and the differences between Christianity and Buddhism, it is best to compare Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha, and Jesus Christ. In general, Christ and Buddha both believed that covetousness and lust were at the root of human suffering, and that men must conquer their appetites and clean evil from the mirror of their minds and nurture spiritual strength. Both have declared that freedom lies in following a life that is free of falsehood, stealing, killing, unlawful sexual relations, and in simpler terms *sin*.

Parallels between the lives of both Jesus Christ and Buddha are numerous: Both Jesus and Buddha were *foreordained* before they were born and that they would come into the world at a particular time, to a particular place, family, country, race, and mother. Both entered their mother's womb in a miraculous manner, having no mortal father. Both were born into a world whose inhabitants spiritually had become corrupt and had lost much of their "spiritual common sense". The births of both were signified by special heavenly illuminations. Both were recognized in infancy by religious leaders as persons of great promise with special missions to perform among mankind. Both visited holy temples in their youth and displayed great wisdom before their elders (Siddhartha with Asita and Jesus with the scribes and Pharisees). Both launched their ministries early in their thirtieth year following periods of fasting and solitude. Both gained disciples under a fig tree. Both were severely tempted by an evil being (Mara in the case of Buddha and Satan in the case of Jesus). Both selected a council of special disciples and joined with them in carrying out their religious ideals through the way of example (Beckstrand, 1994).

However, there is an inherent difference in the iconic imagery in the death of Jesus and Gautama Buddha. Jesus is depicted as a willing sacrifice for the atonement for the sins of humanity through harsh crucifixion which contrasts the peaceful death of an eighty-year-old Gautama Buddha lying between to trees as he accepts final Nirvana.

4.1 Doctrinal Similarities found in the Bible and the Dhammapada

In addition to the historical similarities, Buddha and Jesus Christ both have agreements in thought between the gospels of the New Testament in the Bible and the धम्मपद or *Dhammapada* of Theravada Buddhism including the following:

From Christ: "Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward is full of ravening and wickedness. Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also?" (Luke II 39-40).

From the Buddha: "What is the use of platter hair, O fool! What of the raiment of goat-skins? Within thee there is ravening, but the outside thou makest clean." (Dhammapada 26:394, The Brahmana).

Christ: "Straight is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." (Matthew 7:14). "Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped." (Psalms 124:7).

Buddha: "This world is dark, few only can see here; a few only go to heaven, like birds escaped from the net." (Dhammapada 13:174).

Christ: "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." (Matthew 15:14).

Buddha: "As when a string of blind men are clinging one to the other, neither can the foremost see, nor can the middle one see, nor can the hindmost see." (Tevijja Sutta 1:15).

Jesus said to the woman of Samaria that his salvation is as "living water" (John 4:10-14). In the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha compares salvation to water for all (Saddharmapundarika 5).

Moreover, ethics and the concept of reciprocity are similar between Buddhism and Christianity. Ethics as quoted in Buddhists texts includes the following two quotations: "...a state that is not pleasing or delightful to me, how could I inflict that upon another?" (Samyutta Nikaya v. 353). "Hurt not others in ways that you would find hurtful." (Udana-Varga 5:18). These quotes parallel closely to Christianity's *Golden Rule* as mentioned in the Bible as "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to

you, do ye even so to them.” (Matthew 7:12).

4.2 Similarities in the Concept of “Hell”

The author is also interested in difference between the Buddhist and Christian Hell. The author became interested in this subject when learning more about a comic book called “Hozuki no Reitetsu” (鬼灯の冷徹) or “Hozuki’s Coolheadedness” from his students.

The daily life of various “Hells” is described in this comic book. Not only the devils of Japan, but foreign devils also appeared in this comic. Also, although it is the same “Hell”, there are differences such as the various rulers over Hell and how punishment in Hell is given differently.

At first, it is often merely assumed that Hell is the place where the devil lives, but the punishment received in Hell is different between Christianity and Buddhism. Although the images of the hell are different, religion shares some common points, too. One of the most common shared images of Hell is of crossing a river. Many Japanese are familiar with *Sanzu no kawa* or the *River of the Three Hells*, but this seems similar to Acheron, a river in Hades as known in Christianity. Common points also include the need to pay money in the form of coinage as a wage to cross the river. The River of Three Hells requires payment be made to the wizards *Datsueba* and *Keneo* who plunder the clothes of those who do not have money to hand over. In the Acheron River, a coin for passage must be paid to *Charon* in order to get on board a ship to be carried across the river.

Concepts are different in the Buddhist Hell and Christian Hell. In Buddhism, Hell is a place to compensate for a crime throughout the reincarnation of several lifetimes. In Buddhism, it is believed that reincarnation gives one an opportunity for a fresh start. One’s life is merely recycled through reincarnation in Buddhism. However, in Christianity, it is Jesus Christ who decides a single verdict for one’s life. There is a safety zone provided by religion. In Christianity, the conscience actions that one makes in life is judged by God and one must either suffer responsibility for their bad actions

or seek compensation and redemption to enter heaven through the merits of Jesus Christ. In short, according to Christian dogma, if one does not have faith in redemption through Jesus Christ, one must suffer by going... to Hell. It is said that the devil lives in Hell in Christianity. The devil despises God and tries to prevent Jesus Christ from granting salvation to people. The devil tries to trick people and tempts people by sugared words. Satan rules over Hell and torments the criminals that reside there. In short, Hell in Buddhism is a place for redemption and the Christian Hell is a place for unfortunate people judged to have no redemption.

Judgment is a Christian concept. A dead person remains deceased for a period of time, and then God destroys the world and revives the dead through resurrection and the person is judged whether to enter either of two divided realms—Heaven or Hell. In the case of Buddhism, one is transmitted to any of six worlds. One can be mediated to any of six places. These places include Tendo, Ningendo, Shurado, Chikushodo, Gakido, and Jigokudo. *Tendo* is the superior celestial kingdom. *Ningendo* is the realm of people, *Shurado* is a realm of contention ruled by the ogre Ashura. *Chikushodo* is a realm for beasts of the world including the hungry spirits of oxen and horses. *Gakido* is realm ruled by a demon with a bulging belly suffering from hunger and thirst. *Jigokudo* is a “Hell” where one goes to atone for sins.

If one looks at the descriptions of “Hell”, the Buddhist description seems more detailed and clearer to understand than the Christian concept of *Hell*. Description of “Hell” differs according to religion, but it is universally perceived as a place that is undesirable.

4.3 *Mokugyo, Rosaries and Mary*

Further study introduces many religious artifacts that have potential parallels. As a student of anthropology, the author was introduced to research on the Bodhisattva of Mary and interpretations of the Shinto *torii* arch as being symbolic of the lamb blood painted around the

doorways to thwart the destroying angel according to Judea-Christian legend. This author would like to make mention of the wooden fish known as *mokugyo* or *muyu* in Japan. In Chinese Buddhism, it might be used as a percussion instrument during rituals involving recitation of sutras, mantras or other Buddhists texts. The wooden fist is mainly used by Buddhists disciples in Korea, China, and Japan and in East Asian countries that practice Mahayana Buddhism.

The wooden fish *mokugyo* effigy is often seen at Buddhist temples in Japan. It is carved in a rounded shape from a solid block of wood with scales and often with a lion/dragon head. The wooden fish is hollowed out, so that when the priest strikes it with a leather-padded drumstick, the sound has a strange hypnotic effect on the hearer. This drum is often used to accompany a *kyouten* or sutra-reading. The wooden fish is often used for rituals and rites concerning death and resurrection. During funerals, a priest will strike a slow and unison rhythm on the wooding fish while those attending the funeral walk in processions.

While there are different theories on the history of the wooden fish, this author is familiar with the theory of the fish originating as a Christian symbol that is associated with a symbol of Christian evangelism. Early Christians in Europe who were not of the dominant sects were exiled or left to seek religious freedom in other lands such as the Puritans pilgrimage to the Americas. A fish, instead of a cross was used as a symbol for such a sect. The fish represented the miracle of Christ feeding the multitude and is still used by Christian denominations including the Baptists. Of the early exiled sects, according to this author's professors, one group found itself exiled into India. The fish symbol integrated into Buddhism in India and migrated with Buddhism as it was adopted into China and through the Korean peninsula into Japan.

Japan has a justifiable history of fear from Western colonialists using religion to overtake their culture. Evangelical Christians in Japan are often regarded as cultists and rejected. Conversely, where Christians make a modest

approach, their doctrine is at least tolerated if not welcomed. Part of this soft approach is reflected in Christian symbolism. To most all Japanese, the cross is recognized in Japan as Christian, and the fish remains Buddhist.

In a hypothesis closely resembling the theories on the *mokugyo*, William Crooke in 1904 suggested that Christian rosaries had originated in India and made its way to Western Europe through the Crusades and the Muslim version of rosaries is the *tasbih*. Burnett Hillman Streeter further suggested that the moral teaching Gautama Buddha has four distinct resemblances to Jesus Christ's *Sermon on the Mount*. This similarity was further discussed by Jerry H. Bentley and other religious scholars (Bentley, 1992). Although more likely accepted as coincidental, the similarities in the rosary and *tasbih* tradition is remarkable.

The author has also been made aware of what is referred to as the *Virgin Mary Bodhisattva. Hariti*, also known as *Kishimojin* (鬼子母神) is thought of as both a goddess and a demon in some Buddhist traditions. She is often regarded as a protector of children and as a *mother* deity. It has also been suggested that *Hariti* is a depiction of the Virgin Mary (Beverly, 2007). Likewise, the Bodhisattva *Guanyin* is also thought of as resembling the Virgin Mary (Palmer, 2001).

Further similarities no doubt will be made known through further research. The interest in finding parallels between Buddhism and Christianity can also spark debate. In 2001 Dalai Lama stated that "Jesus Christ also lived previous lives" and further suggested that he "reached a high state, either as a Bodhisattva, or an enlightened person..." (Beverly, 2007). The merit this statement holds perhaps depends on one's beliefs and interpretation but this author finds it interesting that even religious leaders look for correlations.

5. Conclusion

Religion is important in all cultures. Religions deal with the unexplained and reflects the culture and innate values or world views of the people. Religion goes back to the individual and shows the values of the society that the individual

represents.

There are both similarities and significant differences between the philosophies of Buddhism and Christianity. The Buddhism created by the Buddha teaches that Buddha is the way to lead to *nirvana*. However, a follower of Buddhism must first become a monk, denounce the sensuality of the world. Nirvana is a concept of a permanent reality of non-existence. Christians, however, accept a world of external realities. The spirit and body of a person are both real and good before God and will be reunited at the Resurrection before receiving judgment. While Christians believe in a God who is Creator and Lord of all and to Jesus Christ who redeems men from sin, in Buddhism there is no God. There is no future life, but only the “bliss” or extinction that *nirvana* provides. In Buddhism, there is a worthlessness not only to the human body but human activity and to the individual human soul. This is a sharp contrast to Christian doctrine, which teaches that the body is not to be despised but is a sacred *tabernacle* of the human spirit. Christianity also views the physical body as a gift from God. The gospel of Christianity maintains a narrative about the relationship mankind has with God and that the ultimate goal in life is not to escape life but to continually perfect it. Buddhism is negative and pessimistic when it comes to the worth of mortal life and individuality. The concept of reincarnation also endorses this thought. The concept of reincarnation was adopted to Buddhism as an answer for what happens to an individual after death, the concept of reincarnation was borrowed doctrine from Hinduism. Also, in Buddhism there is law, but no divine Lawgiver or divine Creator—God. There are no divine moral doctrines set such as the Ten Commandments God gave Moses on Mount Sinai. In Buddhism, ethic concepts of truth and error, of right and wrong, are largely irrelevant.

The author has written about the doctrine of Buddhism and Christianity in a comparative manner. However, he does not wish to fuel a debate between the two religions. Sometimes talking about religion introduces different

opinions and defending different points of view on occasion turns to violence. Those who are determined to denounce blasphemy, sacrilege, and evil in others, while at the same time claiming an exclusive corner on spirituality and truth among themselves, somehow find it easy to justify violent behavior. Intolerance and violence in the name of religion or God is widely evident throughout history. Unfortunately, it is also evident in today’s world. The Jews are against the Arabs, the Arabs against the Jews; Sikhs against Hindus in the Punjab; Catholics against Protestants in Ireland; Muslims against Christians in the Middle East; Tamils against Buddhists in Sri Lanka; or so-called Christians—Aryan Nations and the Ku Klux Klan who are against all people not like themselves. Moreover, from a global perspective, Muslim extremists and *sharia law* can be seen as a cancer to all of humanity.

This article has been a compilation of the history and the author’s thoughts and research of Buddhism and a comparative study of Buddhism and Christianity. A portion of what has been expressed is also based upon the author’s opinion. That is, the author’s own interpretations of information assessed through the lens of his experiences. This author believes that keeping up tradition and using religion for ceremonial purposes is a reflection of society and culture. Religion that is working to improve the emotional stability or *spirituality* of the individual member or helping the individual member understand more about his or herself, in this author’s opinion has a measure of intrinsic value. On the other hand, this author feels that if a religion becomes something political or business affiliated, creates a false narrative by warping information and truth for its doctrine, or practices are to indulge in superstitions, idol worshipping, and the financial exploitations of the members, or condones violence against those of differing belief, then it lacks in value. Religion goes back to the individual and shows the values of the society that the individual represents. Of course, there are good people everywhere. This is especially true about Asia where “...many

persons strive for high ideals, and everywhere life is full of heroism...therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive him to be. And whatever your labors and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace in your soul..." (Bell, nd)

Religion helps one have faith in some deity or power that is greater than oneself. Believing in or having some measure of faith perhaps provides society members some feeling of hope, fairness and purpose to life. Perhaps, ignorance is bliss.

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