

Religious Comparative Study: Tolerance and Sincerity

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A New Perspective

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Abstract

Buddhism and Catholicism, although quite different, when individual aspects of both are understood and appreciated - we can form a deeper connection with our own faith. Tolerance is essential to Buddhist practice. Buddhist dharma and sutras exemplify this and have been deemed successful due to the lack of war in the name of the Buddha. In this case, tolerance is to Buddhism as sincerity is to Catholicism. Sincerity has upheld Catholic tradition for thousands of years and kept the community strong - it is the heart of the religion. Both philosophical foundations may be very different, but are certainly not mutually exclusive. For one can be a very proud believer of their religion, yet appreciate practice from another. It is important to understand concepts that go against your belief because they could open your mind to a new understanding of your own faith.

Key words: tolerance, Buddhism, sincerity, Catholicism, faith.

Introduction

At first glance, we are deceived by the large space between Buddhism and Catholicism on the spectrum of religion. It is those who put in the philosophical work that can understand the distinct relationship between the two. The core teachings of Buddhism explain that humans are inevitable to suffer from the cycle of life - we are born, we age, we suffer from illness, and we die. To escape the cycle, one must free themselves from materialistic desire. Only those who succeed will become enlightened and reach Nirvana. Nirvana cannot be described for what it is, but only for what it is not. It is not a physical place, but is a realm where enlightened beings have relocated. Life is neither existent or nonexistent in Nirvana. It is a place where enlightened beings have gone to escape inevitable suffering and materialistic craving. Catholicism's equivalent of Nirvana would be heaven. The difference is that Catholics believe heaven is a physical place. In 30 CE, Catholicism was born. Catholics trust that a strong understanding and practice of the religion will allow them to unlock the gates of heaven and be at peace in the after life. Practices include reading and a thorough understanding of the bible, engaging in prayer, attending mass, and completion of the sacrament of initiation: baptism, the first holy communion, and confirmation. Sincerity is an essential aspect of Catholicism just as tolerance is to Buddhism. These philosophical foundations provide followers of both religions with a path of how to integrate their beliefs into the real world. Sincerity refers to the high degree of trust one has with the teachings and practices of a religion. Tolerance describes one's ability to appreciate and respect beliefs and values that do not align with their own. This paper aims to explore the concept of tolerance in Buddhism by analyzing its primary teachings, delving into sutras, and understanding its doctrines; and to ponder the concept of sincerity held true by Catholics through its core principles, practices, and traditions.

I. Tolerance as a Religious Trait

I.1. The Integration of Tolerance into Buddhist Philosophy

Cambridge Dictionary defines tolerance as the, “willingness to accept behavior and beliefs that are different from your own, although you might not agree with or approve of them”. This attitude allows us to ultimately be at peace - for if we are not worried about others actions, we can allocate that time to ourselves and focus on our needs. The Dharma outlines concepts like the “Four Noble Truths” and the “Noble Eightfold Path”, which both provide helpful insight for Buddhists to escape inevitable suffering. The “Noble Eightfold Path” encourages Buddhists to act “right” in almost every aspect of their lives. It is important to note that not only shall they practice these *just* ways internally, but they are equally as important to practice externally. It is suggested that Buddhists extend their selflessness, their kindness, their open mindedness to those who fail to embrace such ways. It is suggested that Buddhists help others to escape the cycle. Not once does it express retaliation against non-believers or people belonging to differing religions. Actually, there rarely is ever mention of non-Buddhists in the sutras or Dharma because it is not a prominent issue. Even between different branches of Buddhism, we are yet to see conflict or turmoil.

I.2. The Birth of Tolerance in Buddhist Schools

Because of the large quantity of sutras needing translation in the name of the Buddha, philosophers and monks grew confused. Many were overwhelmed by the amount of information that had been released up to that time and many became, “puzzled by the tremendous volume of literature, teaching so many diverse doctrines and ideas, and were asking how one individual could preach so many sermons during one lifetime, or how one could explain the numerous

contradictions and doctrinal differences taught in the scriptures" (Chen 305). A proposed solution to this was to divide the Buddha's teachings into chronological periods. Another reason for the confusion was that Buddhism spread in two ways. One through India and another through China. The two separate birth places made it difficult for the religion to hold one true story. Both confusion factors contributed to the several branches of Buddhism that we see today: Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. These branches mustered up following and formed schools aiming to spread their teachings. To name a few: The Hua-Yen school, the T'ien-T'ai school, and the Kosa school. These schools do not compete with each other, they do not fight, and they do not show disapproval or violence. They simply focus on their mission and teaching with a mindset of, "your school is good, but my school is better". There have even been scenarios where students raise a question above a school's capacity and will be sent to a different school.

I.3. Buddhist Sutras and Parables

Many sutras reflect these ideas of tolerance. Specifically the most influential sutra in Buddhism, *The Lotus Sutra*. It aims to express the universality of Buddhahood and the *just* or *right* ways of the Buddha that guide all sentient beings to enlightenment. The *Lotus Sutra* mentions the idea of One Vehicle versus Three Vehicles. The idea behind this is that there is essentially one way to reach enlightenment and escape the cycle - that is to detach from all materialistic things and follow the "Noble Eightfold Path". The Three Vehicles provide Buddhist followers with teachings that lead them to enlightenment, also known as the true teaching. These methods consist of the voice-hearer, cause-awakened one, and Bodhisattva. Yes, it is true that there is only One Vehicle to enlightenment, but one must adopt the necessary expedient means (Three Vehicles) before reaching. Each method or expedient mean one takes on is unique to the

individual and heavily depends on their needs and circumstances. Some people may reach enlightenment through a long gradual process that takes much thought and practice while others may have a sudden surge of enlightenment. Everyone rides *One Vehicle* to Nirvana, they just follow different paths to reach it. The *Lotus Sutra* continues on to discuss the “Parable of the Burning House”. To summarize, the parable explains how a father and his three son’s house caught on fire. The father attempts to get the children out of the house but they refuse as they are far more concerned with their toys. The father takes another approach and tells the boys to come outside because there are three carts outside. Once hearing the carts were being pulled by goats, deer, and oxen, the boys came running but were disappointed to see just one cart with no goat, deer, or oxen pulling it. There are many interpretations to this story but an important one to touch on is that precepts in Buddhism are not commandments, they are suggestions. One will not be physically punished for not having a *right* or *just* mind. They will not be punished for having desire for materialistic things, they will just undergo a more gradual journey before reaching Nirvana.

I.4. Success and Advantages

Tolerance eliminates conformity or pressure of practice. It allows for individuality to prosper and encourages self interpretation. For example, one can meditate as they wish with no strict rule to follow or punishment to fear. This amazing aspect of Buddhism can be deemed successful due to the fact that there has never been a drop of blood shed or war started in the name of the Buddha. With tolerance Buddhists can find peace, with tolerance Buddhists can have an open mind, and with tolerance Buddhists do not have to face the religious pressure that many Catholics face today.

II. Sincerity

II.1 The Concept of Religious Sincerity

Sincerity can be defined as the truthfulness in the words and actions of one's religion. Godly sincerity can be defined as the willingness to give ourselves easily and frequently without expectations of return. Yanming An writes, "People believe that the criterion of sincerity, the calculation of the degree of congruence, is not how excellent a person's work is, but how true he is to himself. The truer he is to himself, the higher the degree of congruence he attains. Hence, 'to be true to oneself', an inner-oriented action to unify the person as intentional agent with his original, natural 'self', becomes final ground for sincerity's presence and evaluation" (Yanming 2004, 2). In order for one to be sincere, he must truly believe within himself that what he is practicing is true. A huge foundational part of Catholic education is that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and we must repay him by following his teaching. Having a strong sense of sincerity in religion makes for a group with true and genuine pride, but can also cause problems to arise. Everyday Catholics show their dedication to practice through the signing of the cross. Before and after prayer one must gesture the cross; acknowledging and honoring the father, the son, and the holy spirit. Another phrase commonly associated with this gesture is "cross my heart and hope to die", essentially signing a personal oath to God that they will practice truthfully and sincerely in his name.

II.2 The Sacraments of Initiation

Members of the Catholic church also will undergo the sacraments of initiation to express their commitment to God. Completion of these sacraments show one's devotion to the religion, welcomes members to the life of Christ, and gives purpose of belonging in our (Catholics) true

family. When a child is born into the Catholic faith, they are welcomed into God's house by being submerged in holy water by a priest - also known as baptism. Once baptism is completed the infant is now accepted by God and continues on exploring their faith. As years go on the child will complete classes to learn about the birth of the religion. They must pass tests and classes to ensure they have a solid understanding of their faith. Once the child reaches seven years of age they are expected to complete their first holy communion. The communion process allows the presence of God to be given to the child through bread and wine - also called the Eucharist. Once the child undergoes the process of communion, their membership into the Catholic Church is officially accepted by God. With age comes understanding and appreciation, so at the age of eighteen one is expected to receive their confirmation. This sacrament is the highest of the three. Amongst the completion of the confirmation process, God and the Holy Spirit are now alongside the member for the remainder of their time as a Catholic. Sometimes confirmed members are referred to as "The child of Christ". Once these three sacraments are completed and Catholic education classes are passed, the member is now accepted into the church as a child of God and may consume the Eucharist as they please.

II.3 The Ten Commandments

The "Ten Commandments" also reflect a high expectation of religious sincerity. The Ten Commandments asks Catholics, "You shall have no other gods before me, you shall not make idols, you shall not take the lord your god's name in vain, remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, honor your father and your mother, you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor, and you shall not covet". Unlike Buddhism, these are not suggestions. For there will be no physical punishment for

the breaking of these rules, but you will be considered a sinner in the name of God and potentially a candidate for Hell. You must cleanse your soul with more practice and speaking with a priest during confession. Confession is a special time where Catholics are able to cleanse their sinful soul and admit what they have done wrong to the priest with an offering of advice in return. The priest will hear their confession and send them off to recite certain prayers depending on what sin or sins were committed.

II.4 The Path to Priesthood

Priests are the prime example of Catholic sincerity. Priests must complete a series of processes to prove to the Catholic community that they are worthy of this honor. First, they must meet the basic requirements which are that you are a Catholic man over the age of twenty-five. The potential candidate must have completed all three of the sacraments of initiation and have never been divorced. After the completion of the sacraments, they seek through prayer and participate in the church to discover if priesthood is where they belong. One must spend years with a prominent involvement in the church and also must complete four years of seminary. Then they will be ordained as a Deacon for at least six months, and are finally allowed to apply for the priest position. Once becoming a priest life does not become easy. This job consists of hours of private prayer a day. A priest must live in the house provided by the church and must remain unmarried and celibate. They are not allowed to have children because the church is aiming to limit all outside distractions so the priest can dedicate all of their time to what is most important, God.

II.5 Limitations and Opposing Views

Although it is great that sincerity yields a strong sense of fellowship and passion for a religion, it can also create a susceptibility to conflict. As said in the 10 Commandments, “You shall have no other gods before me”. Catholics are only allowed to follow one God, for the belief of another would be a sin. There are also issues between Catholics who are active members of the LGBTQ+ community because the bible is not welcoming to homosexuals. Unlike Buddhism, there is no gray area. There is no room for interpretation, either you are following in God’s word or you are sinning in his name. Harsh, yet has been deemed successful in the fact that this religion has kept a strong hold on all of its practices and traditions for thousands of years. Yes, the religion has been successful internally, but when you take a look at their reputation outside the walls of Catholicism, it gets ugly. Roman Catholics are amongst one of the greatest religious followings in the world with about 1.9 billion members. In the European middle ages, the Roman Catholic Church dominated the lives of many people. Townspeople built up many churches in their small villages and turned to the pope and priests to guide them in everyday life. The church went as far as to request 10% of all member’s earnings and took it as profit. With sincerity for the religion being at an all time high, members did what they were told. After the fall of the Roman Empire in 476, Europe was vulnerable and the Catholic Church took control. The church attempted to implement religious unification and make Catholicism the primary religion of the continent. That attempt received a large amount of fight back. The “Thirty Years War” brewed before Europe’s eyes and became known as one of the longest and most brutal wars in human history. There were over 8 million casualties and famine and disease spread in response to the war conditions.

Sincerity is appreciated to a moderate extent but as seen through war - an extreme amount can lead to havoc and discourse.

Conclusion

To conclude, both philosophical foundations - tolerance and sincerity are beautiful contributions to religion. Tolerance provides a sense of freedom and self guidance. It yields a welcoming environment where spiritual exploration is encouraged and self enlightenment is a must. People can be a part of something without being tied to it or restricted in other aspects of their life.

When infused into Buddhism it provides an outlet of peace for believers in times of need.

Sincerity yields a strong community. It upholds traditions and spreads them through generations.

It allows for pride to grow. Sincerity allows one to internally connect with what they believe and to see that all they do is going to something good. The two concepts do not need to be and should not be mutually exclusive. It is important to realize that although not combined in many

religions, it is a beautiful thing to practice. One can deeply believe in their God yet accept others.

It does not have to be all or nothing, people can always argue that, "You are good, but I am

better". This simple mindset allows for conflict to disappear and conversations to arise. It allows

us to learn from each other and create and find out our own beliefs because faith is unique to the individual. We do not need to be tied down to what we believe, we should benefit from it. We

should open our eyes and learn from others, for what we reject could lead us to something we could never have imagined. Infusing other aspects of religion into our own faith should not be

frowned upon for it should allow us to build a greater and stronger personal connection to God.

This paper for example, if it was to use just one source or just one point of view it would be

bland and dry. Combining resources, topics, and different perspectives allows for it to be dense,

have a meaning, and overall makes it better. If we can go through life learning from rather than rejecting things we don't believe in, we will have a vast perspective and a greater understanding of our own faith.

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