A Comparative Analysis of Buddhism and Christianity (Part I)
- With a Focus on the Concepts of "Unattachment" in Buddhism
  and "Renunciation" in Christianity -

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In the future, it will become increasingly important for the world's religions to understand one another. With this objective in mind, this paper performs a comparison of Buddhism and Christianity, with the hope that it may contribute in some way to understanding between these great religions. Previous comparisons of Buddhism and Christianity have focused on their differences in terms of philosophy and religious doctrine. This paper discusses not only these topics, but also investigates methods of comparing the faith and religious practices of the leaders of these two religions, as these are a reflection not only of the doctrine, but also of the true state of the religion.

The analysis in this paper is based in part on a new theory developed of Yoshimitsu Kasahara, a historian of religious thought. Kasahara has come up with the theory that "Jesus Christ was a person of renunciation." The theory is that Jesus left his family, his disciples, John the Baptist, and all forms of organization in order to live in freedom.

In this paper, the same methodology that Kasahara used to analyze the life of Jesus Christ is used to compare the teachings of Jesus and Buddha. The words, life and teachings of these two leaders are analyzed from the standpoint of 3 major themes: "the family," "the teacher," and "the religion / the teachings." The analysis of Jesus is based primarily on the work of Kasahara.

The results of the comparative analysis of "the family" demonstrate that both Jesus and Buddha made the decision to leave their families and live alone in order to pursue freedom.

The results of the comparative analysis of "the teacher" demonstrate that Jesus and Buddha share a number of common traits. More specifically, both had teachers, both were not satisfied with their teachers, and as a result both eventually left their teachers. However, after leaving their teachers, Jesus and Buddha felt their teachers were superior to any other people that they had met, and for this reason
they continued to respect their teachers. Another common point in the life of the two is that prior to reaching complete faith or enlightenment, both were tempted by the devil/demons (in Buddhism this is symbolic for worldly desires). And finally, it is probably safe to say that both rejected "extreme paths" as part of religious practice/life. This receives special emphasis in Buddhism in the form of the Middle Path.

A comparative analysis of the religion / the teachings is somewhat difficult in that Jesus was not as verbal. However, according to Kasahara, if Judaism went in any particular direction on a specific subject, Jesus went in the other direction. In addition, Jesus extended this approach to the infinite level by complete renunciation. In comparison, Buddhism teaches that followers must avoid attachment to even the "teachings," and that once a follower has reached Nirvāṇa, it is acceptable to let go of Buddhism itself, and achieve freedom from attachment of all manner of things. Therefore, from this standpoint, the life chosen by Jesus and the principle of "unattachment" as exposed by Buddhism are extremely similar.

Based on the above, this paper concludes that the life of Buddha and the teachings of Buddhism are highly similar to the "renunciation" of Jesus as described by Kasahara. In addition, there is a strong semblance between "unattachment" as taught by Buddha and Buddhism, and the "renunciation" of Christ as expressed by Kasahara. It may be possible that these two teachings are actually the same in terms of substance.

(To be continued)