

# Christianity and buddhism



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Name: Course: Instructor: Date: Christianity and Buddhism Meister Eckhart and Buddhism This topic, Christianity and Buddhism, is discussed as viewed by D. T. Suzuki in his book, Christianity and Buddhism. Meister Eckhart is a Christian mystic from the past.

He translates the bible in a way that brings similarity of Christianity and Buddhism. His sermons were questioned as being different to what Christians believe. Because of this, he was accused of being heretic. In his sermons, he believes that God is the creator of all things. He explains that God's day is different from man's day. God's day is one and same as a man's many days and eternity. " God's day, however, is the complete day, comprising both day and night. It is the real Now-moment, which for the soul is eternity's day..."(Suzuki).

He further explains that God created in order to continue creating. Because of this, he explains that everything on earth is equal. God created the world and everything in it from nothing.

Everything that exists is created out of God. He explains that with a clear understanding of God in man that man would never stray away from God. He says that human beings should live a Godly and righteous life. That life is in all of us; hence, man is able to procreate.

God's love for himself is comparable to the love that he has for everything he created. He further explains that man and God are one; therefore, man cannot be said to be whole without God. Whatever belongs to man is God's and that God has given man life, in his own form. He explained that anyone who is saved just has an everlasting life with God. God works in men for men

to do his work. His approach could be seen as comparing God to man and, therefore, placing them at the same level. However, he also makes the distinction between God, by stating that man cannot be God or be compared to the divine form of God.

“ Still the creature is not the creator, nor is the just man God.” (Suzuki). He also shows God in his three forms, of the Christian trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. He says that Gods power is enduring, comparing this to the sun’s light.

He can be seen in everything that he created. He also shows that everyone sees God in his or her own way. Another thing he likes to use in his sermons is the comparison between God and Godhead. God can be seen in everything that moves or every movement. On the other hand, he describes Godhead as nothing; that from which man and everything was created. He further explains that in order to live in God we must detach ourselves from the world and worldly things. In this, we can be close to God, as man was before sin.

This nothing, he explains as love for nothing in the world. We have to let go of all things on earth so that God can work in us. He compares God’s love for himself with his love for the world. God loves everything that he created, with the same love that Eckhart has for himself. He further explains that God sees his creatures in his own light. He also talks of seeing his face before he was born. His sermons were compared with Buddhism by D. T.

Suzuki in his book, *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*. Based on the comparisons given on Meister Eckhart and Buddhism, I agree; Meister

Eckhart is a Buddhist. Suzuki compares Eckhart sermon on the Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy to the ego in Buddhism.

He states that the prajna intuition is similar to God's love for himself. "the love with which he [God] loves himself" is the same as the prajna-intuition that sees into the ego itself." (Suzuki). This is seen in Eckhart expression of the play of love between God and son, where the loves goes round between this two. The father gives the son love, and the son gives the father the love. The prajna intuition also revolves around itself, where it goes and comes back to itself. The ego is said to be hard to grasp. In the search for the ego, one ends up exhausted, as he has been following just a mere shadow.

There the ego cannot literally be caught from outside, but from inside. One needs the prajna intuition to see inside the egolessness of things. This is similar to the Zen Buddhism, of the reflection of a mirror to the other, with not a shadow between the two. It shows the similarities between the two religions from both perspectives. Suzuki compares Eckhart's talk of a man of freedom; a man who does not attach himself to anything or whom nothing attaches to him, to the man Zen describes as useless and effortless.

He compares the nothingness, which has been described in both cases. In Buddhism, egolessness of all things that get one to the way of purity is compared to Eckhart detachment of the body, in order for God to work. In these eyes, both beliefs show that one has separate themselves from the worldly things in order to live a pure or holy life. The egolessness was uttered by Buddha at the time of his enlightenment.

Buddha experienced this enlightenment, by being freed from any external thing; that he was not subject to anything. In this enlightenment, Buddha is able to capture and see what had enslaved him. In this, he is able to overcome and control it. In Buddhism, seeing and knowing go hand in hand. " Whatever knowledge the philosopher may have, it must come out of his experience, and this experience is seeing. Buddha has always emphasized this." (Suzuki) Seeing into the freed mind requires the prajna eye. This is of the same perspective to the eye in Eckhart's sermon, whereby he expresses that God's eye is the same as man's eye.

Therefore, it is of the same vision and the same love. There is also a similarity of language as seen in both Buddhism and in Eckhart's sermons. Buddhists understand each other or another's language from the Buddhist experience. Without experience, one cannot understand them. Eckhart expresses the same views on language, that you cannot understand him if you have not had his experience.

They both dismiss the use of language to make sense of divinity or beliefs of both religions. Zen Buddhism avoids the use of language to communicate. Zen's Buddhism is aware that some events cannot be communicated by simple words. One commentator of Buddhism expresses that, words cannot be used in the growth of the Buddha, by individuals. He expresses realism as the way to Zen's freedom. Bodhidharma answer to the emperor that he did not know who he was is cited as an example of language use in Buddhism. He did not have a prepared answer. Zen's further explains that one will be able to know the truth, not from the words used, but from expression.

This, he explains can only be attained through experience. Suzuki gives an example where one question was asked to two Buddhist masters, but they both gave different answers. In order to know the right answer, one must have the experience. Eckhart expresses the same views of language. He says that man was born between eternity and time.

On the other hand, Augustine states that what God is doing now, he has done in the past and will do in the future. Eckhart states that one must find the truth in himself in order to understand these two concepts. The truth is discovered and therefore, it must be experienced, as Suzuki puts it. This greatly corresponds to the Buddhist life of experience, where one must first see in order to know.

In Buddhism, activity is controlled by time; time does not exist, then no activity can take place. However, there are also differences in Eckhart's sermons and Zen's. Eckhart says that in order to have peace of mind one must express every time as the present. God's time is the present. It is the time that man sees as many days or hours. Hence, God's time has no past or future.

Zen's teachings give an example of a man who was talking about time and seasons. The master replies that, in the dawn of every season, it interacts with the new season. Therefore, the past and present somehow interact or are connected to each other. However, the new and the old do not know of the other's existence. Both sermons, Eckhart's and the Buddhist, emphasize more on the present time. They can hence be said to be similar.

From these perspectives, Eckhart's sermons are very similar to that of the Buddhists. The only difference is that they use a different language to express themselves. They both use a language that can only be well understood by those who share the same views of their religion. Eckhart was also accused of being a heretic, since the Christians did share or support his views on religion. They did not understand him Eckhart said and would have to look deep within to see what he meant. This is also, where language comes in; in both Buddhism and in Eckhart's sermons you would have to share the experience in order to understand. His sermons and beliefs are greatly influenced by Buddhism. They also correspond to the views of the Buddhists.

In order for man to attain purity, so that God can work in him, he must completely detach himself from the worldly things. " It was in this sense when our Lord said to Martha: " One thing is needed," which is to say: He who would be untouched and pure needs just one thing, detachment." Buddha goes in such for enlightenment.

He wants to save himself from all the suffering and so he seeks to find the truth. To find this truth he detaches himself from the world. It is in him finding the truth that he gains freedom and finds enlightenment. In conclusion, Eckhart is a Buddhist.

Crucifixion and Enlightenment In D T Suzuki's book, chapter six on Crucifixion and Enlightenment, he explains the crucifixion of Jesus in Christianity, as being the gap between Buddhism and Christianity. He

explains the ego in both cases. He separates the ego into two types, the transcendental ego and the relative or empirical ego.

The relative ego is dependant of the transcendental ego. In the absence of the transcendental ego, the relative ego cannot function. " But since the relative ego is by nature defective, it is always found unsatisfactory and frustrating and leading to a series of disasters, and as the Western mind believes in the reality of this troublemaker, it wants to make short work of it." (Suzuki) In Buddhism, the relative ego is peacefully absorbed into the transcendental ego. This is shown by the death of Buddha, peacefully under a tree. The ego substance is not in existence, thus no need for crucifixion. The death of Buddha was peaceful. He lay horizontally under a tree in Nirvana.

He is always illustrated folding his legs, one hand pointing up and the other down. This, Suzuki says, that one does not need to detach himself from the earth to find enlightenment. This position shows that there is no attachment and yet detachment from earth. In Suzuki's words, this is the absolute freedom. In Christianity, in order to find enlightenment, the figure has to through suffering, crucified and then raised from the dead, which is the resurrection. This in Christianity shows that one must be separated from or be freed from the flesh in order to find purity. The symbol of Christianity is always shown with a figure crucified in a standing position.

His face is sad and shows pain. The standing position symbolizes man's power over nature. The crucifixion symbolizes two things; doing away with the individualistic ego and the amendment of man's sins through Christ's



death. Resurrection must occur in both cases in order for the destruction of sins.

In Buddhism, there is no separation of the flesh, for the flesh does not even exist. In Christianity, there is crucifixion and resurrection, but in Buddhism, there is enlightenment. Through enlightenment, Suzuki says things and the earth itself are renovated and transformed. There is a new sun and all of the universe can be seen. Through this, a person attains Buddha hood.

In crucifixion, the fleshly being remains on earth, while the risen one ascends to heaven. “ It is different with enlightenment, for it instantly transforms the earth itself into the Pure Land. You do not have to go up to heaven and wait for this transformation to take place here”.

The suffering of the man in both cases ends. Buddha reaches his end sitting under a tree and continues to spread the enlightenment until his death.

Christ suffering ends with the end of the life he has on earth. In this aspect of the crucifixion and enlightenment, Suzuki says could be the main difference between Christianity and Buddhism. Both Christianity and Buddhism came into being from their traditions, historical occurrences and experiences. They both express the same goal, where man is free from suffering and pain. This is attainable but being too involved in the earthly or placing importance on the earthly things.

They both seek to free from suffering, where Buddha went in search of enlightenment so that he could free himself of the, Christ died so that he could save the Christians from sin, which had brought suffering. Christ acts as the salvation of humanity in Christianity while Buddha saves his people by

bringing them enlightenment. However, they both express different views. A divine power is involved in Christianity, one that cannot be measured to the level of man.

Where else in Buddhism a man, Buddha, goes in such of enlightenment in order to bring it to his people. Work Cited Suzuki, Daisetz T. *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Internet resource.