

CATHOLIC FAITH VERSUS BUDDHISM

Catholicism has these differences with Buddhism.

Catholicism says

God exists. Loving God matters most of all and it is a sin not to see this God is irrelevant

Buddhism says

If he does then he is not much of a God and needs enlightenment the same as we do. A God that needs wisdom, by definition, is not an all-powerful being and not God. He does not matter.

Catholicism says

Suffering is holy when we offer it up to God

Buddhism says

Suffering is worthless - we devote everything to eliminating it. When we see suffering as useless, we gain the purpose of combating it. We do not need to see our suffering as useful to endure it.

Catholicism says

We meditate on the presence and nature of God

Buddhism says

We empty our minds even of God and especially of God for we must save ourselves

Catholicism says

The sins we commit on earth reduce the happiness we will enjoy in Heaven

Buddhism says

We want to be like the God as imagined by the Christians. We want to reach a state of consciousness where we feel we are perfect and all-powerful and eternal (note - it is not necessary to be really all powerful). The Christians say God enjoys that but we believe any human being can enjoy it.

Buddhism believes in living in the present rather than repenting your sins. That would be focusing on the past. And God does not matter.

Catholicism says

Buddha claimed to have a strange experience in which he discovered the truth and became enlightened. Buddha had a strange experience that misled him so he was not the enlightened one.

Buddhism says

Buddha discovered the only truth that matters. The truth was already in him and he just needed to see it. He did not get any revelation from a God. Nobody, not even God, really can reveal to you the only truth that matters.

Catholicism says

Repentance, primarily motivated by love of God rather than the people hurt, is a major theme in Christianity.

Buddhism says

We believe in living in the present rather than repenting your sins. That would be focusing on the past. And God does not matter.

Catholicism says

God will quarantine evil away from the saints in Heaven so that they will rejoice forever and ever

Buddhism says

It is better not to exist forever as there is a risk of being hurt. God may be preventing that risk but it is still there. It is better to wish your loved ones will go out of existence at death. There is something awry about wishing they would live on forever when there is a chance they might be hurt.

The Catholic Truth Society has published a booklet in the CTS Explanations Series called Buddhism from a Catholic Perspective by Paul Williams who was a Buddhist who has converted to Roman Catholicism. Williams is a Professor of Indian and Tibetan Philosophy and was once president of the UK Association for Buddhist Studies.

The booklet quotes the Vatican II Document, *Nostra Aetate*, with approval which states that the Roman Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in Buddhism. The Church is not confusing the word holy - holy means devoted to the one true God - with the word good.

Yet incredibly the booklet stands by the Catholic teaching that only God matters and that Buddhism is all about the mind and not about God (page 45). If God is of utmost importance as the Church teaches, then how could there be any holiness in a religion that stands for not giving a toss about him? To say the mind matters and not God is to oppose God for Jesus said that whoever wasn't for Jesus was against him so naturally whoever is not for God is against God.

The booklet rejects the claim of some ecumenical Christians that Buddhists believe in God but don't know it. It says it is not tolerance or broadmindedness to hold that somebody who is against your belief believes the same thing but doesn't realise that. Well said! Its patronising and insulting. The people who say Buddhists believe are ignoring the fact that it is Buddhist teaching that God doesn't matter even if he exists though it thinks he doesn't. Some Buddhists say they know there is no God. Those ecumenical Christians who patronise Buddhism are too bigoted to want to see the truth.

Page 47 tells us that God is not about what I need or want for God is God. It quotes CS Lewis who says that we must find God because he finds us and that any other system means that what you adore is an idol of God made to suit yourself.

The fact that those who believe in a God unlike the Catholic God, such as the Mormon God who used to be a normal man and evolved into a God, claim that God found them is ignored. You would need to be able to refute every variant religion and belief in God that differs from your own to be able to claim with honesty that God found you and revealed himself to you.

Page 49 says that as far back as primitive Buddhism and following the attitude of the Buddha himself the Buddhist religion has mocked God and the idea of a Creator. The candour is refreshing.

Page 51 makes the assertion that Buddhism doesn't believe in reincarnation in the sense that you die and return again in another body at all. You really cease to exist at death and what is reborn is an entirely different person to the person who died. Williams says that many Buddhist scholars say this and he thinks this is the correct interpretation of Buddhism. He says Buddhism denies life after death. Just like people say your body dies and can become the raw material for body for somebody else so the Buddhist says your parts become somebody else after you die.

Some may compare the Buddhist idea of rebirth to the thought that you have a candle flame. You light another candle with it and blow the first one out. It seems there is a link between the two flames but they are not the same flame. And so it is with Buddhist idea of rebirth. Buddhism does not indulge our hope that we might live on after death. The Buddhist sees that desire as being based on the ego. It is selfish, in Buddhist thought, to want to live on forever or at least after death. Is it right about this?

Why worry about your future lives if you have none? Why bother trying to get enlightened to stop rebirth?

Some Buddhists might say that it is unselfish to worry for you are saving the persons you are replaced with and that is why you should try to stop rebirth. Looks like Buddhism is attempted murder!

It would be selfish to say prayers and do good for the sake of an afterlife. It would be selfish to spend years writing the laws down that you are going to make when you become Emperor of the world for that is not likely to happen or you can't be sure enough it will happen. So it is with the alleged afterlife.

Williams observes that if I want to keep myself in existence and I can only do that by going into Nirvana then I have to get enlightened in this life. This is assuming that he is right to say that when you are enlightened and you die you go into Nirvana or bliss that this is not suicide but a new kind of existence. Many scholars believe that Nirvana or peace is really like ceasing to exist as well. Williams argues that it means you lose your body and desires and lose all that makes you a person except the awareness of peace. That is all that is left. "You" still exist but you aren't a person in the normal sense any more. The correct Buddhist view is that your experience continues but you are not under the illusion that you are a person.

Page 53 says that if Buddhism is right that there is no perfectly good and loving Creator then the world is not

fundamentally good and neither are we. If so then there is nothing fundamentally good about anything human. My observation is that since Buddhism says that salvation or Nirvana can only be gained by righteous people then it would seem that if the booklet is right then salvation or Nirvana is impossible. Page 53 actually contradicts the Catholic doctrine that evil is not a power or force but merely good that fails to be good enough. To say that there must be a creator for creation to be fundamentally good makes no sense. What if there was nothing at all? Would that be fundamentally bad? No. Its good for its just how things are. It would be good not to exist if you are going to suffer in Hell forever. There are some benefits from not existing. Its not all bad. Good would exist with God or without God. Thus it follows that we can be fundamentally good without God. Besides, if we have to believe in God to believe we are fundamentally good, then we are not fundamentally good. If we were, we would not need the prop of a belief. We would not need to decide there is a God in order to believe in fundamental goodness. We should not. The notion that there is no fundamental goodness in the world or in us if there is no God is not only a lie but a subtle attempt to pressure people to believe and create a stigma against unbelief. As there is no point in believing in God or stressing him if it is wrong, it follows that merely to say that there is a God is to side with the nastiness.

You can't argue, "It is best for the world and us to be fundamentally good therefore there is a God." That is not logical. "It is best for us to believe that the world and us is fundamentally good therefore there is a God to make it fundamentally good," is not logical either. In fact, we know we are fundamentally good without God because neither of these arguments work. The sense of fundamental goodness is built into us. We do not need a God belief to have it or maintain it.

Regarding Buddhism taking the wish to end suffering as its starting point, page 54 says that for Christianity that it is not suffering that is the problem but people not being in harmony with what God wants them to do. So in other words, Christian religion and specifically Christian belief in God matter more than ending human suffering.

Christianity doesn't see suffering as totally bad like Buddhists do. It says God lets people suffer for a purpose so it's not all bad and sometimes people should wish for it. This is the notorious Jesus doctrine that God alone is to be cared about ultimately and in helping others the only real motive is to please God. That is a call to suffer for you have to battle against your wish to put yourself and your loved ones first.

What the Christian attitude to suffering really amounts to is, "People have ideas about divinity that differ from mine and believe them as strongly as I do. So my view of God and therefore my perception of the evidence for him is really a belief and an interpretation of mine. I want to believe in a God who allows suffering to happen to make people holier or more devoted to him. I want human suffering excused in this way. Rather than hate the suffering in the world, I choose this belief that makes me condone it when the God I believe in condones it or permits it to happen. If I could do it, I would do what my God does and make them suffer instead of obliterating suffering. I refuse to believe that suffering shouldn't be tolerated for I want to believe in a God that allows it. I am putting this God who I have no proof for before people whose suffering I have proof for and I care not how unfair this is. I choose to praise human suffering in the sense that I choose to believe in a God who lets it happen who is worthy only of praise. I know that if a tyrant hurts the innocent those who say he does it for a good purpose known only to him so that he is not a tyrant are evil for putting belief before people. That is what I am doing with God and I care not."

If you suppose that God should allow suffering and he is never wrong. Then you would do the same if you were God. You are saying you should do the same. But what if you are almost God but not quite God? It would follow that you might be wrong to allow suffering and the kind of suffering you allow but you should do it anyway. The chance then that you are wrong to allow it is small. Belief in God implies that - it presents a role to you to fulfil if you are God or almost God. There is something wrong in such an attitude. We automatically believe that we should not permit others to suffer but to take that suffering away if we can. Belief in God is a poisoned chalice in its implications.

If belief in God comes before human suffering then this is unfair and this stance opposes justice. Belief in God is fundamentally evil.

If you put a belief before suffering then it follows that you have no genuine concern for suffering people at all. Loads of fake concern do not an molecule of real concern make.

If ending suffering is not of supreme importance and religious or spiritual belief is then people aren't worth very much. It is more important to be free from suffering than free from evil. It is better for a person to have say envy in their heart than for them to Is it not better to be alone in a world where you never suffer than to be in a world where you are alone but with an evil heart? To deny this is to say that people were made for morality and not morality for people.

If you are enlightened, according to Buddhism, you cannot suffer. This implies then that Jesus Christ was not enlightened when he was able to suffer on the cross (page 57).

The problem with Buddhist compassion for the afflicted is that compassion means you suffer with the sufferer for you don't

want them to suffer and you suffer to help them which means a Buddha or a person who is enlightened cannot experience any genuine compassion at all for the suffering (page 63). This would make Buddhism seem to be a harsh and evil faith that only tolerates compassion until it is obliterated by the inability to suffer that takes place when a living person obtains nirvana. We would praise a tired or depressed person who feels numb towards others but who helps them. We must remember that feelings are not everything.

The starting point of Catholicism is that we are all to hate sin. We are to hate our own sins and the sins we see others commit. But the problem with hate is, "I want to hurt you because I think you are offending and hurting and threatening me". Hate is to imagine that someone or something is the cause of your pain and sense of danger and one must try to get it forcibly stopped with condemnation and punishment. My desire to destroy the person or thing or sin that annoys me is based on a mistake! I am the way I am made is the cause of the sadness and upset and not the sins or the sinners. Buddhism does not believe in hating sin for that is promoting an illusion and a mistake. We need to be enlightened from it. You make your hate. It is you torturing yourself over somebody else's actions or perceived actions. If you do that, you blame them for your pain and you only fuel the hate.

If you do not get upset when the enemy insults and laughs at you, the other person will suffer the pain of knowing he or she has no power over you. A manipulator will feel he has learned something from your response. He will see that his schemes will not work. The Buddhist will not get upset when abused and laughed at for he knows all this. The Christian is to put God first so his concern is not that knowledge but pleasing God. He only keeps calm because he thinks God commands it and not just because it is wise. The enemy then has power over you in this sense, you resist the hurt for the wrong reason. You do not resist it because you won't let the enemy have power. If your devotion to God vanishes then you are exposed to the attacks of the enemy.

Catholic mysticism says that thinking and reasoning only take you so far. To get the rest of the way, you need God to reach down to you and give you mystical and supernatural experiences. But these experiences do nothing when your body and mind is sick. You still need the doctor. Having a relationship with God is supposed to matter more than any doctor. That is a really unrealistic and insane idea.

Buddhism says that the perception that I have a self or ego is just a bad habit and once I break the habit I will see there as there is no self there is nothing to be selfish about. This idea implies that any religion that teaches I have a self is paving the way to treating others as means and not as ends in themselves (page 170, 171 Why I am a Buddhist). Buddha thought it was bad enough to think you are a self but worse if you think you are an essential self that is like a spirit that lives forever and is immortal. He believed that godless people who rejected the notion of this spirit were more ethical and more selfless than religious believers (page 100, Why I am a Buddhist). If our idea of the self is behind our selfishness and our willingness to hurt others, then thinking you are an immortal self or an eternal self will only make it worse. The doctrines Jesus taught about everlasting life in Heaven or Hell are really beckoning us to program ourselves into deeper evil.

The Book, Why I am a Buddhist

Buddhists find it juvenile to pray, "Dear God make so and so love me." They suspect that most prayers are really a request for patience, "Please let this awful time pass as soon as possible." (page 78, Why I am a Buddhist). Prayer can be like throwing money into a wishing well for more money. It feels good for a few seconds but then reality hits. The money is not coming. The root cause of your poverty is not addressed at all by your casting of money into the well. In fact the quest for a solution is just put off. If you are working out a solution you won't be praying for money. Asking for help from God means nothing because whether you ask or not you still have to get the solution yourself.

Page 61 of Why I am a Buddhist tells us that the Buddhist after enlightenment still feels hate and anger and sadness but is able to rise above them. He does not engage with them or encourage them. It is like they are leeches attached on to him rather than part of him. Christianity wants us to hate sin and says we are sinners - meaning sin describes people rather than actions. Our sins are us in the Christian faith. That is why nobody really believes the Church when it boasts it can love the sinner and abominate the sin.

Buddha found that there was no evidence that sacrificing animals to gods to atone for sins really did anything (page 141, Why I am a Buddhist). He saw no change in the person - he would have seen today that good Catholics are not really any better or worse than good witches or atheists. Yet they claim to offer Jesus as a sacrifice to God in the Mass!

The Buddhist could find his child's processing of information to be meaningful while transubstantiation isn't (page 119, Why I am a Buddhist). Buddhism unlike Catholicism does not give us stupid mysteries and superstitions to favour above the wonders of normal life.

Buddhism rejects the notion that a sense that your life has meaning is going to come from morality or theology. It does not come from who you are or what you are or what you do but how you live your life (page 157, Why I am a Buddhist). The

Christian who says, "Jesus gives meaning to my life and he can't do yours", is not your friend. She is your would-be manipulator.

For Buddhists, you determine if something is alive by its function and not by religious doctrine or religious metaphysics (page 144, Why I am a Buddhist). You define life by its function which is why if we make a computer that does what we do, it is alive even though it is not made of flesh. Christianity of course will have us murdering the living machines by telling us they cannot be alive and it will deny they have rights. Another example of how that faith tends to put belief before people.

The Catholic has a dilemma. Evil and suffering exist. Who is to be blamed? God? Humankind? The Church blames humankind. The Buddhist would hold that you are going to blame, it's better to blame God than people. He would deny that people come before God. And if you ask the Church why God should come first it will reply, "He deserves our worship." But that is begging the question. Does he really deserve it if he needs us to blame man for suffering? No. There is a great deal of vulgarity about a Church arbitrarily blaming man so that it can have a God to worship. Its worship is selfish.

Conclusion

Catholic politeness about Buddhism is hypocritical. Buddhism repudiates everything Catholicism holds sacred. There is no common ground. And that for me is not a complaint against Buddhism but a compliment. The Buddhist who says he has nothing against Catholicism and who may say it's a deep and beautiful religion is just being a sweet-talker. Catholic tolerance of the Buddhist means it cannot be seen as much of a deep and beautiful religion but as a spiritual plague to put up with. Catholic morality is cosmetic peace and virtue - its only surface deep.

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