

# Understanding of Love in Buddhism and Christianity

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## Abstract

The Christian love has been variously and endlessly interpreted and reinterpreted. So each Christian generation seeking to find in it a new and significant meaning for its own peculiar situation. Buddhism has almost become convinced of the deep spiritual kinship of love and loving kindness he rather unwillingly becomes aware also of subtle dissimilarities of meaning context and application there lead him to withhold the Simple equal Sign for a while longer.

Many things have been said on the subject of Christian love. It has been variously and endlessly interpreted and reinterpreted, each Christian generation seeking to find in it a new and significant meaning for its own peculiar situation. We cannot hope here even to epitomize the width and breadth of this endeavor but will try to present only a few enable some comparison with Buddhist metta and its related qualities.

To begin with, we shall consider Christian love under three aspects : as a unitary quality of life; as personal ; as mutual.

It is often complained that Christian "love" represents, not one distinguishable essence or attitude, but a vast, imprecise conglomeration of varied and contradictory

attitudes and motivations, all consorting together under one banner while they mutually confuse or cancel each other out.

Much of the confusion in the Christian life with regard to its preferred goods and goals is held to stem from this fundamental ambiguity within its central concept. New Testament scholars have helpfully pointed out that even in the New Testament there are three levels or kinds of love, somewhat distinguishable by their respective Greek parent words, but whose various shades of meaning have been indiscriminately lumped together in translation into a single English word.

Thus there is (1) love of the *eros* quality, which implies ordinary human erotic and possessive love; (2) the *philia* type of love

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between equals and friends, institutionalized in the names of the Greek and American cities of brotherly love (Philadelphia); and (3) the highest of all loves, perhaps the distinctively Christian - religious love, which God sheds abroad upon all creatures alike, deserving and undeserving, called *apage* in the New Testament.

It is most important to have these distinctions clearly in mind when we are speaking of Christian love, for there has indeed been great and confused ambiguity in its interpretation and expression. Nor should we seek to make of a linguistic accident a religious truth of great importance.

Nevertheless. This very confusion of meanings is more than a mere linguistic ambiguity: it does, after all, bear witness to a most important truth about Christian love, namely, its essential unity at all levels. Or, to state the principle a little more fully and carefully, despite its varieties and levels of manifestation, love, in the Christian interpretation of it, is not of separate kinds but essentially all of a piece.

The love of God does not war against the love of man: physically expressed love is not entirely unrelated to spiritual love. In the Christian sense, love is not a collection of contradictory qualities or mutually exclusive stages, but a continuum that stretches from the

highest to the lowest forms (*agape to eros*) and back again in some kind of unity. <sup>(1)</sup>

The diagram on the opposite page may perhaps suggest what is meant. A further word to two may be said about the interpretation of the diagram. That some other terms might have been chosen or that those here used might be put in some other order is unimportant for our present purposes.

What the diagram is intended to convey is not a precisely accurate distinction between various synonyms for love or its varied manifestations; and most emphatically it is not intended to suggest that in the practice of the higher forms of love the lower are left behind or renounced-despite some "super-Christian" interpretations to that effect. Quite the contrary in fact. The diagram is intended to make only one central point : the continuity and *interrelatedness* of the various kinds of love in the Christian view.

The diagram is intended to assert that something of the highest level of divine love may be found in the lowest level of earthly love, and conversely that even the lowest level of love may in at least a small degree intimate the nature of, and be a limited experience of, the highest. Or, still otherwise, the highest love (God's *agape* to man and man's wholehearted response to it) may ennoble and enhance the

<sup>(1)</sup> This is course rejected by Anders Nygren, in his *Agape and Eros* (The Westminster Press, 1953), as a valid interpretation. In his view the two are mutually exclusive. For more details see: Schillebeeckx, E. *God and the Future of Man*. Sheed and Ward, 1968.

lowest level (*eros*, love of the world and of the other sex); and, conversely, that when religious love becomes too much divorced from the earthly, then it becomes false and rootless.

The New Testament consistently makes this point specifically with regard to the sex relationship. This relationship is considered fundamentally good, even holy. Jesus suggested that it was part of the divinely created order of things, not to be denied or broken when once established. Though Paul had reservations about the practical common sense of marriage in a time when the end of the age was expected momentarily, he condemned those who condemned marriage as unspiritual or who counselled sexual continence within the relationship itself. Indeed, he went further and used marriage as a type of the highest relationship possible to man, the mutual love of Christ and his church. It should be said, of course, that Paul also made a clear distinction between love as expressed in the marriage relation and promiscuous sexual intercourse, which latter he called lustful and lascivious. For him the marriage relation was the sexual relation placed in, and sanctified by, a context of continuing personal affection of person to person and of the undertaking of family responsibilities jointly with husband or wife.

In general, then, we might say that as we proceed upward along the scale, the higher degrees of love do not represent a negation but an extension and elevation of the values of the love are extended into family love, to friendship,

benevolence, compassionate self-sacrifice, and even to the love of God. And in reverse the love of God provides motive and guidance, as well as strength and balance, to all the lower loves. So it is that the Christian finds it meaningful to use the language of human love for God, calling him Father, and seeks the blessing of God upon the sex relation itself in Christian marriage.

Implied in what has just been said is another quality of Christian love: it is, so to speak, always person to person. This personalistic vocabulary is often given a less complimentary name by those who disapprove of it: anthropomorphic. Particularly is this derogatory term applied to the Christian conception of the God-man relation. Here, say the critics - - and Buddhists among them - - is an example of the projection of the lowest order of term to the highest relationship, the personal category to the superpersonal, or of the personal to the nonpersonal.

This is not the place to discuss the relative merits of the two positions except to say that there seems to be no compelling reason to evaluate the nonpersonal or impersonal as being superior to the personal, despite considerable religious and philosophical opinion to the contrary, nor to imply that the impersonal is necessarily more inclusive or real than the personal. But in any case the Christian must frankly confess that in one sense, in the sense of its being fully personal, his conception of love is anthropomorphic, drawn from his

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Theologically basic to this position is the Christian belief in God as in some sense personal. It is hard to see how this position can be abandoned, however much it may be qualified or refined in concept, without abandonment of the meaning of "Christian." It may well be that much Christian terminology about God needs to be more restrained and rendered much less emotional and sentimental; that there is, as I believe, a need for the reexamination of the terms "personal" and "impersonal" in religious language.

Yet the Christian experience of God as manifest in the life of Christ and in the experiences of forgiveness and prayer is incurably personalistic. Its language will be that of interpersonal communion: and even its mysticism has always been set in the context of interpersonal love.

With regard to the expression of love for other human beings, this too is most Christian when it is fully and concretely interpersonal. The Christian ministry of love is one that attempts to do good to specific individuals rather than to the mass of mankind, or to man as such. True, it seeks to spread its help as widely as possible, and must sometimes in cases of great emergencies think in terms of quantitative spread rather than qualitative depth of personal encounter. But basically and characteristically Christian love

prefers the direct person-to-person fellowship and individually directed helpfulness.

Love considered as a mutuality of relationship, and initial move toward fellowship and an affirmative response to it, is likewise typically Christian and grows in the soil of the personalistic quality of the total Christian religious life. And because of certain apparent contrasts with what corresponds to Christian love in Buddhism, namely, loving kindness and its related dispositions, it is most important to stress the mutuality involved in Christian love.\*\*\*

For Christians often either take this basic interpersonal mutuality for granted or else frequently fail to realize fully its meaning either in understanding or in practice.

Mutuality comprises give-and take, the give-and-take peculiar to genuine interpersonal relationships. And two things at least are implied by its nature. One is that there is both give and take - - and that what is returned is not necessarily the same as what is given. Indeed, if it is genuinely mutual, the response will necessarily be different from the gift, the other person giving what he considers appropriate by way of response or reaction, that there is in him to give.

The dull, stereotyped action and reactions of persons who are supposedly expressing Christian love and responding to it, so frequent in institutionalized Christianity, would suggest

\*\*\* For more details see : Southern, R.W. *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*. Penguin Books, 1970.

that somehow true interpersonal mutuality is lacking. Love has become channeled in a rut of prefabricated forms and has lost its quality of venturesome personal encounter.

The other implication of Christian love as mutuality is that of an encounter in *essential likeness and freedom*.<sup>(1)</sup> It is difficult to think of mutuality (and hence of love) between man and inanimate nature; a stone may respond variously to one's efforts to move it, but the encounter is neither between similar entities nor personal. Relations to animals can be limitedly personal in so far as there is a genuinely affective response; but again the difference is so great that there is no person-to-person encounter.

Also only in an uncoerced relationship, where each party to it is free to give to the other the gifts of his own fellowship, can there be true mutuality.

This raises difficult, practical problems of the interrelationships of people on different levels or performing different functions in society.

For how can the vastly superior or more powerful individual have mutuality with the socially weak and inferior? Here we can only

answer that Christian love should always seek to moderate or bypass the impersonal distances that divide men, by means of direct personal regard: to keep kindness free from coercive response, yet at the same time to unashamedly rejoice in the spontaneous expression of fellowship, gratitude, and good will as integral parts of the personal exchange that love calls forth.

And if we ask how man can fellowship with God, the Christian has only one answer, that He Emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men (Phil. 2 : 7)

By the incarnation the Christian knows that mutuality of love is possible, even with God.

Metta, or loving-kindness, is much spoken of today as the Buddhist equivalent of, or better-than substitute for, Christian love. Yet its likeness or unlikeness to Christian love is difficult to grasp. It seems both similar to and yet different from Christian love; here is typified again the curiously mingled tale of Buddhist - Christian likeness and difference.

One may well be impressed with the resemblance of some of its classic portrayals

<sup>(1)</sup> In Southern Buddhism, where belief in rebirth in animal form is prevalent, there would seem to be greater opportunity for human - animal sympathy. But curiously this doctrine, which makes it wrong to kill animals, seems to produce a certain callousness to animal suffering and no conspicuous love for animals as such. Is it because animals, as beings suffering grievously for past sins, are viewed with a certain subconscious horror? Or because each being is presumed able to bear its own burden of suffering? He seeks to experience its state of being from the "inside" This, of course, is not love in the Christian sense because of its mystic impersonality.

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But just when the Christian studying Buddhism has almost become convinced of the deep spiritual kinship of love and loving-kindness, he rather unwillingly becomes aware also of subtle dissimilarities of meaning, context, and application that lead him to withhold the simple equal sigh for a while longer. For one thing there is the Buddhist unwillingness to make love and loving-kindness purely and simply equal; and despite all the difficulties of the translation of words from one language into another that might reduce this difference to a mere matter of semantics, this unwillingness should give us pause.

Besides, as we shall see when we raise such questions as to what man is to be loved Buddhistically, and how and why, further difficulties arise.

We may begin by quoting two or three examples of the Buddhist interpretation of metta. From the famous Metta-Sutta, somewhat comparable in the Buddhism to the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians in Christianity, we have the following description of Buddhist loving-kindness

Whatever living beings there be ...

May all beings be happy.

Let none deceive another  
Nor despise any person whatsoever in  
any place.

Let him not wish any harm to another  
Out of anger or ill will.

Just as a mother would protect her  
only child

At the risk of her own life  
Even so let him cultivate a boundless  
heart

Toward all beings.

Let his thoughts of boundless love  
Pervade the whole world,

Above, below, and across without any  
obstruction

Without any hatred, without any  
enmity.

Whether he stands, walks, sits,

Lies down, as long as he awake

He should develop his mindfulness - -

This they say is the noblest living  
here. <sup>(1)</sup>

We may further note a contemporary  
description of metta by a well - honwn Buddhist  
monk of Burma:

The Pali word metta means\*\*\* literally  
- - friendliness - - also love without a desire  
to possess but with a desire to help, to sacrifice  
self - interest for the welfare and well - being  
of humanity...

<sup>(1)</sup> Sister Vajira, tr., *Sutta Nipata* (Maha Bodhi Society, Samath, India, n.d. p.6.

\*\*\* For more details see: Phra Dhammapitaka (P.A > Payutty). *A Constitution for Living; Buddhist principles for a fruitful and harmonious lifep.* p.20-21. and *Dighaindaya* (3 vols) II p.193.



It is a dynamic suffusing of every living being .. with dynamic creative thoughts are intense enough, right actions follow automatically. <sup>(1)</sup>

Such is the Buddhist account of what is meant by loving kindness, and it is obvious that is closely parallels the Christian conception of love at several points. As does Christian love, it stands opposed to all ill will, either in deed or in thought.

The goes further than this : It speaks in accents of respect for others (even though they supposedly have no immortal souls) and of right, i.e., charitable, actions toward them; and it uses bear - Christian language about a love so self - sacrificial in quality that it may call for the laying down of one's life for another. Still further, it out - Christians the Christian in calling for a benevolence toward all living creatures, not merely toward man : it is an absolute universalization of love. Do we, then, have here in nontheistic, non - Christian Buddhism genuine crosslike vicarious suffering?

It may be of interest to note none other quality of metta, or perhaps better, pattern of its application. Contrastingly with the spontaneous person-to-person manner in which Christian love is usually expressed, there is here a definite and carefully ordered methodology of the progressive direction of loving-kindness.

Especially important in Buddhist eyes is the initial point of direction. For if a person first seeks to extend metta toward the wrong class of person, the whole enterprise may go astray. He will either end up in total discouragement, and consequently in spiritual stagnation, or else metta will become something quite other, and quite injurious.

For such spiritual purposes Buddhism classifies persons in the following four orders : oneself; dear ones (family and friends); neutral persons (those toward whom one has no emotional disposition, positive or negative, as well as strangers and all the multitudinous beings now in existence but unknown to him); and hostile persons or enemies. Should one try to extend loving-kindness to the enemy, this would be too hard. A neutral person as object would offer none of the initially necessary inspiration. And loving-kindness first extended toward a loved one might turn into a partial and affectionate personal attachment, or into lust in the case of one of the opposite sex. Therefore, one begins by extending loving-kindness to himself (charity begins at home) and from thence to others. Thus does Buddhaghosa put it :

If he develops it in this way, "I am happy. Just as I want to be happy and dread pain, as I want to live and not to die, so do other beings, too," making himself the example,

<sup>(1)</sup> Venerable U Thittila. "Buddhist Metta," *The Light of the Dhamma*, Vol. V, No.1 (January, 1958), p.51. Published quarterly by Union of Burma Buddha Sasana Council of Rangoon.

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<sup>(1)</sup> *Bhandatac*  
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<sup>(2)</sup> *Ibid.*, p.

then desire for other beings' welfare and happiness arises in him

So should he first as the example, pervade himself with loving-kindness.. for "Who loves himself will never harm another." <sup>(1)</sup>

The preferred order from this point on is: extension of metta to a good and respected person (teacher, revered monk), then to a loved one, then to a neutral person, then to the hostile enemy as the climax. One seeks to establish himself in the loving-kindness frame of mind or disposition in the area where it is most natural. For

I visited all quarters with my mind  
Nor found I any dearer than myself. <sup>(2)</sup>

And then, maintaining the same quality of affection, systematically extend it step by step to the uttermost and most difficult object, one's enemy.

Both the similarity and the contrast of this way to the Christian method of extending love to others will strike the reader at once. The end goal of loving the enemy is the same. And in some sense also the Christian begins with himself : only if his own heart is suffused with the love of God for him, can he extend love to others. (Or in psychological language, the man who is divided within himself and hates

himself cannot love anyone else either. But will project on to others his own self - hate.)

So also the Christian is exhorted to love others as he loves himself. Yet there is the Christian reference to God, a sense of being first loved by Another. And it is not absolutely certain that loving another as oneself is the same as intending one's will-to-be-happy first to himself and then to others. Of this we shall speak later.

Before we can fully understand Buddhist loving-kindness, however, we must study it further by noting the company it keeps. For though metta is predominantly emphasized today in Buddhism, it is actually only one of four related qualities, all of which are traditionally called the Divine Abidings, or Illimitables. The reason for this name is as follows, according to Bhandatacariya Buddhaghosa, the famous commentator of the fifth century A.D. :

The divineness of the Abiding should be understood here in the sense of the best and in the sense of immaculate. For these abidings are best in being the right attitude toward beings. And just as *Brahma* Gods abide with immaculate minds, so the mediators who associate themselves with these Abidings abide on an equal footing with the *Brahma* Gods ...

<sup>(1)</sup> Bhandatacariya Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification*, Nyanamoli translation (R. Semage, Colombo, 1956), pp. 347, 353.

<sup>(2)</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 323.



For the Great Beings' (*Grahma Gods*) minds retain their balance by giving preference to beings' welfare, by dislike to beings' suffering, by desire for the various successes achieved by beings to last, and by impartiality toward all beings. And to all beings they give *gifts*... without discriminating thus: "It must be given to this one: it must not be given to this (i.e. that) one." <sup>(1)</sup>

They are also called Illimitables or Measureless sentient beings who, like himself, are caught in the toils of *samsara*, i.e., the endless birth - life - death cycle of individual existences that is under the iron rule of *karma*.

Compared to the diagram of Christian love, we observe one of two differences. In general, there is not the sense of the mutual and total involvement of all levels of love with each other. While it is wrong to think of each stage as radically distinct with regard to the others, especially in the case of the Divine Abidings, there is considerably more exclusion of one level of love by the other than in the Christian scheme. Quite different words are designedly used for the different varieties of concern. One would not say that *metta* had absolutely nothing at all to do with sexual love, but it would certainly be quite distinct and different from it: and if we think of following the Middle Way through each type of Divine Abiding, this Way would be contradictory and

exclusive of the lower orders of merely human love and friendship. Certainly equanimity at the top, as a kind of vestibule to nirvana, is of a *completely* different order from sexual love at the bottom.

We have now distinguished Christian love and Buddhist Blessed Dispositions as they are described in the respective scriptures and classical interpretations. We turn next to a somewhat more practical aspect as a further means of understanding likenesses and differences and will inquire as to the *motivations and methods* or characteristic expressions of love and loving-kindness respectively.

At this level we are primarily concerned with the interhuman relationships and therefore leave largely out of account man's relation to God in Christianity and the role of Nirvana in Buddhism, though these aspects to condition the total situation and must necessarily be referred to now and again.

Our first question to both Christian and Buddhist is simply this: Why should a human being love his fellow? And the answers that Christianity and Buddhism have historically provided will be revealing.

The basic Christian reason for universalizing the expression of love to all men is the Christian belief in a personal God

<sup>(1)</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 347,353.

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who has manifested his love to men, most particularly in Christ, who died that men might live more abundantly. To be sure, the redeeming God is also the creating God: the world and man's life in it are both evidences of divine love. Divine love, "all loves excelling" Comes to clearest expression, however, for the Christian in the life and death of his Master.

And it is continued in the sense of the primitive purpose and presence of God in human life that the Christian has called the Holy Spirit. Thus, in short, because God (the Supreme Reality) is love toward all his creatures, they are to love one another.

It may be observed here again that love of man through, of because of, God is not to displace or destroy the natural love of man to man, but to confirm and extend it. It is both to strengthen the force of natural associations and to extend human concern beyond its natural range. The writer of the above passage seems to suggest indeed that all love, of whatever sort, brings one nearer God : or, at least, lacking natural affection altogether, one cannot truly know God. There is no evident concern here about natural affection's being so great that it may crowd out the love of God, or vice versa.

Indeed, when such an interpretation is given to Christian love we may be sure that either strong mystical or ecclesiastical influences are at work. It may also be observed that this motivation of human love through the experience of divine love has the practical corollary that when the sense of reality of the love of God

declines in the Christian life, then that special quality of Christian love to man also grows weak. The two can scarcely live apart.

What, then, is the counterpart to this basic Christian motivation in Buddhism? Obviously, it will not be the experience of the love of God for man, for the Buddhist God-in-four-parts does not "love" man. Nirvana is not to be prayed to dharma-karma is only to be respected and profitably used : and the Buddha's memory is to be venerated but he cannot be petitioned. (Actually, of course, Buddha-veneration often approaches theistic adoration in quality.)

This leaves each man to be his own sole god so far as working out his salvation is concerned, or in finding the power to exert loving-kindness toward others. So it is that he practice of metta, like charity, must begin at home and is solidly rooted in one's own concern for oneself.

However cold such a portrayal of the reasons for other-love leaves the Christian, he must not accuse the Buddhist at this point of mere narrow selfishness. If one views the universe as does the Buddhist - as an impersonal, meaningless process in which are found separate streams of conscious being, each of which is the product of its own past deeds-

how else would he react to it? It is of vital importance that he (one of these streams of conscious being) should purify himself to achieve his own salvation.

Only then can he be of spiritual help to anyone at all : in helping and loving himself he helps and loves others in the only possible way. For he cannot directly change another's karmic character or destiny : but by purging himself by impurities he may provide some light for another who is ready to receive it and cease to be an occasion for another's stumbling through arousing his ill will.

One must keep in mind here also the strong Buddhist belief in the power of "suffusing" others with good will. (A more contemporary expression is "radiating.") This to the Buddhist represents an actual and positive force for good. Though its maximum benefits can be received only by those who are themselves men of good will, yet in an extrasensory way, like the invisible radio wave, it impinges upon others, strengthening the forces of good will and purity in the world, turning aside hostility, and healing divisions between men. Thus it is that after every generous or pious deed the good Buddhist seeks to radiate or share the merit of that he has done by the fervent wish "May all beings be happy." This is the Buddhist "prayer" of love.

By method we mean the characteristic way in which Christian love and Buddhist loving-kindness seek to express themselves. Something both of the ideal and of the actual practice in each case must be indicated, for the proof and even the meaning of an ideal come to light only as they are joined in conflict with actual historical conditions.

It would be erroneous to speak of Christian love as having a method, at least in any thoroughgoing systematic sense. And it is both the weakness and the strength of Christian love that it is unsystematic. Practically this has often resulted in spasmodic, feverishly active, and ill-considered efforts toward doing good, alternating with period of vague or gushing emotionalism.

Yet, on the other hand, since love is conceived and practiced as a direct person-to-person relationship, flexibility and spontaneity must remain its essential features. In the sense love has no method but that of a consistent attempt to secure and practice maximum personal mutuality, and it must freely adapt itself to new situations. In this attempt at mutuality there are two key words: forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness represents the attitude of the Christian who in love seeks to break the walls that separate men from each other, and reconciliation represents the implementation and result of that attitude.

Both root primarily in the Christian conception of man's relation to God. Man's reconciliation with God, i.e., the universe in which he lives, takes the form of the sense of his own forgiveness: as forgiven he is reconciled and the estrangement is overcome. In so far as the Christian finds men estranged by class structure, racial difference, national antagonisms, and on the personal level by past hostile deeds and attitudes, he seeks to break down the barriers and close the gaps by purging his own

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heart of ill will and by the performance of loving (reconciling) deeds. In this he is strongly motivated by the sense of God's prior and continuing great mercy to him.

For the Christian the work of reconciliation (the achievement of mutuality) is a very active and practical matter. Believing, as he does, that the concrete world order of space and time realities in which he lives, including the human individuals who live therein, is the creation of God and the continuing object of His love, the Christian thinks inevitably about doing something tangible for, to, and with actual living persons.

He thinks in terms of modifying physical circumstances of human life, of altering the flow of historical events, and of dealing with specific persons in their fullness of their individuality and in the concreteness of their individual needs. Sometimes, to be sure, there has been such an excessive emphasis upon the saving of man's "soul" that man's mind and body have been neglected. Yet the full Christian ministry of love is to the total man however we wish to describe him.

This leads obviously to a strong emphasis upon personal fellowship within Christianity and to communal practice. It is true that some Christian mystics believed the highest expression of Christian love to be man's union with God - - the alone within man approaching Divine Aloneness.\*\*\*

Yet even this is a kind of fellowship. And the Christian can agree only limitedly with Whitehead when he says that religion is what a man does with his solitariness.

For Christianity maintains that religion is also what a man does with his mutualities. Hence, in some sense the fellowship of faith and worship, of which the church is one expression, is absolutely essential even to the true love of God; and the attempt to achieve strong communal ties with one's fellows is an inevitable expression of Christian love. For the Christian, then, there can be no truly "higher" quality of religious or saintly life that, because it is "higher," leaves out as nonessential, or reduces to lower religious rank, the service and fellowship of man. For in loving man he also loves and serves God.

When we turn to the practice of Buddhist loving - kindness we are immediately struck by those basic contrasts which grow out of the very different Buddhist view of the universe and of the self. If Christian love might be described as spontaneously and intensely personal in spirit, practical and direct in its expression, historically and socially minded in viewpoint, Buddhist loving - kindness must be described as systematic and calculated, indirect and impersonal, and atomistically individualistic.

The calculated system of Buddhist loving - kindness has already been described

\*\*\* For more details see: Ragner, Karl. *Theological Investigations*. Translated by D. Bourke. Vol. 1-10. London : Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971. And Boff, L. *Jesus Christ Liberator*. Orbis Books, 1978.

in one connection: the methodical and carefully prescribed way in which the Blessed Dispositions are to be practiced.\*\*\* And this methodical quality is integral to the total Buddhist spiritual life. The spontaneous and the personal in themselves are to be distrusted: they must be pruned and regulated, even negated at times. While it is true that Buddhism seeks to achieve in its higher reaches of sainthood a kind of naturalness about being good, so that it becomes absolutely spontaneous to extend loving kindness to all other beings with the same fullness as to oneself, this is a cultured and created spontaneity, a deliberately developed naturalness that produces few surprises and implements no reforms.

Thus in Buddhism, as we have emphasized before, in the end man can only do good or harm to himself, the walls of karmic isolation forever separate him from his fellow. He could not redeem him if he would. He can only redeem himself by his own corrective action and leave the other man to his own karma. Or better, he can only help the other person as he helps himself. Such indirect benefit as he can give will be that of example, of the calm detached radiation of harmless benevolence, and by avoiding occasions for fanning the resentment and greed of others. What effect has this doctrine of seemingly cold aloofness from

the plight of one's fellows had upon Buddhist practice in actuality? Has it meant the total destruction of natural human ward concern among Buddhists? Certainly Not.

In practice one finds Buddhist people loving, gentle, and helpful in many cases, apparently both because of and in spite of this religious beliefs. The doctrine that one builds up merit for himself by helping others fortifies the natural human desire to extend help and hospitality. And further, it should be remembered that the perfection of the Blessed Dispositions in the pervasive practice of detached equanimity is only for the saints, who are always few and far between. It is not the practical everyday rule for Buddhist monks or laity. Due to its personalistic conception of the universe as governed by a supreme God who is purposefully loving in his creation and in the maintenance of that universe in existence, a universe that is populated by uniquely personal individuals called human beings, Christianity thinks, feels, speaks, and acts in interpersonal terms.

The supreme virtue known to Christians is to love God, in a sense not absolutely different from that of loving men. And correspondingly its highest humanward virtue is also the exercise of love, love toward each man in terms of his concrete individuality. Its hope is to achieve genuine interpersonal

\*\*\* For more details see: Lynnde Silva, "Theological Construction in Buddhist Context," in G.H. Anderson, ed., *Asian Voices in Christian Theology*. (Orbis Books, 1976); *The Problem of the Self in Buddhism and Christianity*. (Colombo, 1975)

umtuality in attitude and in actual association under space-time conditions. Therefor, Christianity has sought social and communal expression, majoring in fellowship and proliferating its organizations: it has also sought to minister to the totality of the concrete individual as he belongs to the personal, social, economic, political, and historical orders of being.

Christianity has therefore built church fellowships attempted social orders, been abundant in physical deeds of helpfulness and healing, and been the author of countless attempts to achieve the Kingdom of God on earth.

By the same token Buddhism has been quite other. Because it conceives the universe as an impersonal and purposeless order of physicomental proportions, populated by streams of being that endlessly perpetuate themselves in newly individual forms rather than by genuinely unique persons. Buddhism thinks, feels, speaks, and acts in what the West calls an impersonal manner. Emphasis upon the uniqueness and

value of the space - time individuality of the person, or even upon his immortal soul, is for Buddhism a delusion and snare that prevents man's true enlightenment and ultimate salvation.

Buddhism views the Christian tendency to emphasize personal attachments and to act primarily in terms of concrete practical helpfulness to other individuals, as either fundamentally mistaken or at the very best representing a lower order of spiritual action than its own detached benevolence. It believes Christianity is misled in that it attaches too much importance to individuality and to individual, and thus binds its efforts and loyalties to what is not essentially real or enduring and because it does this, Christianity achieves a lesser order of spiritual good, even to those it seeks to help, than does Buddhism, for it touches only the fringes, not the heart, of man's basic problem. Resultingly, Buddhism has no basic faith in the real possibility of world improvement or a vital drive toward historically and politically oriented action. □



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Abstract

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