

The Finality of Christ

and wisdom language needs to be related to process language for I believe that our present understanding of patterns large and small in the universe is very largely a process one. What this restatement should enable us to do is to show that the basic gospel centered on Jesus Christ gives us grounds for claiming that the process and processes of the universe are to be understood in relation to the word and wisdom of the God and Father of Jesus so that we may face these processes and be part of these processes with every hope not of disappearance into cosmic randomness but of personal fulfillment and of the fulfillment of personality.

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NON-CHRISTIAN VIEWS OF CHRIST

Buddhism

There appears to be a growing tendency among the Western people to take an interest in the teachings of other races and not infrequently to seek a better understanding of their own Christian religious teachings in relation to other religions. Among such non-Christian religions, Buddhism is receiving great attention.

It is interesting to note that certain eminent Christian religious dignitaries are making an effort to bring about a synthesis between Buddhist and Christian teachings. Whatever be the motive in their attempts, one significant point may be stressed. If the intention of such Western writers is to bring about religious harmony among nations aiming at tolerance, peace, and the progress of mankind, this indeed deserves the highest credit. Unfortunately, however, many of the observations made by people of the caliber of the Reverend George Appleton are very misleading. It is very regrettable that many non-Buddhist Western writers are misrepresenting the facts regarding the Buddhist system of thought.

Not only the non-Buddhist writers but some of the well-known Western writers who have adopted the Buddhist religion also misrepresent these teachings, because they do not

fully understand them. I am very grateful, therefore, for the opportunity of presenting the Buddhist point of view to the best of my ability in the short space at my disposal.

Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of the Buddhist system of thought, was born in India as a man in the the sixth century B.C. and lived as a man and passed away as a man. He was a man, no doubt, but he was an extraordinary man (*Acchhariya manusso*). At no time did the founder of this system of thought expect his followers to regard him as a divine being. He never asked his disciples to believe anything he said without appealing to their reason. His attitude to knowledge was absolutely liberal. Freedom of thought, freedom of speech, respect for other people's views, and tolerance of other systems of thought, were his most outstanding features.

As examples of his liberality of thought, he cut right across the contemporary caste system, which denied religious instruction to any but members of the privileged classes, and then only to the males, by making his teaching available to people of all classes, castes, and races, and to both the sexes, and he sought to correct the indifference of his countrymen to the sufferings of animals by strongly denouncing animal sacrifice.

MAN'S KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

It is recorded that when a group named the Kalamas asked his advice on how they could come to understand truth, Buddha laid down the general principle leading to knowledge, as follows: "Do not believe a thing just because it has been handed down to you for generations; do not believe a thing just because it has been laid down in the scriptures; do not believe a thing just because it is said by a person whom you respect; but when you yourself find that it is reasonable and rational, then accept; otherwise reject."

This, I believe, is the first charter of free inquiry ever given to man. The Buddha has given due place to man's intelligence and to his ability to comprehend truth. Nothing said in the Buddhist texts occupies the place of commandments or of oracles. The general policy which Buddha advocated throughout his mission of forty-five years was: "Come and see for yourselves" (*Ehi Passiko*).

Dogmatic acceptance of what he said is never found in his system of thought. The right to disagree was always present in his teachings. The pupil might disagree, and he had freedom to ask counter-questions of the teacher. So his disciples could ask questions of the Buddha and disagree with him.

The entire system of Buddhist thought arose as a result of Buddha's personal experience in human society. As a prince, in his early stage of life he grew up with all manner of comforts and luxuries. Recognizing the transitory nature of all things, he gradually came to realize the nature of things as they are. This realization was accomplished while being a human being associating himself with his fellow beings. The attainment of omniscience, the highest possible state of perfection which a living being can reach, was accomplished by Buddha through his own personal experience.

The enlightenment which he obtained was not revealed to him by any supernatural being. The beautiful and natural utterances made by Buddha immediately after his attainment of enlightenment are worthy of mention:

<i>Cakkhum udapadi</i>	Eye arose
<i>Panna udapādi</i>	Wisdom arose
<i>Vijjā udapādi</i>	Knowledge arose
<i>Aloko udapādi</i>	Light arose

This description given on the attainment of enlightenment by the Buddha is quite human and natural indeed. His effort

was concentrated on finding the root causes of man's existence, his continuity, and his release. In this connection the scientific explanation which is known as the "Theory of Causal Relation" (*Paticca samuppada*) was expounded.

Teaching on the origin of the world was not one of Buddha's functions. He took it for granted that something called the world appeared to exist which is not permanent. He saw the character of change as inherent in it. Hence he never bothered to make a detailed analysis of the world as a whole. His concern was focused on man and his destiny. He dismissed all metaphysical speculation as valueless and reproved any of his disciples indulging in it.

His was the world of a teacher—the World Teacher (*Loka Guru*). He may be well compared to a physician who prescribed medicine for sickness. The Buddha considered people in general as sick. Hence prescribing a suitable prescription was considered an urgent matter. Thus the message of Buddha was expounded.

THE WAY TO SALVATION

The Buddha was fully aware of the belief in revelation commonly found in the Hindu society of India. But he was not content with such "revealed doctrines" and expounded a middle path through which salvation could be achieved. The concept of God or *Brahman* was not unknown to him. Not being satisfied with popular interpretations of theistic concepts he made the following observations on this belief: "The traditional observances of taking refuge in higher and lower gods by man were attributed to fear."

Not knowing the cause of wind, fire, rain, disease, and other disturbing phenomena, people in primitive societies attributed these to some kind of supernatural powers generally attributed to gods. Both monotheism and polytheism are found in ancient

Indian society and their influence is still being spread here and there.

"Fear" is mentioned in Buddhism. But it is not directed to any external being, natural or supernatural. Fear for committing evil deeds, speech, and thoughts is encouraged because committing such actions will bring back adverse results upon the person who commits those acts. It is the effect of the actions that brings back results, no agent is instrumental in this. It is said there is no doer for action, so there exists no person who receives the results of the actions. It is only the phenomenon that acts.

It is said that an individual is constantly being burnt by elevenfold fires. At times individuals are burnt by lust, on other occasions they are burnt by anger, decay, death, grief, malice, lamentation, discontent, and hatred. It is for such internal defilements an individual may be afraid of, not of any other external forces.

The concept of "Self" or "Atman" is necessarily a non-Buddhistic theory. Some Christian writers try to make us believe there does not exist a lower self or a higher self in the Buddhist system of teaching. Of course the popular terminology "Self" or "Atta" is commonly used in our day-to-day language when referring to individuals. This is an unavoidable usage because a being had to be introduced by some sign or terminology. The correct term used for the individual in Buddhist text is "*Satta and Puggala*," being, individual. The terms "*Atta*" and "*Attabhāva*" are found in many places. But this usage is qualified with definite principles. There are two kinds of usage in the Buddhist terminology. The one is "*Sammuti Sacca*" (conventional truth); the other is "*Paramattha Sacca*" (absolute truth). The term "*Atta*" or "Self" is used in the realm of conventional meaning. To Buddhists who are versed in their doctrine it has no ambiguity whatsoever.

At this point one might raise a question: How can a Buddhist find his salvation without having any kind of relation to God? I will try to present how a Buddhist finds his ultimate goal without references to God.

The Buddhist reduces everything in this conditioned world into three general characteristics: the universality of impermanence or change; universality of suffering or imperfection; the universality of insubstantiality or permanent ego. According to the basic Buddhist theory, there cannot exist any form of being, natural or supernatural, visible or invisible, which does not undergo change. He reflects upon the changing nature of things and does not see any values in changing things. Therefore, his endeavor is to get away from persons and things which are conditioned. The basic principle Buddhists adhere to is: If a thing is conditioned, that is impermanent. The very existence of being is conditioned. Therefore, it is not worth clinging to, and developing attachment to.

With recognition of the above, a scientific formula known as the Four Noble Truths was expounded by the Buddha. Firstly, Buddha established the theory of universal suffering or imperfection (*Dukkha Sacca*); secondly, the truth of the origin of suffering (*Dukkha Samudaya Sacca*); thirdly, truth of extinction of suffering (*Dukkha Nirodha Sacca*); fourthly, truth of the path that leads to the extinction of suffering (*Magga Sacca*).

This is the central teaching of the Buddha under which the whole system of teaching is evolved. These Four Noble Truths paved the way for the scientific explanation of becoming and extinction in man. (Causal relations—*Paticca samuppada*).

Not only *Paticca samuppada* but the Eightfold Path, which is the practical aspect of the said theories, is also expounded. This again led to the unconditioned state of mind and the

final goal of Buddhism which is known as *Nibbana* or *Nirvana*.

Causal relations in the doctrine of the conditionality of all physical and mental phenomena, a doctrine which, together with that of impersonality (*Anattā*), forms the indispensable condition for the real understanding and realization of the Buddha's teaching, shows that the various physical and mental life-processes, conventionally called personality, man, animal, etc., are not a mere play of blind chance but the outcome of causes and conditions. Above all this doctrine (*Paticca samuppāda*) explains how the arising of rebirth and suffering is dependent upon conditions, and in its second part it shows how, through the removal of these conditions, all suffering must disappear. Hence *Paticca samuppāda* serves to elucidate the second and third Noble Truths.

Once the universality of suffering (*Dukkha*) is recognized, its way out has to be found. That way is the Noble Eightfold Path, the way that leads to the extinction of suffering.

1. Right understanding (*Sammāditthi*)
2. Right thought (*Sammāsankappa*)
3. Right speech (*Sammavācā*)
4. Right action (*Sammākammanta*)
5. Right livelihood (*Sammāgiva*)
6. Right effort (*Sammāvāyāma*)
7. Right mindfulness (*Sammāsati*)
8. Right concentration (*Sammāsamādhi*)

This Eightfold Path is classified into three. First and second come under wisdom (*Panna*). Third, fourth, and fifth come under morality (*Sila*). Six, seven, and eight come under concentration (*Samādhi*).

THE GOAL OF HISTORY

Nibbāna is a word which is misinterpreted by many writers. The more the explanations, the greater the confusion. Students of Buddhism who understand the basic theory and its gradual development will have no difficulties in understanding the term "*Nibbāna*." The moment one is free from all worldly fetters, he is within the realm of *Nibbāna*. Stopping the journey through *Samsāra* by way of eradicating inner defilements such as craving (*Tanhā*), conceit (*māna*), ignorance (*Avijjā*), and the like, one is able to attain the state of *Nibbāna*. It is a state of perfect freedom. The question of union with anybody does not arise. This is the bliss of emancipation.

Reference which I made earlier to the doctrine of *anattā*—insubstantiality—proves this point still clearer. According to the Buddhist teaching on *anattā*, individual existence, indeed the whole world, is nothing but a process of ever-changing phenomena which are all comprised in the five groups of existence. This process has gone on from time immemorial, before one's birth, and will go on after one's death. It will continue for endless periods of time as long, and as far, as there are conditions for it. The five groups of existence—corporeality (*Rupa*), feeling (*Vedana*), perception (*Saññā*), mental formations (*Sankhāra*) and consciousness (*Viññāna*), either taken separately or in combination—in no way constitute a real ego-entity or subsisting personality, and equally no self, soul, or substance can be found outside this group as their "owner."

In other words, the five groups of existence are "not self," nor do they belong to a self. In view of the impermanence and conditionality of all existence, the belief in any form of self must be regarded as an illusion.

The Buddha having analyzed the nature of insubstantiality

in the individual advised his disciples not to depend on other persons. In the *Dhammapada* it is stated: "Self is the protector for the self. Who else could be the protector?"

This confirms the view that the Buddhists are not expected to believe even in the founder of their religion. So what talk of believing in a supernatural God?

The attempt made by certain Christian writers to prove that there exist two types of Self—lower self and true self—is a convenient fiction to extricate themselves from the dilemma into which their reasoning had led them.

The Buddhists recognize the existence of the individual and his ever-changing nature and appeal to all that is best within him to develop himself together with the society in which he lives.

What the Buddha, the *Dhamma* or doctrine which he preached, and the *Sangha*, the community of monks, can do for him is to guide him. The individual takes Buddha as a guide, *Dhamma* as a guide, and *Sangha* as a guide, but not as saviors. Actions committed by the individual either in the past or the present will determine the destiny of such individuals. This theory, known as *Kamma*, or *Karma*, is one of the major teachings of the Buddha. It is wrongly stated by certain writers that it is only past *Kamma* that matters. This is not true. Present *Kamma* has a tremendous influence on the destiny of the individual. At the same time, I can be quite certain that this theory of *Kamma* cannot in any way be identified with the Christian belief in God.

The Buddhists cannot tolerate deliberate misinterpretations being made by certain Christian dignitaries regarding Buddhist teaching. The Buddhists are entirely in favor of better understanding between religions, as well as between nations, but they do deplore intellectual dishonesty. Such attitudes will not in any way contribute toward better religious harmony.