

REVIEW, 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!

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 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 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 to 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, its 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.

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 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.

