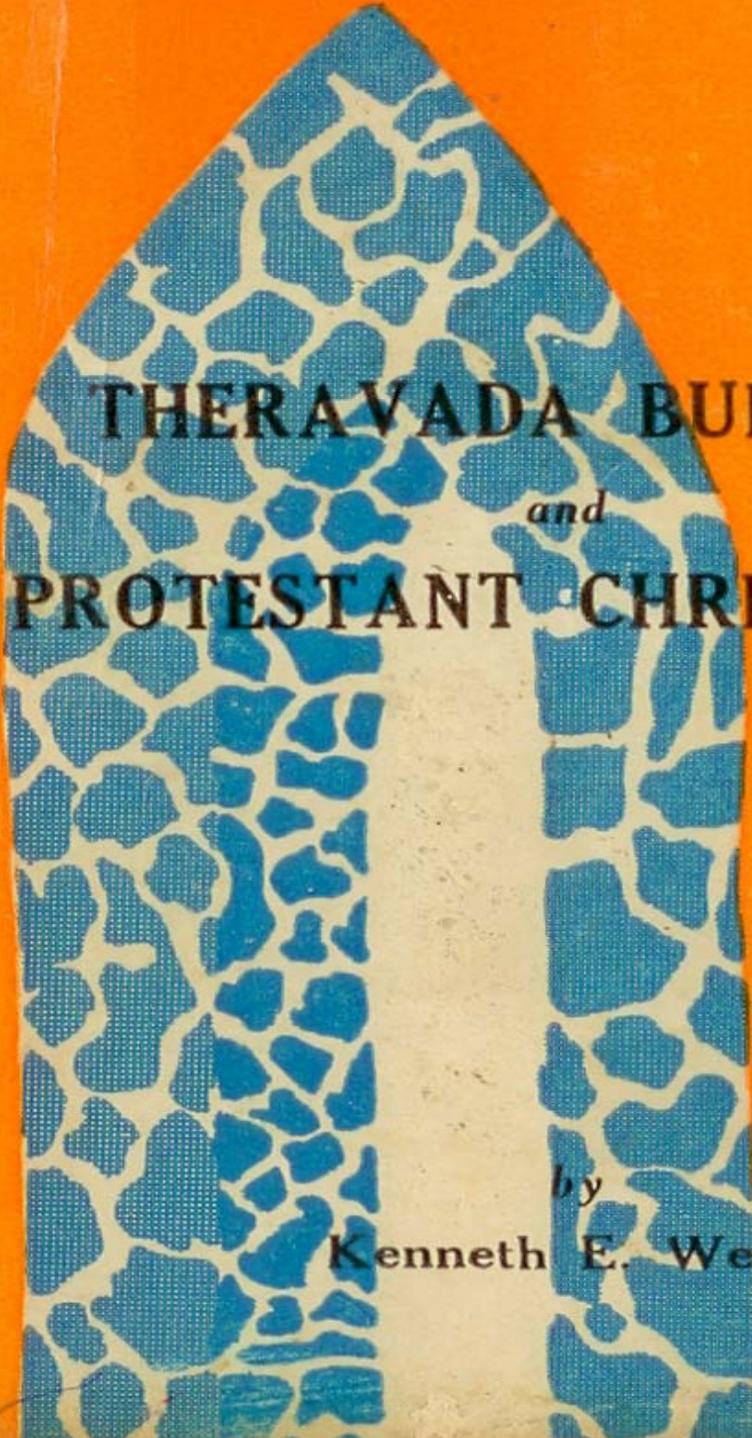


Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures
Second Series

Thailand Theological Seminary
Chiengmai



THERAVADA BUDDHISM
and
PROTESTANT CHRISTIANITY

by
Kenneth E. Wells

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PROTESTANT CHRISTIANITY**

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PREFACE

Thailand Theological Seminary is pleased to present the second series of the Sinclair Thomson Memorial Lectures (1963). They are in memory of William James Sinclair Thompson (1915-1961) who worked in Thailand from 1937 until his internment during the Second World War, and from 1946 until his death in a railway accident July 8, 1961. He was a member of the faculty of the seminary and taught Biblical, theological, and practical courses with equal skill and enthusiasm. He had a lively interest in Buddhism and its frontier with Christianity, and this memorial lectureship was established to carry on the work he was doing when he was called by our Lord for higher service.

The lectures in this series are given by Kenneth E. Wells, Ph.D., who has served in Thailand as a fraternal worker of the United Presbyterian Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations (USA). From his arrival in Thailand in 1927 he has continued his interest in Buddhism, and is well known for his authoritative study, *Thai Buddhism: its Rites and Activities* (republished in 1960). Formerly a teacher and later Headmaster of Prince Royal's College (1928-1951), he has been Secretary of the Department of Christian Education and Literature of the Church of Christ in Thailand since 1953. The seminary is happy to welcome Dr. Wells to this lectureship.

E. John Hamlin

Principal

THERAVADA BUDDHISM AND PROTESTANT CHRISTIANITY

INTRODUCTION	6
LECTURE I WHEREIN BUDDHISM AND CHRISTIANITY DIFFER.....	8
A. RELIGION: A TEACHING OR A REVELATION?.....	8
B. GOD: PERSONAL, OR NON-EXISTENT?.....	10
C. HISTORY: LINEAR OR CYCLICAL?	14
D. HOW SHOULD LIFE BE REGARDED?.....	19
LECTURE II AREAS OF UNDERSTANDING INTRODUCTION.....	25
A. MAN’S PREDICAMENT	25
B. THE IMPORTANCE OF LIFE AND THOUGHT	28
C. THE FIELD OF ETHICS.....	35
LECTURE III PRESENT-DAY SOCIETY, MORALS, AND FAITH	49
A. A NEW WORLD CULTURE	49
B. THE BUDDHIST APPROACH	51
C. THE CHRISTIAN APPROACH	60

THERAVADA BUDDHISM AND PROTESANT

CHRISTIANITY

INTRODUCTION

These lectures were prepared for the general public rather than for Buddhist or Christian scholars. Only a few of the basic teachings of Theravada Buddhism and of Christianity are discussed. Limitations of time and learning make impossible an exhaustive treatment of any or all the great doctrines of the two religions. The teachings here taken up, however briefly, are those which determine to a high degree the religious thinking and practices of devout adherents.

No attempt is made to discuss the historical development of the two religions, or their forms of organization, their present-day activities or their moral influence or social effectiveness. Instead, the discussion is focused on doctrines which have a bearing on religious practices. The primary teachings, however ancient, of a living religion have present-day relevance for those who respect and follow them. Any development of religious concepts and practices, any concessions to social pressures and trends of thought, involves a fresh scrutiny of, or a bow to, the original texts. For a religion to depart entirely from its basic doctrines would be to lose its traditional character, its essence, its unique contribution to the world.

The texts hereafter cited, however numerous, give the reader some basis upon which to judge the validity and fairness of the general discussion. No mention is made of texts which run counter to the main current of doctrinal thought. As appropriate to the general subject before us the approach to this material has been irenic.

Religions today have need to preach peace and to exemplify it. Men of all nations are prey to the same fears and diseases, warmed by the same sun, subject to the same

political and economic forces, and caught up in the same world culture. All religions have common problems, not the least of which is secularism. Ethical religions share a concern for moral integrity in today's society. Modern science has not reduced in any marked degree man's propensity to evil, neither have wealth and technology of themselves freed mankind of corruption, juvenile delinquency, and war. Today, in addition to giant machines and weapons, there is need also for the quiet satisfactions of life, the values that flower from doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly. The art of living finds support and expression in ethical religions, for in them moral values are upheld and human existence is recognized as having significance. Great art and great saints have come from the great religions, - to the enrichment of civilizations and history. More important, such religions give and have given courage and comfort to men and women of all ranks and in all conditions, - given them moral purpose and a sense of worth.

LECTURE I

WHEREIN BUDDHISM AND CHRISTIANITY DIFFER

Horticulturists have sometimes crossed or blended two strains of fruit or flowers, both good, to produce something better. Some people say that Buddhism and Christianity are both good, and that the two religions, like flowers, could be blended, syncretized, to produce a faith which would have universal appeal.

Such a synthesis would appeal only to persons who are not deeply committed to either Christianity or Buddhism. Are the two religions of such a nature that they can be blended? Or are they, like the orchid and the rose, of two different species and incapable of blending to form one life-stream? Those who stress the similarities of Buddhism and Christianity speak of the ethical teachings common to both. This aspect will be discussed in Lecture II. For the moment let us consider the differences in doctrine that are basic. Persons who are prone to think of the two religions as somehow alike will, upon questioning, concede that a Buddhist monastery and a Protestant church, even in the same culture, are quite dissimilar in atmosphere, activities, and architecture. Is it that different concepts bear different fruit?

A. RELIGION: A TEACHING OR A REVELATION?

It can be argued that a religion may consider its body of doctrines both a revelation and a teaching. Actually there is a great difference in the Christian concept of moral law and that held by Buddhists. The Dharma and the Bible differ in origin and in the role they play in man's salvation or release.

I. In general, Buddhists look upon their religion as a Teaching. At the end of a six-year quest Gotama the Buddha found the Way. He then remained upon earth for 45 more

years in order to teach the Way to others. His precepts numbered 84,000. They may be divided into teachings for householders, and rules and instruction for his immediate disciples the monks. The early monks or bhikkhus had the task of memorizing the *suttas* and *vinaya* rules and thus preserving them for future generations. The Three Gems were the Buddha-Teacher or *muni*; the Dharma or Teachings; and the Sangha or Order which preserved and transmitted the Dharma.

During his six-year quest for knowledge Buddha listened to the teachings of various ascetic gurus or monks such as Alara Kalama who taught the attainment of “the state of nothingness,” or Uddahka Ramaputta who taught “the state of neither consciousness nor unconsciousness.” (Majjhima Nikaya, Mahasaccaka Sutta). Many of the teachers belonged to rival schools. After Buddha attained enlightenment and began instructing his own followers he did so against a background of Brahman teachings opposed to his. The discourses in the Suttapitaka often arose in answer to questions from inquirers and followers, questions prompted by rival points of view. Buddha, in summing up his mission, said, “I came to teach suffering and the escape from suffering.” (Samyutta Nikaya 22:86)

II. In general, Christians look upon the essential teachings of their religion as a revelation. In the Old Testament the teachings of Moses and the prophets carries the ring of, “*Thus says the Lord.*” The prophets spoke and the national leaders moved at the command or revelation of God. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is the Messiah promised by God and is God’s supreme revelation of himself to mankind. This is the significance of Christmas. “Immanuel,” “God with us” came: in the heavens a new star, the angelic proclamation of “good tidings of great joy,”.... “glory to God”, a babe born of a kingly line who was the long-expected and divinely-promised Messiah foretold by the prophet Micah and others. (Micah 5:21). Israel had become familiar with God’s acts and revelations in an historic past covering much more than a thousand years. God had

revealed himself to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to Moses in the burning bush, to Israel at the crossing of the Red Sea, to Joshua and to the prophets Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. At times such revelations were accompanied by manifestations of God's power, for example to Elijah at Mount Horeb, and they involved commands to action.

When Jesus Christ was born Israel was a colony of Rome and the people were in economic and spiritual distress. Had God abandoned Israel? Then came the birth of Jesus, - and those who knew him saw in him a revelation of God himself, in love and power. In joy they quoted, "*For those who sat in the region and shadow of death, light has dawned,*" (Matt. 4:16)

Thus Buddhists and Christians have different concepts of religion. Buddhism is essentially a Teaching. The Dharma is a body of knowledge: psychological, metaphysical, moral and intuitive. Buddha is the Teacher. Many prominent Buddhists have asserted that Buddhism is not a religion at all, but a philosophy. Christianity is not a philosophy but a religious system based on faith in a personal God. Jesus Christ was the supreme revelation of God's grace, will, and power. By a sacrificial act, by his voluntary death and his resurrection, Jesus demonstrated God's concern for mankind. Christianity was founded on acts of God as well as on his word - transmitted by prophets and by Jesus Christ. The Christian message is not thought of as a teaching but as a gospel, good news which came by revelation from God.

B. GOD: PERSONAL, OR NON-EXISTENT?

I. When Buddhism arose in India polytheism generally prevailed and the names of deities such as Brahma, Indra, Thorani, Mara, and Yama were widely known. Buddhism reduced them from gods to godlings or celestial beings. As such they were not abiding, not permanent, but subject to *samsara* or rebirth after long intervals of time.

“Buddha answered, ‘I do not see, O friend, neither in this world, together with the world of the devas, maras, Brahmans, nor amongst the generation of Samanas and Brahmanas, gods and men, the one who can scatter my thoughts’.” (Sutta Nipata, Kulavagga, Sukilomasutta)

Sakka, referred to as the chief of the gods, was not the creator of the cosmos.

“Sakka, the leader of the gods, O monks, was not free passion, was not free from hatred, was not free from...birth, old age, death...” (Angostura Nikaya 3:37)

The position of Brahma was somewhat ambiguous; in general he was head of the Brahma worlds.

“But is there then, Vasettha, a single one of the Brahmans up to the seventh generation who has seen Brahma face to face?”

“No indeed, Gotama!” (Digha Nikaya, Silakkhandha Vagga, Tevijja Sutta I:12)

On the other hand Brahma appeared before Buddha after his enlightenment.

Said Buddha, “But if I were to teach the Doctrine and others did not understand it, it would be a weariness to me, a vexation... As I reflected, my mind turned to inaction, not to teach the Doctrine. Then Brahma Sahampati... disappeared from the Brahma world and appeared before me... and said, ‘May the revered Lord teach the Doctrine, may the Sugata teach Doctrine.’...Then perceiving Brahma’s request, and on account of my pity for beings...” (Buddha consented to teach the Dharma). (Majjhima Nikaya i:167 ff)

Buddhism having accepted the Indian cosmology accepted the gods as part of the celestial scene. Sakka and the other divinities held the role of interlocutors and messengers. In one sense they could be said to exist and in another sense not exist, just as in discussions of Buddhist doctrine a man would, for convenience, refer to himself as “I”,

when strictly speaking he would deny that he had an “atta”, an “I”. The gods were to be referred to, but not prayed to.

“Now what think you, Vasettha? Would the further bank of the river Akiravati, by reason of that man’s invoking and praying and hoping and praising, come over to this side?” “Certainly not, Gotama.” (Digha Nikaya, Silakkhandha Vagga, Tevijja Sutta I:24)

Assertions that Buddhism is agnostic or atheistic have been both made and denied. Whatever the texts adduced, it seems clear that Buddha was opposed to Brahman sacrifices to the gods. Buddha told the Brahman Kutadanta that right conduct and right concentration, including the four *jhanas* or stages of meditative trance, were more efficacious than the most elaborate sacrifices. Said Kutadanta:

“May the Venerable One accept me as a disciple...And I myself, O Gotama, will have the 700 bulls and the 700 steers and the 700 heifers and the 700 goats and the 700 rams set free, To them I grant life.” (Kutadanta Sutta)

Buddha did not teach the existence of a creator God. Rather he accepted the universe as something which *is*, and urged his followers to devote their thoughts to man’s predicament in a world of suffering, and to the way of escape. Said Buddha:

“Without a cause and unknown is the life of mortals in this world” (Sutta Nipata)

“Incalculable is the beginning of this traveling on. The earliest point is not revealed of the traveling on, of beings clothed in ignorance, tied to craving, *tanha*.” (Samyutta Nikaya 15:1:1)

II. For Christianity, God is basic, and central. God is the beginning and the end.

“*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*” (Genesis 1:1)

He is the cause of all things, by him all things exist. Whatever there is in the world: energy, light, laws of cause and effect, science, evolution, life, rationality, beauty, reflective thought, goodness, aspiration, - all these exist because God wills them into existence.

The fullness of God is greater than the sum of all these things. The fullness of God contains infinitely more than the mind of man has been able to grasp. And yet the greatness of man's mental capacity is a subject of increasing wonder. In the pursuit of science the mind of man continually discovers what for man are new forces and relationships in the cosmos, new significance in things long seen. But with each new discovery, man encounters new problems and questions. It is a tribute to man's intelligence that he can recognize fresh riddles in the universe. Man's attempt to understand God, to grasp the concept of God, is perhaps man's most audacious intellectual effort. Yet there is a certain compulsion about it because:

"God made man in His own image." (Genesis 1:27)

As Dr. Malcolm F. Stewart said in his 1962 Sinclair Thompson lectures: the Christian "sees the power which flows in and through him, which guarantees his existence and the condition of his life, as being personal." God takes the initiative in approaching man, the Christian believes, therefore man must respond. God reveals himself to man, not fully and not visibly, by insights and by acts. The mind of God informs the mind of man giving glimpses of divine purpose, transcendent moral values, and unselfish love, *agape*. In Christ were portrayed the mind and spirit of God. Seeing this, the disciple Peter said to Jesus:

"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16)

Jesus prayed and taught his followers to pray, -- addressing God as "Father." Prayer is the mind of man seeking the mind of God, seeking communion with the Giver of Life who is ever concerned with His creation.

The God worshiped by Christians has no recognition in Theravada Buddhism.

C. HISTORY: LINEAR OR CYCLICAL?

Christianity and Buddhism differ widely in their concepts of history. By history I mean the course of actions of nations and individuals. How is the history of man to be regarded?

I. Buddha refused to discuss the origin of the world on the ground that such ultimate question was not useful to one seeking a way of release.

"And why, Malunkyaputta, have I not explained it? Because it does not tend to the advantage of the religious life, to aversion, absence of passion, cessation, calm, insight, enlightenment, Nirvana. Therefore have I not explained it?" (Majjhima Nikaya 1:426, Culamalunkyaputta Sutta)

In adopting the Indian cosmology Buddhism accepted the concept of a *kalka* or world-cycle, an eon, something over four thousand million years according to one reckoning. During the course of one *kalpa* the universe appeared, ran through its cycle, and ended in a fiery holocaust. This was then followed by a renewal.

To these periodic cycles of great length Buddhism added lesser periods, Buddha-ages. Buddhas under different names appeared in succession, but under different conditions. During the period of the Buddha Kakusandha the span of human life was 40,000 years, during that of Konagamana it was 30,000 years, and under the Buddha Kassapa a man's life-span was 20,000 years. (Digha Nikaya, Mahapadana Sutta 2:5-12) The Buddha periods also decreased in duration, that of Gotama being 5,000 years. At the end of each age, however, another Buddha arose and the Dharma was proclaimed anew.

In the lives of the successive Buddhas certain episodes appeared and reappeared. This may indicate that history repeats itself, or that the traditions which were handed down by oral transmission misplaced some of the episodes.

In Buddhism the doctrine of *samsara* or continuous cycle of rebirths is fundamental. In the past each human being has endured an almost endless series of rebirths, and he faces a similar series in the future. There is some question as to what it is that is reborn, inasmuch as Buddhism denies that there is a soul or *atta* to transmigrate. The new being that is reborn is sometimes likened unto a candle flame that was kindled by another flame before it became extinguished. The consensus is that the new being or person who is born is neither the same as the one who has just died, nor is he wholly another. Consciousness has been transmitted from the old person to the new, and consequences of karma, and in some cases – memory. Buddha at the time of his enlightenment said,

“I remembered many former existences, such as one birth, two births, three, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, 100, 1000, 100,000 births: many cycles of dissolution of the universe....thus do I remember my many former existences with their special modes and details. That was the first knowledge that I gained in the first watch of the night.” (Majjhima Nikaya i. 240, Mahasaccaka Sutta)

During such a long course of events many kingdoms and many kings arose and disappeared. The excessive repetition of historical events deprives single episodes of deep significance of historical value. Indian chronicles bear almost no dates. When was the Bhagavad Gita written? For the most part we must go outside the Vedas, the Indian epics, and the Tripitaka to determine dates. In religious thinking, events which repeat themselves endlessly, as the rotations of a wheel, scarcely deserve dating,

In a cyclical, non- theistic universe the life of an individual has no concurrent point of reference. In any given *jati* or rebirth he must assume that he is experiencing but one of

an infinite series of existences. Usually he is unable to determine whether his condition is inferior or superior to that of previous existences. He has, however, a goal or point of reference for the future, namely Nirvana. A Buddhist may look forward to the cessation of rebirths by resolutely following the Eight-fold Path. This multiple path of indeterminate length involves moral and physical discipline, the practice of mental detachment, meditation, and concentration, and a quest for intuitive knowledge. The discipline is undertaken by the disciple to free himself of desire and all attachment to the world of the senses.

The knowledge to be attained is an inner realization of the truth of Buddhist doctrine, namely, that the visible world is illusory and that release from rebirth has come to the disciple by a vivid realization or apprehension of Reality and of his own release from the round of rebirths.

“To him, thus realizing, thus seeing, his mind is set free from sensuous *asavas* (hindrances, impurities)... In him, thus set free, there arises the knowledge of his freedom, and he realizes: Rebirth is no more; I have lived the pure life; I have done what ought to be done. I have nothing more to do for the realization of arahatship. This is the bhikku’s knowledge.” (Digha Nikaya, Silakkhandha Vagga, Ambatta Sutta 8.)

The Buddhist conception of *samsara*, the endless recurrence and rebirths, largely deprives history of significance for nations and individuals. History is cyclical.

II. Christianity has the concept of God the Creator who is Lord of History. Having created the universe, he sustains and directs it, imparts his eternal purpose to it, and brings it to an end in his own time. For the Christian, history begins and ends in God.

“I am the Alpha and Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”(Rev. 1:8)

God is a valid reference point at any time in history; history is significant because it is significant to God and his purposes. God is eternal; he exists before worlds come into existence and after they disappear. In the cosmos there are galaxies of stars incomprehensible in numbers, size, and in distances apart. Their structure, energies, and motions are only faintly understood by man, and they seem likely to produce mysteries which will be forever insoluble by man. Why do such celestial bodies exist? The Christian believes that the answer is to be found in God by whose power the cosmos was created, and whose intelligence infuses all existence with order which man discerns in fragmentary form in the field of science. The great question, “Why does anything exist?” can be answered only by reference to God. Long ago some Indian philosophers surmised that the world is the “plaything of the gods,” and that the dancing of Siva set all things in motion. The answer to the fact of existence must be found outside the finite creature man. Christianity holds that:

“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein; for he has founded it...” (Psalm 24:1, 2)

In the Christian concept of history there is purpose, God’s purpose, running through the centuries. This purpose includes the rise and fall of nations, even nations that know not God. Such was Persia. Of its ruler, King Cyrus, God said:

“He is my shepherd and he shall fulfill all my purpose.” (Isaiah 44:28)

Nations were agents to carry out God’s purpose – not because of any merit in themselves – but because God chose to use them. The people of Israel were repeatedly told that God had chosen them to be his servant despite their unworthiness, and that God had taken them when they were but a horde of slaves and made of them a nation. The Bible, packed with historical events and records of God’s acts and words, was written largely in western Asia, in Israel, not simply by court scribes as in China, but by prophets

and priests who were history-conscious. These, and the patriarchs and the rulers and kings felt that they were acting out the drama of their lives in the presence of God. They traced their genealogy back to God's creation of man, told in Chapter One of the Bible, and they looked forward to God's new creation told in the penultimate chapter of the Scriptures.

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth ...and I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." (Rev.21:1, 2)

Moses and King David were herdsmen until God called them to lead the nation. To Moses at the burning bush God said:

"Come....that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt." (Exodus 3:10)

To David he said:

"I took you....from following the sheep that you should be prince over my people Israel." (II Samuel 7:8)

Jesus Christ spoke of the prophecies and the long history leading up to his coming.

"And beginning with Moses and the prophets he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke 24:27)

The disciples declared Jesus Christ to be the long-promised Messiah, and the one who would return again, and who was Lord of the future.

"This Jesus...will come (again) in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11)

"That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." (Philippians 2:9-11)

In Christianity, man's history has significance because God works amid human events and with humans. Man's true goal is reconciliation with and obedience to God.

When restored to sonship with God man reaches his highest humanity. His value is the value God places upon him; his future is bound up in the purpose of the Eternal Father.

D. HOW SHOULD LIFE BE REGARDED?

I am speaking now of human life in its qualitative aspects. Is life worth living? This is a practical question and one of universal concern.

I. Buddhism starts with this question. Said Buddha:

“I came to teach suffering (or sorrow) and the escape from suffering.” (Potthapada Sutta 29)

“This is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering, old age is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering. Union with unpleasant things is suffering, separation from pleasant things is suffering, not obtaining what one wishes is suffering, in short, the five groups, *and khandas*, of clinging to existence is suffering.”(Vinaya, Maharaja 1:6:10)

This appraisal of life arises from Buddhist views regarding the physical world, the nature of man, and ultimate reality. It is a value judgment based on the belief that peace of mind or heart, which is the opposite of suffering, can be found only in that which is permanent, abiding, unchanging, at rest. That which is constantly changing is unreal and distressing; true peace must be sought in that which is abiding.

The physical world made familiar to us by our senses is in a process of change. Everything is in motion. The seasons, the winds, the rivers, living creatures, - all are changing. Atoms and electrons are in motion and restless. Why would anything change if change could be avoided? Constant change necessitated and determined by the interplay of cause and effect produces the world's un-ease, its suffering, its transitoriness. The world perceived through the senses is therefore without peace or true satisfaction. Man is enmeshed in the process of change. His body grows old and sickens and dies. Because

decay is inherent in all things, living is a form of dying, a postponement of death. The Four Noble Truths, which consist of the doctrine of suffering and its cure, are basic in Buddhist thought. Said Buddha:

“What think you, O monks, is (bodily) form, *rupa*, permanent or transitory?”

“It is transitory.”

“And that, which is transitory, is it evil or good?”

“It is evil.” (Mahavagga 1:6)

Living is *bhava*, not simply existence but a process of becoming – something else. The thoughts of man are constantly changing. Man both in his thinking and in his being changes from moment to moment, and in which he is at this instant is not that which he was a short time ago. Man has no *atta* or continuing self. He consists only of five *khandas* or aggregates: *rupa* or bodily form; *vedana* or feeling; *sanna* or perception; *sankharas* or predisposition will, or mental aggregates; and *vinna* or consciousness. (Samyutta Nikaya 22:22:1) Together the five *khandas* form a living being called man, a being so transitory in mind and body as to be thought of as a process. Moreover he is a fire, knowing no peace. Said Buddha:

“The eye, O bhikkhus, is burning; visible things are burning... burning with the fire of lust, the fire of anger, the fire of ignorance, burning with the anxieties of birth, decay, death, grief, lamentation, suffering, dejection, and despair. The ear is burning... the tongue is burning....”(Visuddhi Magga 8)

The sorrow and suffering inherent in life are compounded by rebirths. Said Buddha,

“Which do you think is more: the flood of tears which, weeping and wailing, you have shed upon this way, -- hurrying and hastening through this round of rebirths...this, or the waters of the four seas?” (Samyutta Nikaya 15:3)

Buddhism therefore holds that the experiences of life add up to suffering. In actual practice individuals differ widely in their acceptance of this view, whether with anxiety or complacency. Seasoned and learned monks presumably accept the doctrine of suffering as the determining factor in their lives, – that which keeps them on the stern path to Nirvana.

II. Christianity views life as a gift of God and as inherently good. Christianity acknowledges the problem of suffering, but even more, - the problem of evil. Evil corrupts life, intensifies suffering, and hastens death. Unable to explain fully the two problems of pain and evil, Christianity accepts them as part of existence – but not the most significant part. Man can do much to alleviate physical suffering by his own efforts. As for other kinds of suffering, - while often inescapable, God provides “peace that passes all understanding,” which mitigates sorrow, and he gives strength and incentive for man’s struggle against evil.

“God saw everything that he had made, and lo, it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31)

“In Thy (God’s) presence there is fullness of joy.” (Psalm 16:11)

Not only is life good because it partakes of the goodness of God’s creation, but human life holds the status of a special creation. Man was created after and above the animal kingdom; he is master of all other creatures, he names the animals and tames them and puts them to work. (See Genesis 1:27; 2:15-20)

How has evolution affected the Christian view of man? The reply is that all things come from God, all processes, all life. If the evolutionary process excites wonder, one reflects that it first existed in the mind of God. What further excites wonder is the significance of the mind of man, which in its greatness is able to piece together not only the evolutionary process but to explore and interpret much more in the world of science. The mind of man scans celestial space and the molecular world, and brings to them mathematics and the science of optics. It asks of the universe not only “What” and “How”

but also “Why?” Man reflects upon his own powers and significance. He even seeks communion with his creator.

Man’s finer intuitions and aspirations are no less a part of his life than are his lower instincts. The Christian catechism declares,

“Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”

Christianity does not say that man *is good*, but that he was created good. It says that man is now inherently corrupt, sinful and from infancy given to selfish and evil impulses.

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23)

“None is righteous, no not one.” (Romans 3:10)

All men are not equally corrupt or depraved. Those who keep the moral laws are near the Kingdom of God. But those who most nearly attain moral perfection have moral sensitivity enough to perceive how far short of the goal they come.

“Our righteousness is as filthy rags.” (Isaiah 64:6)

Even bad Christians will concede that ideally life can be good: that is, enjoyable, and morally good. Saints have peace and joy, rapturous faces, and a sense of God’s presence.

“God was in Christ reconciling the world unto him.” (2 Cor. 5:19)

The goodness of life, -- its joy, hope, comes from the goodness of God. Life is by nature good because God is good. Said the Psalmist:

“O give thanks unto the Lord for he is good. His steadfast love endures forever.”

(Psalm 136:1)

Buddhism extols the tranquility and peace that come with quiet reflection and meditation. Christianity proclaims a life of inner joy that comes as a divine gift. Said Jesus,

“These things I have spoken to you that my joy might be in you, and your joy might be full.” (John 15:11)

Yet Jesus wept because of the sorrow of others. (John 11:35)

The Buddhist goal of tranquility or peace is carried to its ultimate in the concept of Nirvana. The Christian quest for joy, the joy of forgiveness, and acceptance by or reconciliation with God, reaches completion in the Christian idea of heaven, -- a place where there is community and rejoicing in the presence of God.

As we have seen, the two religions have divergent views on the nature of religion, on history, life, and worship. These stem from the difference in attitude towards God.

The Christian concept of God is that held by and revealed in Jesus Christ. God is the supreme fact of existence. One who in wisdom created the universe, who had a purpose in making man in His image, and who communicates with man. Such communion makes prayer meaningful for man, and makes possible the hope of future life. Having come from God, man can return to Him. God is the living Father, therefore man is not an orphan. By means of the Father's presence and help man attains true humanity, and final salvation. Man's worst predicament is alienation from God.

Theravada Buddhism posits no God in the Christian sense. Man therefore seeks within himself ultimate wisdom, purpose, significance, and peace or release. Man has the example and teachings of Buddha in this quest, but he must rely upon himself for his own final release from the predicament of endless rebirth and suffering.

A man either believes in God, in the Christian sense, or he doesn't. To be agnostic is to be uncommitted to any belief. To be eclectic is to be neither Christian nor Buddhist.

Man's belief or disbelief in God is inseparable from what he expects of religion and the interpretation he places upon life.

A syncretism of Buddhism and Christianity is not possible because they hold irreconcilable views of God.

LECTURE II

AREAS OF UNDERSTANDING INTRODUCTION

In the previous lecture we discussed certain basic doctrines of Buddhism and Christianity which differed so radically that it was impossible to syncretise them. Theravada Buddhism and Protestant Christianity could not be blended without destroying their traditions and forms. What would result from such a union would be neither Buddhism nor Christianity.

However, we can do more than point out the dissimilarities of the two religions. There is another side to the coin, a happier side in terms of good relations, which might be referred to as "Areas of Understanding." Both religions arose in Asia. They recognize common problems even though they offer different solutions. Both are concerned with moral and metaphysical questions, and offer mankind guidance and peace. They point to what is abiding and of supreme value. To some extent they appeal to people of similar temperament: men of devotional nature who respond to transcendent ideals, men who are by nature non-acquisitive, capable of voluntary renunciation. Such men may differ as to the way and yet share a feeling of mutual appreciation and understanding as they follow their separate religious vocations. Buddhism advocates tolerance, Christianity, forgiveness: in this spirit let us look at some of the areas of understanding known to both religions.

A. MAN'S PREDICAMENT

As Buddhism and Christianity consider the world we live in they agree at many points in their assessment of man's predicament.

Both religions hold that the world is temporal.

*“The things that are seen are temporal, the things that are unseen are eternal,”
said Paul. (2 Cor. 4:18)*

*“As for man. His days are like grass, ...for the wind passes over it and it is gone.”
(Psalm 103:15, 16)*

The followers of Jesus expected an end to all things, and Jesus assured them that he would be with them.

“to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:20)

“Heaven and earth will pass away,” said Jesus, “but my words will not pass away.” (Matt. 24:35)

The Apostle Peter wrote specifically about the end of the age saying,

“And then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up.” (2 Peter 3:10)

Both religions point out that human life is brief and attended by sorrow. The Christian scriptures declare that:

“Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.” (Job 5:7)

In a prayer ascribed to Moses we read,

“The years of our life are threescore and ten, ...yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.” (Psalm 90:10)

Said Jesus, *“In the world you have tribulation.” (John 16:33)*

At this point I quote from Christian rather than Buddhist sources because the Buddhist emphasis upon suffering and transitoriness is well known while Christian texts in this vein are less prominent or familiar. In Christianity, brevity of life is not to be taken lightly, instead, men are to make mental and moral preparation for the end. Human life is

of so short a span that supreme value cannot be ascribed to merriment, great wealth, or earthly utopias. Jesus told of the rich man with a super-abundance of goods, who said,

“I will pull down my barns and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘Fool, This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’” (Luke 12:18-20)

Both Christianity and Buddhism, seeing the transitoriness of the world and life, repudiate materialism which finds value largely in things that man can produce from the earth or make with his hands. Rather, both religions uphold values and seek goals which are other-worldly.

Christianity, however, is this – worldly to the extent that it approves the use and enjoyment of the things that God made “good,” the beauty and the riches of the earth. But these “things” are secondary,

“Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well,” said Jesus. (Matt 6:32, 33)

One of the worst aspects of man’s predicament, recognized fully by both religions, is evil resident in the human heart. Man is corrupt, filled with craving and desire, with greed, anger, and cruelty. Buddhists have terms for these: *tanha*, *kilet*, *lobha*, *moha*, and *tosa*. The evil characteristics of man are not something which can be put on or taken off like a coat, - they are a poison within. Ill temper and deceit appear in small children. When a man attempts to be perfect in thought and deed he fails by reason of defects within him. The Apostle Paul speaks for most men when he says:

“I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want, is what I do.” (Romans 7:18, 19)

In Christianity this evil is not considered to be chiefly of the flesh, but rather of the mind: pride, willfulness, and evil thoughts which result in evil deeds.

This sin or corruption is not something imaginary, conjured up by religious leaders, existing only in the minds of pious ascetics. It is of such reality that it makes a mockery of good government, compels nations to spend half their budgets on armed forces, policemen, courts, jails, and reformatories, and multiplies deaths by means of war, narcotics, alcohol, homicide, and neglect, Evil, or sin, destroys homes and families, impoverishes individuals and nations. It was man’s predicament, - a corrupt creature living in an insecure world, that made the monastic life attractive to Buddhists from the beginning, they wished to avoid and repudiate the worst moral evils. The same factors helped give rise to monasticism within Christianity.

The brevity, trouble, and sorrow of life man has compounded by his own acts, willful or no, — arising from his own corruption. Such is his predicament.

B. THE IMPORTANCE OF LIFE AND THOUGHT

I. Both religions hold that life and reflective thought are significant. In this they can speak to the condition of those non-religionists, materialists, who are plagued with feelings of the emptiness or meaninglessness of life. The terms “life” and “thought” are here associated together because we are not discussing life as a biological process but human life at its level of highest performance: life capable of memory, speech, reasoning, creative thought, aspiration; life responsive to order, beauty, goodness, and the thoughts of other minds.

Christianity holds that human life is inherently significant because God made it so. Man was a special creation in point of time and in manner of creation. Man bears the

image of God; he can commune with God, and he has a future after death because God wills it.

Buddhism considers man's life to be of such vitality, so *charged* with dynamic forces: deeds, consciousness, will, memory, — that life simply cannot terminate at the moment of physical death. Human life must go on to rebirth. Only the arahant who attains enlightenment can bring the life process to an end, and that only by great effort of discipline and detachment. Human life in general, no matter if sorrowful and corrupt, is nevertheless ongoing and significant. The doctrine of *samsara* ascribes power of rebirth to non-human forms of life as well. But in the Buddhist Tripitaka the doctrine of rebirth is discussed primarily in connection with human beings and it is in this connection that we speak.

Neither Christianity nor Buddhism attaches much importance to the physical body either to exalt it or to subject it to harsh ascetic or yoga torment. Both find the great questions of life more important than bodily comfort. Jesus and his immediate disciples followed a path of renunciation and traveled about virtually homeless. They were ready to die for their faith if need be. Said the Apostle Thomas,

“Let us go with him (Jesus) that we may die with him” (John 11:16)

To the lame beggar Peter said truly,

“I have no gold or silver.” (Acts 3:6)

However, the Apostle Paul taught that the troublesome body is:

“the temple of the Holy Spirit” and therefore should be held in respect. (I Cor. 6:19)

II.

II. Thought, right thinking, and right analysis, are stressed throughout the Tripitaka. The discipline for monks was set up to train the mind. The reasoned discourses in the Suttas were to lead the mind to right conclusions. The discussions on mental processes in the Abhidhamma are directed toward the apprehension of truth and reality. In teaching his followers Buddha frequently used the formula:

In the same way, O Ambattha, the bhikkhu, with his mind...ready to act, firm, imperturbable, applies and bends his mind to the knowledge. (Digha Nikaya, Silakkhanha Vagga, Ambattha Sutta 8)

In an oft-quoted passage Buddha urged his disciples to accept religious doctrines on the basis of reason and experience rather than on authority. The son of Kesa, from Kalama, said to Buddha,

“I do not know what to believe.”

Buddha answered, “Do not believe anything on the mere authority of teachers and monks. Whatever, according to your own experience, and after investigating it, agrees with your reason, and is of benefit to you and to other living creatures, accept that as true,” (Anguttara Nikaya 111:65)

The concept of causation, cause-and-effect, arrived at by the process of reason, is one of the fundamental doctrines of Buddhism. This concept is applied to all phenomena: physical, mental, and moral.

“The Buddha has the causes told, of all things springing from cause.” (Mahavagga 1:231)

The Paticca – sammuppada or Dependent Origination, — the series of Twelve Nidanas based on causal sequence, has been referred to as the most original element in Buddhist thought.

Patticca – sammuppada

“On ignorance (*avijja*) depends the *sankharas*,
On the *sank* *Aras* depends consciousness?
On consciousness depend name and form?
On name and form depends the six organs of sense?
On the six organs of sense depends contact;
On contact depends sensation?
On sensation depends desire?
On desire depends attachment?
On attachment depends existence?
On existence depends birth?
On birth depends old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, misery, grief and
despair.
Thus does this entire aggregation of misery arise?”
(*Samyutta Nikaya* 22:90:16) 3:16

Here we see that contact leads to or causes sensation, and sensation leads to desire. Strict determinism is implied in this series. The sequence begins with *avijja*, non-knowledge, delusion, and the absence of true knowledge. Thus the whole life process with all its suffering and sorrow has its beginning in thought, albeit erroneous thought. The illusory world we see around us stems from illusory thought. Buddhist metaphysics is thus akin to subjective idealism in which everything is a projection of mind or thought. Two teachings of Buddha may be adduced:

“ Verily I declare to you, my friend, that within this very body, mortal as it is and only a fathom high, but conscious and endowed with mind, is the world and the waxing thereof and the waning thereof, and the way that leads to the passing away thereof.” (*Anguttara Nikaya* 11:48; *Samyutta Nikaya* 1:62)

“Where do earth, water, fire, and wind,
And long and short, and fine and coarse,
Pure and impure, no footing find?
Where is it that both name and form die out?
leaving no trace behind?
On that the answer is:
The intellect of Arahatsip....
There both name and forms die out, leaving no trace behind.
When intellect ceases they also cease.” (Kevaddha Sutta 85)

III. Christianity also makes use of reason and experience, and of the law of cause-and-effect. Jesus observed that his hearers studied atmospheric condition in the evening in order to predict the following day’s weather.

He said that a bad tree bears evil fruit, and stated the principle that things and ideas are to be judged by their consequences. (Matthew 7:15-20)

“You will know them by their fruits.” (Matthew 7:20)

The law of causation applies to moral acts. Said the Apostle Paul,

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” (Galatians 6:7) Again he said,

“The wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23)

Said James: “Then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death.” (James 1:15)

The Bible contains numerous passages which appeal to men’s reason in order to persuade them. When Paul was in Thessalonica,

“for three weeks he reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving...” (Acts 17:2)

Later Paul wrote to this group,

“Test all things, hold fast to what is good.” (1 Thessalonians 5:21)

While Christianity gives God’s revelation precedence over human reason, it should be noted that such revelation come as a form of human experience. The revelation may reach the mind of the recipient through his eyes, as Moses at the burning bush. The Israelites never forgot the experience of crossing the Red Sea when God revealed his guidance and power to a whole nation. The disciples of Jesus constantly bore witness to their experience of God in Christ Jesus. John wrote:

“That...which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands...we proclaim.” (I John 1:1-3)

Christianity holds that everything which exists stems from thought, the thought of God. By his intelligence and will he created all things. At the beginning he said,

“Let there be light,” and there was light. (Gen. 1:3)

Great men of the Bible, like David and Solomon, appealed to God for wisdom and direction because God was to them the source of wisdom.

“O Lord, how manifold is thy works!

In wisdom thou hast made them all.” (Psalm 104:24)

The Lord by wisdom founded the earth;

By understanding he established the heavens.” (Proverbs 3:19)

Said the prophet Jeremiah:

“It is he (God) who made the earth by his power,

Who established the world by his wisdom?

And by his understanding stretched out the heavens.” (Jer 10:12)

Not only was the earth established by the thinking of God, but daily in the mind of God the earth and man continue to exist. In a prayer to God the psalmist said:

*“Thou art acquainted with all my ways;
Even before a word is on my tongue,
Lo, O Lord, thou know it altogether.” (Psalm 139:3, 4)*

Christians pray to God because they believe he is omniscient and omnipresent. They feel sure that God “has them in mind”, and is aware of their situation. When King Artaxerxes of Persia asked his cup-bearer Nehemiah, “What is your request?” Nehemiah uttered a brief silent prayer to God before replying.

Nehemiah felt that God was there in the room as well as the King, and Nehemiah wanted God’s thought on the matter. (Nehemiah 2:4)

Jesus, before opening the tomb of Lazarus in the presence of many spectators, first paused to say to God,

“Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.....” (John 11:41)

That the world is the thought of God is indicated in John’s Prologue, chapter 1:1-3 of his gospel.

“In the beginning was the Word (Logos), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...All things were made through him (Word) and without him was not anything made that was made.”

Here the “Word” in John’s original manuscript was the term *logos*, a Greek word from which the English language formed such words as “logic” and “biology”. “Logos” or “Word” can mean: the rational principle of the universe; the creative intelligence of God;

and “knowledge” or “science”. Some of the early and great scientists felt that in discovering new physical laws, new galaxies, and new elements that they were “thinking God’s thoughts after him.” Joseph Priestly, who discovered oxygen, was an English clergyman. Many of the early European scientists were men of deep religious faith who thought that they could come nearer to the mind of God if they could discover more of God’s designs in nature. Among such men was Sir Isaac Newton, physicist; John Kepler, astronomer, and Robert Boyle, chemist. Early scientific thought was indeed related to Christian thought and to the Christian concept of a universe that was rational because it was informed with the mind of God.

Prof. Alan Richardson of Nottingham University, England, said,

“The question why science arose in Christian civilization (and in no other) has been much discussed... The struggle of the new scientists against the old order was not a struggle of ‘science’ against ‘religion’ (Christian), but the revolt of the new scientific philosophy against the old Aristotelian pseudo-scientific philosophy. ... The real issue, of course, was not the truth of the Bible but the truth of Aristotle and the authority of the Aristotelian theologians themselves... It can hardly be without significance that the scientific attitude arose in a civilization which acknowledged one God who was personal, rational and dependable, and that the most ardent and dedicated pioneers of the new scientific movement were themselves students of the Bible and of Christian theology.” (The Bible in the Age of Science, SCM Press, London, 1961, paper cover. pp 26, 16, 17, 27)

C. THE FIELD OF ETHICS

The greatest area of mutual understanding is the field of ethics. Both Buddhism and Christianity are ethical religions. Both teach that moral perfection is not man’s supreme goal, but that morality, – or at least a sincere attempt to be moral – is necessary in

order that man may approach the ultimate goal whether it be Nirvana or reconciliation with God. Both religions recognize the existence of transcendent Moral Law which men cannot flout or dismiss with impunity but which operates inexorably bringing serious consequences to society and to individuals. Buddhism, centering its attention upon the doctrine of man, attaches first importance to deeds, *karma*, and to the acquisition of “merit” – the fruit of right action. Protestant Christianity, giving first place to the doctrine of God, gives to right actions or “works” of man a secondary role: that which is a necessary concomitant of true faith and of God’s grace. Said Jesus:

“When you have done all that is commanded of you, say, ‘We are unworthy servants, we have only done what was our duty.’” (Luke 17:10)

Said Paul: “(Jesus) saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy.” (Titus 3:5)

I. In Theravada Buddhism a man’s release depends solely upon his own efforts. Therefore the measure of his concern and the degree of his attainment are gauged by his diligence in following the precepts and the Eightfold Path. Buddhist ethics by and large is for the individual. It is sometimes summed up in the maxim:

“Do good, get good,” or, “Do good and good will result.”

A much – quoted stanza is:

“To refrain from evil; to do good;

To cleanse the heart of evil. –

This is the teaching of all the Buddhas.” (Dhammapada 183)

Buddhist ethics lays stress upon the attainment of inner peace or serenity, *sukha*, or on equanimity, *upekha*. Another verse in the Dhammapada epitomizes the teachings behind this concept:

There is no fire like lust, no ill fortune like hatred;
There is no sorrow like bodily existence;
There is no happiness like Nirvana.” (Dhammapada XV:202)

Hatred is the foe of serenity, hence the reliance upon the stanza:

“For not by hatred is hatred calmed
Here in this world at any time;
But by non-hatred is it calmed.” (Dhammapada 1:5)

In Buddhist ethics the Five Precepts are basic:

1. Refrain from taking life.
2. Refrain from stealing.
3. Refrain from sexual offenses.
4. Refrain from speaking falsehood.
5. Refrain from intoxicants.

Four of these occur in the Christian Decalogue, and occur in the precepts of any well-ordered society. The fifth precept, on intoxicants, occurs as a precept in Christian scriptures outside the Decalogue:

“Do not get drunk with wine.” (Ephesians 5:18)

The Five Precepts are prescribed for all Buddhist monks and laymen. Monks, however, must observe five additional rules making Ten Precepts:

6. Refrain from eating after mid-day.
7. Refrain from attending plays and entertainments.
8. Refrain from adorning the body with flowers, perfumes, and other things.
9. Refrain from sleeping upon large soft beds.
10. Refrain from accepting gold or silver.

Rules Number 6,7 and 8 are optional for the laity, and are sometimes adopted by them for short periods of time, e.g., while in a monastery on uposatha (*wan phra*) day. It is seen from this that Buddhist moral precepts fall into two categories: those for the laity and those for the monks or *sangha*. Indeed, monks have 227 Patimokha rules which concern discipline and conduct. While the Eight-fold Path is prescribed for all Buddhists it is followed *in toto* almost exclusively by monks and novices.

“The Eight – fold Path”

1. Right (doctrinal) Views.
2. Right Resolution.
3. Right Speech.
4. Right Conduct.
5. Right Livelihood.
6. Right Effort.
7. Right Mindfulness.
8. Right Concentration.

Only monks have the Livelihood which frees them from distractions and enables them to give full time to the way of Right Effort or Endeavor, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. Monks acquire special status and a kind of neuter gender by adopting the strict ethical code prescribed for the *sangha*. The laity hold monks in high esteem because of their renunciation of the life of a householder. The voluntary renunciation of goods and pleasures is of the highest order of merit. A monk wishing to give up the discipline of a *bhikkhu* can leave the monastic order at any time. Knowing this eases the strain of monastic life. The Buddhist approach to ethics and philosophy includes the avoidance of extremes and of unnecessary strain. It is by the reasoned choice of the Middle Way between laxity and extreme asceticism, and between opposite metaphysical

viewpoints. While a *bhikkhu* follows a spartan discipline conducive to detachment, meditation and study, he is yet spared the physical anguish of many yogi practices.

Said Buddha: "There is a middle path, O bhikkhus, avoiding these two extremes (sensuality and severe asceticism)... which leads to peace of mind, to the higher wisdom, to the full enlightenment, to Nirvana." (Mahaparinibbana Sutta, Dhamma Kakkapavattana Sutta 3)

With the laity also in mind, Buddha said:

"Now what think you, Sona, when the strings of your lute were neither too much stretched, nor too loose, but fixed in even proportions, had your lute sound then, was it then in a fit state to be played upon?"

"Yes, Lord."

"Just so, Sona, does too eager a determination conduce to self-righteousness, and too weak a determination to sloth." (Maharaja 5:1:16)

There are numerous precepts to guide householders in their daily relations and pursuits. However, the laity is given to understand that their way of life is not the way of moral striving at its highest.

"A householder... on hearing the truth has faith in the Tathagata, and when he has acquired that faith he thus considers within himself: 'Full of hindrances is the life of a householder, a path defiled by passion; free as the air is the life of him who has renounced all worldly things. How difficult is it for the man who dwells at home to live the higher life in all its fullness, in all its purity, in all its bright perfection! Let me cut off my hair and beard, let me clothe myself in the orange robes, and let me go forth from a household life into the homeless state...' When he has thus become a recluse he passes a life self-restrained... he sustains his life by means that are quite pure." (Tevijja Sutta, Digha Nikaya 1:47:49)

A passage in Buddhist ethics now much stressed is called “The Four Brahma Viharas” or Brahma Dwellings. While directed to *bhikkhus* it applies to laymen as well. It prescribes meditation upon *medha*, *karuna*, *mudita*, and *upekha*, namely, loving-kindness, compassion, good-will, and equanimity. These appear in a list of forty *kasinas* or objects of mental concentration. Yet they are not simply passive virtues or idle thoughts. In Buddhist ethics, thinking and volition are considered as acts having force and producing consequences, – a thought is a kind of deed. At the same time the person practicing *medha*, *karuna* and *mudita* does not become emotionally attached to others. The fourth *viharas*. equanimity, guards the meditator against any clinging to or involvement with beings or existence.

Asked Buddha:

“And how, Vasettha is his (monk’s) conduct good...? He lets his mind pervade one quarter of the world with thoughts of loving-kindness....one quarter of the world with thoughts of compassion, and one quarter of the world with thoughts of good-will, and one quarter with thoughts of equanimity. And thus the whole wide world, above, below, around, and everywhere, does he continue to pervade with thoughts of medha, karuna, mudita and equanimity, far-reaching, grown great and beyond measure. Just as, Vasettha, a mighty trumpeter makes himself heard in all the four directions..... Verily this, Vasettha, is the way to a state of union with Brahma.... That the bhikkhu who is free from household cares should, after death, become united with Brahma, who is the same, – such a condition of things is every way possible,” (Tevijja Sutta, v. 43, 76, 78, 79, 81, from the “Sacred Books of the Buddhists” Vol. II, London, Oxford U Press, 1899)

Said Prof. T.W. Rhys Davids, “This is the only Sutta among the thirteen translated in this volume in which the discourse does not lead up to arahantship. It leads up only to the so-called *Brahma Viharas* – the supreme conditions – the four states of mind held to

result after death in a rebirth in the heavenly worlds of Brahma..... The Jataka Commentary in numerous passages states that the four Brahma Viharas were practiced long before the time of the rise of Buddhism by the sages of old.... It should be recollected that the argument here is only an argumentum ad hominem. If you want union with Brahma –which you had better not want –this is the way to attain to it.” (Sacred Books of the Buddhists”, Vol.II, Introduction p. 298).

Buddhism teaches non-violence; hatred is considered one of the cardinal sins. An example is found in the case of the monk Purna who wished to preach the Doctrine to the wild Suner tribe. Buddha asked Purna:

“If they beat you with their hands and stones, what will you think?”

“I will think they are kind and good men, since they do not attack me with clubs and swords.”

“And if they attack you with swords and clubs?”

“I will think they are kind and good since they do not kill me.”

“And if they kill you?”

“I will certainly think they are kind and good since they deliver me with so little pain from this vile body.”

“Very well then, Purna,” replied Buddha, “with such perfect patience you are allowed to fix your abode in the country of these violent men. Go, Purna, yourself delivered, deliver others.” (Majjhima Nikaya 145)

In this limited space it has not been possible to do more than high-light a few characteristic features of Buddhist ethics. Mere mention in passing can be made of the existence of passages on heavens as rewards and hells as punishments for the morally good and the bad. There is evidence that laymen, and especially lay women, are prone to adopt a popular version of the Middle Way and to seek rebirth – not in Nirvana and not in

hell – but in this world and under more favorable circumstances. One regrets the necessity of discussing so briefly the extensive passages on ethics found in the Buddhist Tripitaka.

II. The key word in Christian ethics is “love”, *agape*, to distinguish it from sensual love, *eros*; and love, *philia*, ‘to like or be friendly to,’

“Love, *agape*, does no ill to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”

(Romans 13:10)

But love, *agape*, in the Christian sense is not as passive as the above verse seems to indicate. There is an element of self-sacrifice in it. The term love includes many of the characteristics of *medha*, *karuna*, and also overtones of “devotion to, promoting the well-being of,” to a degree beyond mere thought or beyond mere restraint of self.

The two foci in the Christian word “love” consist of “God-neighbor.” Said John,

“We love because He (God) first loved us.” (I John 4:19)

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...” (John 3:16)

In one of his letters John wrote, “If any one says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen....He who loves God should love his brother also.” (I John 4:20-21)

Thus to understand Christian ethics it is helpful to know what is meant by the word “love”; to note that God is in the background if not in the foreground of ethical discussion; and to observe that Christian ethics is predominantly social ethics, exercised by man in community. The Lord’s Prayer taught by Jesus:

“Our Father....forgive us our debts as we forgive others.....” (Matt. 6:9-12)

expresses concern for others, and is to be uttered by groups as well as individuals.

The origin of the Ten Commandments is found in the intervention of God in history at Mt. Sinai. (Exodus 20:1-17) The Decalogue contains the familiar:

No. 6 You shall not kill.

No. 7 You shall not commit adultery.

No. 8 You shall not steal.

No. 9 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

No. 10 You shall not covet your neighbor's house....wife, servants, ox, ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.

Here there is social concern, – for the welfare of our neighbors. A man has a right to seek a wife, and material goods, – but not his neighbor's!

The first four Commandments, considered fundamental, deal with man's relation to God:

No. 1 Worship only God.

No. 2 Do not make and worship images of God.

No. 3 Speak of God with sincerity and reverence.

No. 4 Keep the Sabbath day for rest and worship.

No. 5 Honor your father and mother.

Commandment No. 5 did not lead to ancestor worship (thanks to No. 1) but it did contribute to the stability of the home and of society. It may be noted that the Decalogue contains "commandments," not to be thought of as precepts but as commands from God. Christianity holds that the Moral Law is not one aspect of natural law, automatic cause-and-effect, but that Moral Law is juridical, involving justice rendered to persons by a just God who is a Person and who stands in personal relationship with people.

The Ten Commandments are the best known of the hundreds of religious and moral laws in the Old Testament of the Bible. In addition to the Ten Commandments, two other laws which Jesus called the summary of the whole body of laws are:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” (Deuteronomy 6:4)

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Leviticus 19:18)

When Jesus was asked:

“Which is the great commandment in the Law?” he answered by quoting, ‘You shall love the Lord your God’....This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments depend all the law. (Matthew 22:36-40)

The word “love”, *agape*, is common to both commands and unites them into one rule, “Love God, – love neighbors.” This command is not a vague generality, “Love humanity,” but specific, “Love your neighbor”, i.e., persons you have contact with or knowledge of. Love specific persons. “Love your enemies,” said Jesus,

“Do well to those who hate you, bless these who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

To him who strikes you on one cheek, offer him the other also.” (Luke 6:27-29)

This does not limit one to:

Love *only* neighbors, near neighbors. Jesus told of a Samaritan, who was a foreigner, who helped a stranger that had been robbed and injured by bandits. The Samaritan enacted the role of a good neighbor toward a total stranger. Neighbors are specific people, needy people, whether they live near or far. (Luke 10:29-37)

The principle of Non-violence is included in the above teaching, ‘Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you.’ The ethical principles of Buddhism and Christianity approach each other closely at this point.

Jesus’ *Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 5-7) contains many moral teachings which find close parallels in Buddhism. The Sermon begins with “The Beatitudes”:

“Blessed are the meek.... the merciful.... the pure in heart ...the peacemakers.”

To Christians the “blessedness”, *sukha*, consists of both God’s approval, – and good consequences for man. Said Jesus:

“Every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment.” (Matt. 5:22)

Anger is condemned because it is poisonous, destructive to others as well as to the heart which contains it.

Immorality is a bar to communion with God and to sincere devotion.

“If you are offering your gift at the altar and remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother And then come and offer your gift.”(v. 23, 24)

Thus right relations with fellow men are necessary to right relations with God.

Jesus taught that evil thoughts are akin to evil acts and lead to evil results. This teaching is familiar to Buddhists. Said Jesus:

“Every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in heart.” (v. 28)

Is right thinking important? Where are your thoughts? Where they are, you are, Said Jesus:

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Matthew 6:19-21)

Can a young man attain perfection? Is worldly wealth an obstacle? A young man asked Jesus, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?”

Jesus replied: "Keep the commandments."

Young man: "All these I have observed, what lack I yet?"

Jesus: "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor... and come, follow me." (Matt. 19:16-21)

This was the way of renunciation. But Jesus did not establish an order of monks, or advocate celibacy for his followers. Therefore his moral teachings form a single code applicable to all, male and female, rich and poor, (Matt. 19:4, 24; Luke 16:22, 23)

This had important consequences. It led Paul to say:

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

And the Apostle Peter said:

"Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." (Acts 10:35)

It was this concept of the equality of all men and all nations under the law of God that led to the development of democratic principles of government and to the charter of the United Nations. Small nations as well as large have a vote and a hearing.

The teaching of renunciation found in Buddhism occurs also in Christianity but with an added emphasis on sacrifice for service to mankind. Jesus taught this by precept but even more by example. He said:

"Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave: even as the Son of Man (Jesus) came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:26-27)

Shortly before his death by crucifixion Jesus said,

"I lay down my life for the sheep (people) ...No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord: (John 10:15, 18)

When at the last supper he wished to impart a final lesson to his disciples, and he saw that the lesson needed to be on humility and service, he took water and a towel and washed his disciples' feet. (John 13:5) At that meal Jesus gave them a final commandment:

"A new commandment I give to you: that you love one another even as I have loved you." (John 13:34)

This was a new dimension in love, *agape*....love that sacrificed life. Christian ethics is summarized:

"Love is the fulfilling of the Law." (Romans 13:10)

In our discussion we have seen that Buddhism and Christianity are in close agreement in several respects. Indeed parallel teachings on some points are so striking and numerous that some people have suspected mutual borrowing. Serious scholars dismiss this possibility as unlikely because the two religions are too disparate in origin and development.

We observed that both religions rely on reason and experience. They also rely upon faith. This will be discussed in Lecture III together with the practical aim of both religions, – to help man out of his moral predicament.

Buddhism:

"Beings obstructed by delusion, ensnared by craving,...therefore they come to ever fresh rebirth." (Majjhima Nikaya 43)

Christianity:

"I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin...wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:23-24)

We note that both religions hold human life and thought to be of transcendent importance.

Buddhism: “All that we are is the result of our thoughts.” (Buddhaghosha’s Parables 1)

Christianity: “*For out of the heart come evil thoughts murder, adultery...these are what defile a man.*” (Matt 15:19)

And in the field of ethics we see both religions upholding moral values.

Buddhism: “He who possesses virtue and intelligence, who is just, speaks the truth...the world will hold dear.” (Dhammapada 217)

Christianity: “*He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*” (Micah 6:8)

Upholding morality, mindful of tolerance and love, the followers of the two religions can and do enjoy a wide area of mutual understanding.

LECTURE III

PRESENT-DAY SOCIETY, MORALS, AND FAITH

A. A NEW WORLD CULTURE

Today man and religions are immersed in a new scientific age which is totally different from anything known in the past. Buddhism and Christianity arose in an era of shepherds and farmers. There were cities at that time, but they were supported by agriculture. Now, in many countries, farmers constitute a minority, and the cities are supported by industry and commerce.

How does this new era affect the religious thinking of man? Urban man, looking out of a tenth-story window, is “lord of all he surveys” – almost. The factories and complex machinery within them, – he built them. He built the great universities, wrote the textbooks, and equipped the science laboratories. The hospitals are his; he found the means to banish malaria and to make plastic valves for human hearts. He turns from nature to the laboratory to compound food as well as medicine. And the changes he has brought about in his own environment and mode of living have brought changes in his religious thinking.

Moreover, these changes are becoming common property of all peoples, so that all cultures are moving toward a central, common world civilization. The two-score or more newly independent countries in Africa are not going back to their old tribal cultures. They want universities, modern hospitals, factories and a high standard of living. Everywhere in society today there is an interweaving of ideas and technology, like multicolored threads in a fabric of rich and complicated design. In 1868, when Dr. Daniel McGilvary reached Chiangmai after a three-months’ journey from Bangkok, he and his family were so *foreign*

to the life of the city that no one knew what to do with them. In the absence of hotels, they lived in an open sala. The Chao Fah (Prince) of Chiangmai wanted only to get rid of them. Today, is anything foreign to Chiangmai? Radios, television, motor cars, air travel, universities, all these, and every new idea, belong to Chiangmai, are a part of its civilization. Dr. McGilvary's sala is gone because that era is gone. The culture of Chiangmai today is a world culture: it is not only accepted, it is welcomed.

Modern man, looking out of his tenth story window, has self-assurance, and conceit. He measures all things in terms of himself. He is inclined to consider "real" only those things he can measure and test in the laboratory. Such nebulous things as moral and spiritual forces and human personality tend to put him off because he doesn't quite know what to do about them. True, he is sobered by the fact of death, and troubled by his failure to control human events, moral behavior, esthetic and emotional reactions, human aspirations, and all those things which determine the quality, mood and direction of individual lives, – the stuff which determines whether life is worth living. For these human or personal reasons some men turn to religion to obtain meaning and direction in life, and moral guidance. And some men, for good fortune, resort to astrology, magic charms, lucky numbers, and spirit shrines. Being human, men can be both scientific and superstitious, and believe that luck, good or bad, plays a part in their lives.

Two features of life in great man-made cities now disturb us. One is the lack of meaning in life as man molds it. Modern authors are frequently praised for their craftsmanship, and then told: "But you have nothing to say." One reads their novels about barren lives and then asks, "So what?" What is the message, the significance, the challenge, the hope portrayed in the lives of the characters in the story? What is the value, the goal, of life thus described?

The other disturbing feature of big city life is the fact of evil. Newspapers report annual increases in crime despite ever more scientific methods of police patrol. There are

those who claim that religion is a hindrance to justice, sane ethics and good morals. This is not true of Buddhism and Christianity which are ethical religions. The adherents who are truly devout are zealous to keep the moral precepts. Conversely, those who shrug off moral absolutes and religious precepts are likely to rely upon social expediency, or hedonism, or their own rectitude for standards of personal conduct. Moral corruption is apt to accompany opportunism, an over-weaning concern for self.

Buddhism and Christianity do speak to the moral condition of man in the world of today: the need for obedience to law, for justice, for public service, for self-discipline, compassion, good will, inner peace and for world peace.

B. THE BUDDHIST APPROACH

Buddhism offers man an ethical code backed by religious sanctions and based on moral absolutes set forth in the Dharma. Morality is not the chief end of man but a means to an end, the *sine quanon* of attaining the highest goal or final release, namely Nirvana.

Said Buddha to his disciples: “Come, O bhikkhus, well taught is the doctrine. Lead a holy life for the sake of the complete extinction of suffering.” (Maharaja 1:24:4)

The Moral Law is an absolute, that is, it operates inexorably and is quite independent of the mores of men and society. It is an extension of the physical law of cause and effect into the realm of morals. Good actions produce good results. Presumably the result must be known or foreseen before an action can be labeled good or bad. However, in such a system of inevitable consequences the question may arise whether the term “justice” applies to Karma, – to interactions and processes seemingly impersonal. But the realm of morals *is* deemed a reality, and its bearing upon man’s existential condition is given full weight.

The religious sanctions for the laity are the moral precepts and rites, ceremonies, and *suttas* prescribed for individual and corporate or temple observance, and the goal of

rebirth in any of the 31 stages of existence which include earth, heavens, hells, and Nirvana. The monks, following more fully the example of Buddha, presumably focus more attention upon the goal of Nirvana. Their monastic regimen enjoins poverty, celibacy, and the observance of the 227 Patimokha Rules and other regulations.

Each monk and layman achieves his religious goal by his own efforts, at his own pace. In this quest there is a certain solitariness. Though he is in a monastery he follows a path of meditation and concentration as an individual. His moral concern is to break the causal chain at the link of Desire thereby ending karmic action and at the same time freeing his mind from hindrances that impede enlightenment or realization of Truth. Concerning reliance upon self, Buddha said:

“Therefore be ye lamps unto yourselves. Be a refuge unto yourselves. Betake yourselves to no eternal refuge.” (Digha Nikaya 16:26)

Combining moral conduct with solitariness:

“Without covetousness, without deceit, without craving, without distraction, having got rid of passion and folly, being free from desire in all the world, let one wander alone like a rhinoceros.

Having left son and wife, father and mother, wealth and gain, and relatives, and the different objects of desire, let one wander alone like a rhinoceros.” (Sutta Nipata, Thera Gatha 137).

Buddhist ethics also include concern for the welfare of others. Monks are urged to teach the Dharma; laymen are encouraged to be benevolent. To the monks Buddha said:

“Go ye forth on the mission that is for the good of the many,
For the happiness of the many, to take compassion on the world,
To work profit and good and happiness to gods and men. Go not singly, go in

pairs.

Teach ye the truth.” (Digha Nikaya 14:22)

Buddhism was a missionary religion from the beginning. Both monks and laymen carried it from Maghada (Bihar) to all parts of India, and to Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, and elsewhere, The *Sangha* is the repository of the *Dharma*, the Teaching Order that imparts the *Dharma* to others.

Laymen are encouraged to give, – to give to the support of the *Sangha* and to extend both good will and tangible benefactions unto others. It is a moral requirement, and one yielding great reward in merit for the donor.

“To him who gives shall virtue be increased?” (Digha Nikaya, Mahaparinibbana Sutta, 11:135)

The amount of merit resulting from donations depends in part upon the spirit in which the donor bestows his benefactions.

Said Buddha:

“Now Prince Payasi, inasmuch as he had bestowed his gift without thoroughness, not with his own hands...was reborn into the communion of the Four Great Kings in the empty mansion of the Acacia. But the youth Uttara... who had bestowed his gift thoroughly, with his own hands was after his death reborn in a bright and happy world, into the communion of the Thirty-three Gods.” (Digha Nikaya, Payasi Sutta, II: 354-356)

The amount of merit depends also upon the worthiness of the recipient. Gifts to animals yield some merit, to evil men somewhat more, to good men still more, to monks far more, and to Buddha most of all. Beneficiaries are classified under fourteen headings, but no reference is made to their degree of need. (Majjhima Nikaya, Vibhangha Vagga, Dakkhina-Vibhanga Sutta)

There is a “rightness” about giving that is affirmed by the glow of inner satisfaction that comes to the donor. And yet it is difficult to separate giving from self-interest, so closely is merit-making associated with offerings.

Prince Vessantara set the supreme example of meritorious giving by relinquishing all that he had including his throne and his family.

“It was for the sake of supreme wisdom and of the treasure thereof that he (Vessantara) gave gifts so immense...He uttered the verse: ‘Jali my son, and Kenghajina my daughter, and my Queen, my wife Maddi, I gave them all away without a thought – And ‘twas for Buddhahood I did this thing.’” (The Questions of King Melinda IV: 1, 37)

Prince Vessantara was able to give away everything he had except his merit. While merit can be transferred to others, e.g., to deceased parents, yet by this very act of generosity more merit is made.

Benevolent giving has moral significance both for this life and for the life to come. In telling of former times when he was a great ruler, Buddha said:

“Thereupon, monks, I had this thought, ‘This is the ripening of three deeds, – that I am now of such mighty power and majesty, namely, deeds of charity, self-control, and abstinence.’” (Khuddaka Patha, Itivuttaka 1:33:11)

Charity and benevolence have social implications; abstinence and self-control are moral disciplines associated with solitariness and detachment, *upekha*. Meditation and concentration may accompany detachment, and may be practiced by laymen as well as monks. It is in the exercise of these that disciples seek ultimate reality and that which is of highest significance in life.

Release from life’s suffering and constant round of rebirths requires detachment from life’s concerns and urges. So difficult is renunciation of these that monks seriously

engaged in the attempt are held in high esteem. Numerous sections of the *Tripitaka* give encouragement to those who would practice detachment, *upekha*.

“He whose mind is not shaken when he is touched by the things of the world, but remains free from sorrow, free from defilement, and secure, this is the highest blessing.” (Sutta Nipata, Kulavagga, Mahamangala Sutta)

“Visakha, whoso have a hundred things beloved, they have a hundred sorrows...Whoso Have but one thing beloved, have but one sorrow. Whoso have no thing beloved, they have no sorrow. Sorrowless are they, and passionless.”

(Khuddaka Patha, Udana Sutta VIII: 8)

As for self-control or self-discipline, it is implicit and explicit in the Eight fold Path, in all passages prescribing meditative practices, and in the numerous teachings having to do with rational and psychological processes of thought. The attainment of self-discipline depends ultimately upon man’s will power. The truly strong can succeed.

“When evil and unworthy thoughts arise in the mind, images of lust, hatred, and infatuation, the monk must win from these thoughts other and worthy images...If in spite of these efforts, evil thoughts and images still rise in his mind, he should let them go to pieces one by one...If this method does not succeed, then with teeth pressed against each other, with his tongue pressed against his gums, he should by the exertion of his will overthrow, press down, destroy these evil thoughts.”

(Majjhima Nikaya, Sihanada Vagga, Vitakka Santhana Sutta)

Pre-occupation with self necessarily attends rigorous practices of moral and mental discipline.

“How does a monk become self-possessed? He acts in full presence of mind whatever he may do, in going out or coming in, in looking forward or in looking around, in bending his arm or stretching it forth, in wearing his robes or carrying

his bowl, in masticating or smelling, in walking or standing or sitting, in sleeping or waking, in talking or being silent.” (Digha Nikaya XV1:13)

Mental concentration, *samadhi* is practiced to bring the mind under control, that is, to free it from wandering thoughts and vagrant distractions, and to obtain true insight. Forty *kasinas*, objects or subjects of contemplation, are prescribed for the attainment of mental control and force. Yoga postures and practices may accompany the meditative process.

“Mindfulness by breathing is very fruitful and profitable. It perfects the four bases of mindfulness, which, being perfected, perfect the seven factors of enlightenment, which, being perfected, perfect in turn deliverance by comprehension,” (Majjhima Nikaya, Anupada Vagga, Anapanasati Sutta)

“Deliverance by comprehension” is the essential element in Buddhist salvation or release from suffering. Morality contributes to mental tranquility, but final release, the attainment of arahantship, comes by intuitive knowledge, – a sudden realization of truth.

“He knows things as they really are: ‘These are the *asavas*’ (desire, existence, ignorance). He knows as it really is; ‘This is the origin of *asavas*, this is the extinction of *asavas*’ He knows as it really is: ‘This is the path leading to the extinction of the *asavas*.’ In him, thus set free, there arises the knowledge of his freedom, and he realizes: ‘Rebirth is no more. I have lived the pure life. I have done what ought to be done. I have nothing more to do for the realization of arahantship. This is the bhikku’s knowledge (*vijja*).’” (Digha Nikaya, Silakkandha Vagga, Ambattha Sutta 8)

The knowledge here mentioned includes the doctrine of *anatta*, no-ego, no-abiding-self. Said Buddha:

“Moreover, Meghiya...in order to excise (evil) thoughts the monk must practice inhalations and exhalations. For the removal of pride which says, ‘I am’ he must exercise himself in the consciousness of impermanence. By the consciousness of impermanence, the consciousness of non-self is established; he who is conscious of non-self succeeds in the removal of the notion, ‘I am’, and in this very existence attains to Nirvana.” (Khuddaka Nikaya, Udana IV: 1)

”You have to see and fully know...that no form, no feeling, no perception, no constituents (*sankharas*) no consciousness...is either ‘mine’ or ‘I’ or ‘self-of-mine’. (Majjhima Nikaya Devadaha Vagga, Maha Punnama Sutta)

Such knowledge includes an understanding of the full implications of the Dharma including the unreality of nearly all that man sees and thinks.

“And again, Patthapada, the monk by passing quite beyond the consciousness of the infinity of cognition, thinking: ‘There is nothing that really is,’ reaches up to and remains in the mental state in which the mind is concerned only with the unreality of things,...And there arises in him a consciousness, subtle but yet actual, of unreality as the object of his thought...He goes on from one stage to the next....And when he is at the summit it may occur to him. ‘To be thinking at all is an inferior state. It were better not to be thinking....so I will neither think nor fancy any more.’ And he does not....so he falls into trance.”(Digha Nikaya, Pithead Sutta, 15-17)

Both in the attainment of Enlightenment and of Parinirvana, Buddha passed through a series of meditative trances, *dhyana*. (Majjhima Nikaya, Mula-Pariyaya Vagga, Samma Ditthi Sutta and Mahaparinibbana Sutta 5).

There is not time to discuss what is meant by Nirvana. The trend today is to speak of Nirvana as a state of abiding, form-less bliss. Description falters, we are told, because the language of this world does not apply to Nirvana which is wholly “other.”

“Monks, there exists that condition wherein there is neither earth nor water nor fire nor air; wherein...is no coming to birth, no going, no duration, no falling, no arising. It is not something fixed, it moves not on, it is not based on anything. Just this is the end of suffering: (Khuddaka Patha, Udana 8:1)

Buddhist writers frequently say that Buddhism is based upon reason and therefore is not dependent upon *faith*. However, great reliance is placed upon faith when accepting Buddhist views of man’s past and future and the many teachings that cannot be tested empirically. Recognizing this, one writer said, “Buddhism would sweep the world – if the doctrine of Rebirth could be proved.”

The first step in becoming a Buddhist is an act of faith. It is to say: “I go for refuge to the Buddha....to the Dhamma...to the Order.” This commitment is made by:

“those who have faith in the Buddha...
those who have faith in the Dhamma...
those who have faith in the Order.” (Khuddaka Patha, Itivuttaka 3:5, 1)

Faith is placed first in the list of “The Five Moral Powers,” which are”

Faith, Energy, Thought, Contemplation, and Wisdom. (Digha Mahaparinibbana Sutta 2:120)

To adopt the life of a bhikkhu, the way of renunciation, requires faith. Said Buddha:

“Was it not for faith’s sake, Phagguna that you went forth from a comfortable home to homelessness as a pilgrim?” Phagguna: “Yes, Lord.” (Majjhima Nikaya, Opama Vagga, Kakacupama Sutta)

To follow Buddha as the Teacher and exemplar requires faith.

Said Buddha: “Herein is a monk full of faith: he has faith in the Enlightenment of the Truth-finder, thinking: ‘Indeed this Lord is the perfected one.’” (Majjhima Nikaya 2:95:128)

As if to answer doubts concerning the doctrine of rebirth, Buddha said:

“I am your surety (guarantor) for not returning (be reborn).” (Khuddaka Patha, Itivuttaka I: 1:1)

Steadfast perseverance in the Eightfold Path requires steadfast faith. Said Buddha:

“And further, O monks, when a monk does not doubt in the system of belief, is not uncertain regarding it, has confidence in it, and has faith in it, then his mind inclines to zeal, exertion, perseverance, and struggle.” (Digha Nikaya, Ketokhila Sutta 16)

“But if faith comes to have vanished, then disbelief sets in, stays, then there is stepping in of wrong.” (Anguttara Nicaya 3:5)

The man who said, “I will attain Release by my own efforts, even if it takes me a million rebirths,” had faith in himself, faith that his own entity would continue indefinitely, faith that he could sever the causal chain of *sansara* by “works,” i.e., his own efforts, and faith that supreme knowledge resided within him ready to be realized under proper conditions. He who plans for the future ventures by faith.

The psychologist C.G. Jung said: “Modern consciousness shudders at faith and therefore also at those religions based on it.” Often those who shudder at such faith accept

without question various beliefs about luck, fate and destiny which come from their social group or from childhood conditioning. However much they may deprecate such departures from strict logic and attribute them to mere whimsy, they yet illustrate the point that men do not in fact live and think solely by reason. Faith and emotion also are determining factors.

C. THE CHRISTIAN APPROACH.

Without hesitation Christians refer to their religion as a faith. They do not consider theirs a blind faith but that which is born of reason, insight, and experience. What has faith to do with morals? Christians hold that true faith undergirds morality, that without God man is morally unstable, self-centered, opportunistic, and lacking in enduring ethical principles. The moral absolutes of Christianity are considered to have divine origin. Man's moral corruption is held to be the end result of alienation from God.

The first five books of the Bible are *The Books of the Law*, the moral law of God. Christians believe that He who created the cosmos also created the physical and moral laws that structure the cosmos and make it operative, The Creator and Law Giver is also the supreme Witness and Judge of all creation. "Thou, God, seest me!" haunts the evil doer. The Psalmist, thinking of God's omniscience, said:

"If I say, 'The dark will screen me, the night will hide me,' Yet darkness is not dark to Thee, the night is as clear as daylight." (Psalm 139:11, 12. Moffat)

Christian ethics is founded upon moral and religious concepts dating back over three millennia. Biblical writers hold that true morality consists of obedience to God's laws. The primeval wrong-doing was man's disobedience in the Garden of Eden. The man and woman ate of the forbidden fruit, not because they were hungry, but because they wanted to "be as gods" and to do as they wished. Their disobedience brought them exile and insecurity, – their Creator and Judge had beheld their misdeeds. (Genesis 3) Their son

Cain, also self-willed, killed his younger brother Abel. Even before the crime, Cain's moral conduct and religious practices had met God's disapproval.

"Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground... But for Cain and his offering, God had no regard. So Cain was very angry. The Lord said to Cain: 'If you do well, will you not be accepted?... Sin is crouching at the door, but you must master it.'" (Genesis 4:3-7)

Right worship requires a right attitude. To approach God the worshipper must take thought to cleanse his heart and to be penitent in God's presence. To repent is to acknowledge that self-will is self-defeating and must be supplanted by God's will. True moral values are those approved of God. The aim of Christian ethics is not expressed in terms of human happiness and highest good, but in terms of God's will. True piety does not focus attention on self but on God. For any individual the possibility may arise that he will be called to a life of sacrifice for others. The concept of sacrifice, of vicarious suffering for others, is woven inextricably into the fabric of Christianity.

And yet, paradoxically, man's highest good and greatest happiness are to be found in the will of God, – for His will is highest good, and His wisdom is ever supreme. The paradoxes of Christianity have an other-worldly sound, and yet they ring true to human experience:

"He who would save his life must lose it."

"To be great is to be as a servant."

"It is more blessed to give than to receive."

"Love, and feed, your enemies."

Modern man seeks an ethic that meets the deepest needs of human personality in this age of advanced learning, of mass movements and vast impersonal forces. He seeks and an ethic that will not become out-moded in swift-changing modern society where

populations increase with frightening rapidity. Christianity believes that God's moral laws are appropriate for every culture and every age, and that they apply to man in solitude as well as in society. God "knows what is in man," what he can and should do.

In the crowded world that lies ahead, proper human relationships will be of first importance. The Commandment termed *great* by Jesus is relevant to such a teeming, jostling world: "*Love God and love your neighbor.*" That is, give true devotion to that which is Highest; give loving service to your neighbor, your city, your country, and to all mankind.

In Christianity *faith* is a rich and vigorous word supported by experience and history. Faith is conviction based on and going beyond reason and experience. Faith is an act of understanding and will; it is commitment of one's life to a Way or to a Person. By faith man sets energies in motion: to open the hand to receive blessings, to open the mind to new values, to point the feet toward worthy goals.

"Whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists, and that He rewards those who seek Him.

Without faith it is impossible to please Him." (Hebrews 11:6)

Here faith means not only "faith in," or trust, but "faithful to." Christian faith undergirds Christian ethics.

"The righteous shall live by faith," said the Apostle Paul the foremost New Testament theologian. *"Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness,"* Abraham, *"the father of all who believe."* (Romans 1:17; Romans 4:9, 11)

Can faith be a form of righteousness? To grasp what this concept has meant to Christians of all generations one must go back in human history to Abraham and the beginnings of Christianity 3,600 years ago. The reference is to human historical experience. Hebrew boasts that they are descendants of Abraham, that he was their

physical and spiritual father. Arab Mohammedans make the same boast, – they are children of Abraham through his son Ishmael. Both Arabs and Jews are Semites. As for Christians, the first verse in the Christian New Testament reads:

“The books of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” (Matt.1:1)

Abraham is a revered archetypal figure in the Hebrew Scriptures, in the Koran of the Mohammedans, and in the Christian Bible. Present day Jordan and Israel were once Abraham’s homeland. His descendants are still there. This calls to mind the covenant that God made with Abraham long ago:

“I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and made your name great.” (Genesis 12:2)

It was God who would make Abraham great. God said:

“I will give to you and to your descendants after you...all the land of Canaan (Israel) for an everlasting possession.” (Genesis 17:8)

God acts in history. This promise which Abraham experienced and accepted by faith is now a political reality. But when God made the promise Abraham was old and had no son. Therefore Abraham asked:

“O Lord, what will you give me, for I continue childless?” (Genesis 15:2)

God replied: *“Your own son shall be your heir. Count the stars if you can, so shall your descendants be.” (Genesis 15:4, 5)*

Then follows the Biblical statement that religious teachers treasured through the centuries:

“Abraham believed the Lord, and He reckoned it to Abraham as righteousness.”

(v. 6)

Karl Barth points out that Abraham had faith in a God who was faithful to His promises. (A shorter Commentary on Romans P.53.1960) It was after Abraham's acceptance of God's word by faith that Abraham became the father of Isaac and Ishmael, – of the Hebrews and the Arabs. The significant point is: Abraham's act of faith was a righteous act, a moral act. This achievement of faith did not involve elaborate worship ceremonies or strict adherence to numerous ecclesiastical regulations. It did not require renunciation, monastic vows, or munificent donations. By faith in a righteous God, by faith expressed in obedience to the Word of God, Abraham was termed righteous. God's *word* includes the moral commands of God given in times past as well as the guidance God gives to individuals in their needs today. God still speaks. He is a God who reveals His will to man.

Here one sees a distinctive feature of Christian morality: righteousness comes with right relationship with righteous God. By faith in and association with God one becomes infused with the Spirit of God. The Apostle Paul said:

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”

(Galatians 5:22)

An act of faith is an act of will. A man does not become a saint against his will. But if a man, although corrupt, is willing to receive God's Spirit, to receive “this treasure in earthen vessels’ (2 Cor. 4:7) by an act of faith, then he welcomes the transformation God's Spirit works within him. His faith is a response to God, not simply an idea about God. It is then that he is enabled to become, by God's help, truly or fully human. He attains a new spiritual stature because he is, as the Apostle Paul said, “*a new creation.*” (2 Cor. 5:17)

“For by grace you been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God.” (Ephesians 2:8)

The disciples of Jesus saw universal significance in the supreme test put to Abraham: Would he obey God to the extent of offering up his son Isaac as a sacrifice? As Abraham journeyed three days to Moriah, the place of sacrifice, his troubled heart was sustained by one conviction, – God was righteous, and just. At the scene of the sacrifice the boy Isaac said,

“Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the offering?” Abraham replied: “God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” (Genesis 22:7, 8)

And God did, and Isaac lived, and Abraham’s faith in God was vindicated. Long after, in New Testament times, John said of Christ:

“Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29)

John and his hearers believed that man could not, unaided, divest himself of his own evil and guilt. Only sacrifice, vicarious suffering, God’s help, could do it. Paul spoke for universal man when he said:

“I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing that I hate... I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.” (Romans 7:15, 18)

Paul’s discovery was a new righteousness achieved by faith in God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

“Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 7:24)

“For God has done what the Law....could not do, sending his own Son.” (Romans 8:3)

“All this is from God who through Christ reconciled us to himself....so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:18, 21)

God took the initiative with Abraham. God again took the initiative through Jesus Christ to reach the descendants of Abraham. Those who saw in Jesus the image of the invisible God could more readily seek reconciliation with God.

The Christian Gospel, the Good News, in essence is Jesus Christ. When man asks: Does human life has significance? Does thought, does moral effort have meaning? Christianity says yes, – the affirmative answer is found in Jesus Christ.

In an upper room in Jerusalem twelve disciples met with Jesus to observe the sacred rites of the Passover. The shadow over the supper was the impending death of Jesus. He could have avoided that death, but accepted it as necessary for mankind. What final word had he for his disciples? What he then did affirmed the worth of man more conclusively than anything he said.

He took a towel and a basin of water and washed the disciples’ feet, – over their protests. He took bread, broke it, and gave each one a portion saying: *“This is my body....broken for you.”* (I Corinthians 11:24) He took the wine cup and said. *“This is my blood...poured out...”* (Matthew 26:28) One disciple, Judas, whose feet had been washed, betrayed Jesus that night for thirty pieces of silver. Another disciple, Peter, before dawn denied that he had ever known Jesus. All twelve men deserted Jesus before the unjust trial that took place the next morning. They were ordinary men, like ourselves perhaps. Jesus died that Friday, voluntarily, by crucifixion, and his body was put in a tomb. He died beyond all doubt. Then followed the unexpected.

Two days later some women disciples took spices to the garden, found the tomb empty and hurried home to report it. *“Their words seemed to the apostles as idle tales, and*

they did not believe them.” (Luke 24:11) Thomas heard that Jesus had risen from the dead and had appeared to the other disciples. But Thomas did not believe it, and said that he would not believe it unless he himself saw Jesus and could put his finger into the spear wound in Jesus’ side. (John 20:25) Cleopas and another disciple talked of the death of Jesus, and of their dead hopes, as they walked seven miles to their home in Emmaus. But along the way they met Jesus, alive. He talked with them at length, and sat down to eat with them, then left. Although weary, the two men rose up and walked the seven miles back to Jerusalem to report the incredible event – that Jesus had appeared to them. In Jerusalem they met equally astonished disciples who said that Jesus had appeared also to Simon and others. (Luke 24:13-35) Then Jesus appeared to doubting Thomas that prostrated himself before Jesus saying, *“My Lord and my God!”* (John 20:28)

What of Judas, the betrayer? Judas gave back the thirty pieces of silver and went out and hanged himself. And Peter, who denied Jesus? Peter became a new man, an active, courageous, lifelong witness to the resurrection of Jesus. Peter died for his faith in Rome. The other disciples likewise braved death to witness the resurrection. Paul, a highly educated official in Jerusalem, at first hated Christians and persecuted them to the death thinking he was doing God’s will. But Paul on the way to Damascus met Jesus, – and thereafter Paul became the most influential of witnesses to the resurrection for Jesus. Paul suffered long imprisonment and at last execution in Rome for the Christian faith.

The early Christian disciples were common people with an uncommon experience. To their own great astonishment they had witnessed the return of Jesus from the dead. This strange event became the greatest reality of their lives. *“This Jesus,”* they said, *“God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.”* (Acts 2:32) Witnesses in spite of themselves, Paul Tillich expressed their message: “We only want to show you something we have seen, and to tell you something we have heard.”

The Crucifixion, in which Jesus asked God to forgive his enemies, and the resurrection, why did they take place? The apostles remembered the words of Jesus when he washed their feet: *“What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand.”* (John 13:7) It was something done for them. And they recalled his words: *“This is my body...broken for you.”* Broken for them. They recalled he had said to them: *“I will come again and take you to myself.”* (John 14:3) His resurrection was for them! They were ordinary men, typical of all mankind, living in a small country in western Asia. But Jesus thought they were worth helping. Unexpectedly the disciples had witnessed God’s act of placing high value upon them, on all ordinary men, on all mankind. *“God was in Christ,”* reconciling man to himself. (2 Cor.5:19) God had life yet more abundant for them. (John 10:10)

Just as the meaning of a clock is found in a thoughtful person who uses or make clocks, so the meaning and significance of man is found in a higher intelligent being, namely God. What man can maintain that his life is significant apart from God? Significant to others, perhaps? But what if the lives of others are ultimately meaningless? Ultimate significance rests with God the author of ultimate purpose and the source of all thought.