

Contributions of Buddhism to Christianity

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IT MAY BE A good idea to begin by noting that as few as fifty years ago the idea of “contributions of Buddhism to Christianity” would have sounded to most Christian ears like a crazy idea, something unthinkable, or even a blasphemy. Indeed, my title started making sense only after Vatican II recognized that there is truth and grace not only in Christianity but also in other religions. It is only in the perspective of a Christianity not yet in possession of the full truth and God (Christ) graciously at work also in other religions that we can speak of possible contributions of Buddhism to Christianity.

To speak of “contributions from Buddhism” means, of course, to see Buddhism in a positive light, as something we can expect good things from. This view, while having solid foundations, still represents a willful option. It is also possible to experience the existence (and recent missionary activity in the West) of Buddhism as a *threat* to Christianity. Buddhism is probably experienced that way in some Christian milieus of Europe and America, where Buddhism now projects a very positive image and is gaining many adepts. This is most clearly the case in the United States and Canada, but Europe does not lag far behind. For example, according to a recent opinion poll, more than two million French citizens appear to consider Buddhism to be “the religion best suited for our times.”

In a more neutral vein, we could say that in the past thirty years Buddhism has come to appear as a great *challenge* to Christianity. A challenge is something one has to face or confront, either in a negative way by trying to crush it, or in a positive way by struggling with it as with something that can bring out the best in oneself. The first Catholic theologian who became conscious of Buddhism as a challenge was probably Romano Guardini, who in his book *Der Herr* (published in German around 1950) speaks of Buddhism as possibly the greatest challenge

Christianity has ever faced. And he wrote: “Perhaps Buddha is the last religious genius with whom Christianity will have to reach an understanding. No one has yet drawn out his significance for Christianity.”¹

Today, half a century on, we still cannot say that we have really “drawn out the significance of the Buddha for Christianity.” This can only be done in a patient, ever deepening, dialogue; and this dialogue has only just begun. One immediate conclusion is, of course, that what I can present here is only a very tentative, provisional, and rather personal “balance sheet.”

We must be conscious that admitting Buddhist contributions into Christianity means that Christianity will be “transformed” in the process. The American Whiteheadian theologian, John Cobb, who pleads for a “mutual transformation of Buddhism and Christianity,” wrote, for example:

A Christianity which has been transformed by the incorporation of the Buddhist insight into the nature of reality will be a very different Christianity from any we know now. A Buddhism that has incorporated Jesus Christ will be a very different Buddhism from any we now know.²

Such a transformation supposes, of course, that we see Christianity not as an unchanging “thing” but as a dynamic historical reality that always develops. This may sound like a newfangled idea but is, in fact, nothing but a lucid recognition of historical realities. Church historians will tell us, for example, that the Christianity of the nineteenth century is rather different from the Christianity of the Middle Ages, although there is enough continuity (sameness) between the two to recognize both as the same Christianity.

If Buddhism has anything to contribute to Christianity, it will be at its own “strong points,” its particularly profound religious insights. When compared to Christianity, Buddhism also shows up its weak points, points at which it can gain much by Christian contributions. It has often been remarked that Buddhism and Christianity are rather complementary: that the strong points of Buddhism mostly correspond to weak points of Christianity and vice versa. Whatever the case, here I will speak about one side of the story: namely, the strong points of Buddhism, which may help Christianity to become a “better religion,” more faithful to Jesus Christ and his Gospel of the Reign of God. Our viewpoint here may be somewhat in the line of that of the famous French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who in his *Tristes Tropiques* wrote about “a slow osmosis with Buddhism that would have made us more fully Christian.”³

¹ Romano Guardini, *The Lord* (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1956).

² John Cobb, Jr., *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 52.

³ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques* (Paris: Union Generale des Editeurs, 1962), 369.

A Dark Picture of Christianity

As a somewhat shocking way of entering into our topic, I shall first hang up a picture of our present-day Christianity as it might appear “in the mirror of” the strong points of Buddhism. It will be a very one-sided picture and, fortunately, as such not a fully true one; but there will be enough truth in it to make us sit up and pay attention.

Generally speaking, the great benefit Buddhism represents for Christianity lies in that it presents us with a mirror-image of ourselves, reflecting to us features of ourselves that we may never have been conscious of. As such, it renders possible a self-knowledge or examination of conscience more radical than any we have been capable of until now. To mention only one (but extremely important) point: In the mirror of Buddhism—that religion wherein God is absent, plays no role⁴—we are given a chance to come to a clearer consciousness of what God means in our religion or what “role” God exactly plays therein.

So, let me now indicate rather schematically how Christianity can appear in the eyes of a Buddhist. It may be experienced as:

- A religion based on a particular narrative (the story of the Jewish people and of Jesus Christ), rather than on the experience and analysis of the universal human predicament; as a religion, thus, wherein faith is central rather than direct human experience.
- A religion that, possibly for that reason, attaches enormous importance to the exact formulation (in human language) of the divine mysteries, and strongly insists on the intellectual acceptance of well-defined dogmas; in a word, as a very dogmatic religion, in which doctrine is apparently much more important than the religious path of self-transformation. And perhaps, again, for that reason:
- A very institutionalized, centralized, and authoritarian religion, wherein obedience to the ecclesiastical authority is given more weight than personal experience.
- A religion centered on sin and its redemption, on the battle of good and evil; therefore a moralistic religion, that gives the impression that the essence and aim of religion is morality; moreover, a religion prone to making people guilt-ridden.
- A religion that pins the individual down in splendid isolation over against a personal God, and one-sidedly stresses the reality and value of the individual person—thus not able to overcome the self-centeredness of the ego.

⁴Note that I avoid the term “atheism,” that Western category which does not fit this Eastern religion (no matter how fond some Buddhists are of using it).

- A religion that attaches overly much importance to the external world and pushes people to external action in that world, thereby underplaying the primary importance of the inner transformation of the subject, which alone leads to liberation or inner freedom.

I want to repeat here that this is, of course, a very lopsided picture of Christianity. Still, rather than rejecting it out of hand, we do better:

- To presuppose, or recognize, that there is much truth in it;
- To reflect that, insofar as it is true, we must confess that on several points we have drifted away from the spirit of the Good News of Jesus and from the “freedom of the children of God” of Saint Paul;
- To have a good look at Buddhism to see whether Buddhist tenets and attitudes cannot help us to counteract our wrong tendencies and so to come to a more balanced Christianity.

Counterbalancing Elements in Buddhism

It is time now for a short, and of course incomplete, tour of these strong points of Buddhism that may constitute contributions to Christianity. I believe that all these elements hang together somehow, but it is not easy to get that point of unity in sight. Maybe a radical Zen saying may give us a hint: “If you meet the Buddha, kill him; if you meet the sutras, burn them.” The Buddha is, of course, *the* object of veneration in Buddhism, and the sūtras are the Holy Scriptures wherein the Buddha’s doctrine are written down in words. “Meeting” them, however, means that we see them as objects outside of ourselves, apart from ourselves. The meaning of the Zen saying could then be said to be: as objects outside of yourself they are not the real thing, and if you cling to these objects you are lost. They are real and salvific only as realities you experience in yourself.

This reminds me of something I read by the American monk Brother Steindler-Rast that shocked me when I first ran across it. I do not remember the exact wording, but it went something like this: “the whole Christ event (with the Incarnation and the Paschal mystery) means only that Christ is born and lives now in me. It is only at this point that it comes to truth and life.” And I think that St Augustine was seeing things much in the same way when he prayed to God: “Noverim me, noverim te” (give me the grace of knowing myself and knowing you). He seemed to see those two things together, as if knowledge of the one did not make sense without knowledge of the other, and the idea of a God who was not connected with himself did not appeal to him.

It is true that in our faith—contrary to Buddhism—the objective content of the revelation, as found in Scripture, legitimately plays a big role. This revelation is a

free gift from God, which we could not have found by ourselves or in ourselves; and we can never be grateful enough for it. But, when we look at Christianity as it is today, it often looks as if over the centuries Christianity has come to see this revelation more and more as a purely objective given, and to consider religion as the recognition in faith, the worship, and the proclamation, of that object. This is not the case, however, with liberation theologians, for example, for whom the reality of Christ comes to life in the experience of the oppressed. It is not so either for the Christian mystics, who wanted to experience (to “taste”) the object of faith in the depths of their heart and to be transformed by it.

But these people are, unfortunately, the exception rather than the rule. Christianity as a whole appears to have succumbed very much to that objectifying tendency and to have lost sight of the relationship of faith with spiritual experience. Buddhism, on the other hand, has been mostly free of that temptation, because it did not originally start from an objective given but rather from an analysis of the human predicament, a diagnosis of the human sickness. The Buddha defined the human situation as “suffering” (or “general unsatisfactoriness”) and taught that the cause of people’s suffering does not lie in the outside world but in themselves, in their desires and passions, and basically in their being closed in within their “ego,” whereby they cannot see things as they are, but only as distorted by that self-centeredness.

Like a good doctor, he then prescribed a cure, a path whereby people could get rid of their suffering by transforming themselves into selfless persons. That path is basically what Buddhism is; and that path is not centered on external objects but on the self and its experience. In the course of its history, Buddhism has worked out an enormous body of doctrine, rituals, objects of worship, religious organizations, and so on, so that it certainly must be called a religion, but basically it remains a spiritual path of self-transformation, a “spirituality.” And since for many centuries the bulk of the Buddhist attention has gone to that spirituality, its spiritual path has become very rich and deep. And it is precisely from this treasure trove that Buddhism now can contribute to a Christianity that, for a long time, has forgotten about and neglected the spirituality aspect of itself and its own spiritual treasures. It is mainly about some relevant traits of that Buddhist spirituality that I want to say a few more words.

As already hinted at above, Buddhism believes that our natural human being is deeply flawed—at least as deeply flawed as we Christians ever consider it to be through our idea of original sin, and therefore stands in need of a radical change or transformation. But it calls the human predicament a “sickness,” and thus does not stress so much one’s own responsibility or guilt. What matters is to recognize correctly where the sickness lies and what its causes are, and to start the healing process. Therein preoccupation with past sins is deemed not to be very helpful.

Since Buddhism is exclusively geared toward that inner path of transformation, Buddhist culture did not much develop knowledge of the outer world (what Western science is first and foremost), but came to deep insights into the workings of the human psyche or soul and developed an admirable “spiritual psychology.” And one of the basic insights this psychology came to is that our human sickness is not really cured by morality (avoidance of sin), but only by something that reaches the deeper levels of the soul—something that could be called “spirituality.”

From very early on, Buddhism taught that the path of transformation (which, in another presentation is called “the eightfold path”) basically consists of three elements: *Sīla* (morality or observation of the monastic precepts), *Dhyāna* (“concentrated meditation”—transliterated in Chinese as *Ch’an*, which in Japan becomes *Zen*), and *Prajñā* (transcendental wisdom). Morality (obeying the commandments, leading a good life, avoiding the excesses of sin) is indeed recognized as a necessary condition, without which the rest of the path cannot very well succeed. But that this is only the beginning and by itself does not really cure one or lead one to freedom is, for example, illustrated by the well-known story of the two monks who go on a trip during the rainy season. The pair soon come to a river, which has been turned into a raging current by days of heavy rain, and find there a young woman sitting on the riverbank and crying helplessly because she must cross the river to reach her ailing mother, but cannot do it by herself. One of the monks then takes the woman on his back, crosses the river and puts the woman down on the other side. The pair then continue on their journey, but the helpful monk soon feels that his companion is upset and readying himself to level a volley of criticism. He then forestalls this by saying: “I have put the woman down at the riverbank, but you are still carrying her in you.” To get the full thrust of this tale one must remember that the monastic rule forbids monks to touch a woman even with a fingertip, and the hero of the story thus committed a very grave sin. Still it is not he, but his companion who did not break the law, who is said to be in trouble.

If then we would read Matthew 5:27–28, where Jesus puts actually committing adultery and looking lustfully at a woman on the same level, we could recognize that Jesus is really telling us the same thing. Jesus is not talking morality here (it would be a harsh morality, indeed). He recognizes, of course, that morally speaking there is a big difference between committing adultery (or killing) and being tempted (or getting angry). He is talking spirituality and saying that, when it comes to the spiritual perfection or freedom his disciples are supposed to come to, those two are still on the same level, and the real work still has to be done.

We could maybe say that the aim is not-sinny, but we must then be conscious that “non-sinny” has a double meaning. To illustrate this, let us provisionally consider smoking as a sin or a sickness. The aim is then “non-smoking,” but we all

know that there are two kinds of non-smokers. There are those who gave up actual smoking, but who still feel the hunger for tobacco in all the fibers of the body; and there are non-smokers who are inwardly free from smoking, for whom smoking does not exist any longer, and who thus have transcended the opposition of smoking and non-smoking. It is clear enough that only this second kind of non-smoking can be considered to be the aim.

Buddhism then teaches that the further steps toward true non-sinful or spiritual freedom consist in a combination of Meditation and Wisdom. It is well known that meditation is central to Buddhism. The image that symbolizes Buddhism is, after all, that of the Buddha (or monk) sitting cross-legged in meditation. "Meditation" in Buddhism is thought of as a cross of concentration (quieting the mind, doing away with all distractions 止, and sharp insight 觀). It is a turning inward to come into contact with and insight into the deeper levels of the mind, where the passions or devils that drive us are at work. It is by that insight or wisdom that we can get free of our devils.

The idea is that, for the overcoming of our passions, the right method is not to get angry with ourselves and to attack our devils head-on by doing violence to ourselves through strenuous efforts of the will (the famous "*agere contra*" most of us have been taught in the novitiate), but rather to get quiet insight into our particular devils. It is interesting that the first person in the West to come to that insight may have been Simone Weil, a French Jewish philosopher of the first half of this century. She maintained that we overcome sin and passion not by effort of the will but what she calls "attention."

So, what lessons could Christianity learn from Buddhism on this point? The just-mentioned lesson in psychology is already of utmost importance, I believe. It is one of the lessons from Buddhism, which Anthony de Mello forcefully taught in his later retreats, as for example in his book *Awareness*.

Moreover, external action in the world rightfully has a bigger place in Christianity than in Buddhism, but it is true also for Christianity that it can neglect work on the inner man (the spiritual path) only at the price of becoming superficial, irrelevant for many people, and not what Christ wants it to be.

On the other hand, meditation—and the monastic lifestyle that has often been seen as its condition—can never be as central in Christianity as in Buddhism. But, if we see the aim of the Christian path as attaining the freedom of the Children of God or as being transformed into Christ, a good measure of quiet meditation must be considered to be a necessary ingredient. In fact, traditional Catholic spirituality has been sufficiently conscious of this, and has recommended meditation, especially to priests and religious. To quote only one, relatively recent, example: in his exhortation to priests, *Menti nostrae*, Pius XII wrote the following:

Just as the desire for priestly perfection is nourished and strengthened by daily meditation, so its neglect is the source of distaste for spiritual things. It must therefore be stated without reservation that no other means has the unique efficacy of meditation, and that, as a consequence, its daily practice can in no wise be substituted for.

As explained above, Buddhist meditation focuses on the self and its inner workings. Christian meditation, on the other hand, is usually defined as reflection on objects of our faith, such as episodes of the Gospel. However, from the Buddhist insights, it seems clear that such meditation will not be inwardly transformative as long as these objects stay apart from the self. It could also be said that Eastern meditation aims precisely at internalizing one's religion into the total person (body included), or at making sure that one's religion does not stay at the level of intellectual acceptance of doctrines and the observance of prescribed practices, but is as it were "experienced" or "tasted." But this we could also say of the meditations of the Christian mystics.

It is certainly true that, in its strong focus on meditation, Buddhism has elaborated sophisticated methods of meditation. The question then is how far Christianity can gain by incorporating (some of) these methods, and how these can be reconciled and possibly combined with the traditional object-oriented meditations, which certainly cannot simply be dispensed with. I submit that it is only patient Christian experimenting with these Buddhist methods that will permit us to come to a real answer to this question, and these experiments therefore should not be condemned out of hand.⁵

Strong points in the Buddhist meditation methods are undoubtedly the fact that they deeply engage the body and that they make use of the psychosomatic connections—things that Buddhism itself mostly learned from Indian Yoga.

Since for Buddhism the only important thing is the spiritual path of inner transformation, it can show a great freedom towards the other elements of religion (religious laws, rituals, etc.). These latter are only means, to be respected in as far as they are conducive to the central thing, but not sacred in themselves and never to be taken by themselves as the aim. It is a freedom not unlike the one Jesus showed toward the law of the Sabbath.

And one area of these "secondary things" for Buddhism is that of religious doctrine, which certainly includes the exact formulations of doctrines. Here Buddhism

⁵ One point on which Anthony de Mello's book *Awareness* has disappointed me is that it does not offer any hints on the possible combination of Buddhist methods with traditional Christian methods. The book thus cannot be said to offer a complete course in Christian spirituality. While the transformation of the self is here presented as the goal of the Christian path, it must equally be said that the goal of Christian spirituality is the internalization of the "incredible" Christian message that God loves us so much that he cannot rest before He is fully united with us. Nothing permits us, however, to conclude that de Mello wanted (or pretended) to present a complete Christian spirituality in this one book.

shares the more general Eastern skepticism toward reason and language when it comes to ultimate truth. It is the conviction that we can never catch this truth in our human concepts and words; the best even our most sophisticated categories can do is to point in the direction of ultimate truth—like “a finger pointing at the moon.” And the stupidest thing one can do is then to keep staring at the finger.

If we then remember that God in his revelation to us could not but use human categories if He wanted us to understand, we might reflect that the case of Christianity as a revealed religion is not necessarily so very different. We could then also come to the conclusion that our Catholic Church could gain by adopting a solid dose of that sound Buddhist skepticism.

Buddhism identifies as the fundamental enemy, and the cause of all human suffering, our blind clinging to our ego, the natural human tendency to self-centeredness and self-affirmation. It therefore directs all its strategies toward the eradication of that tendency. On the other hand, “modern Westerners” are often characterized as human beings in a double bind: as the possessors of an “insatiable ego,” they are totally geared toward self-fulfillment and aggressive self-affirmation; on the other hand, however, as beings closed in within themselves, they suffer from a profound loneliness.

It is then only natural to ask whether Christianity, that biggest influence on Western culture, would not be responsible for the development of that kind of human being. The answer cannot, of course, be a simple “yes.” For it is clear enough that the Christians of the Middle Ages were a quite different breed of human beings. Still, some Buddhist thinkers tend to think that the Christian idea of the “person” is at least partly responsible for this development.⁶ The idea of the irreplaceable value of the individual person in God’s eye—no matter how valuable in other respects—would confirm and sanctify the natural idea of the ego as a thing of ultimate reality and solidity (substantiality) by itself.

Confronted with this interpretation, we could react angrily and say: that is nonsense! Is not the Christian central commandment that of selflessness (losing the self) in selfless love to God and neighbor—which precisely presupposes a person who is not closed-in on himself but, on the contrary, open to God and neighbor? But the Buddhist partner could retort: you have the right idea, alright, in that admirable commandment, but that is not reflected in your (philosophical and theological) theory on the human person; and that may be the reason why modern times were able to pervert the Christian idea of the person into that of a closed-in and self-sufficient individual.

⁶ In his book *Religion and Nothingness* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1982), 202–204, for example, the Japanese Buddhist philosopher, Nishitani Keiji, develops this idea.

We might reflect here that this “perversion” is something of the highest irony. As is well known, the notion of *persona* entered Christian speculation from the discussion about the Holy Trinity, where one needed to think of a plurality of realities that would not destroy the unity of the one and only God. The notion of “person” was then coined to denote “entities” that have nothing in and by themselves, but have everything by their reciprocal relationship or total mutual indwelling (*perichoresis*); not entities that first exist and then get into relationships, but entities that are nothing but their relationships—*relationes subsistentes*. It is hard to imagine a notion that is more clearly the opposite of the modern idea of the person as self-sufficient individual. It is also hard to imagine any Western notion that is nearer to the Buddhist idea of *pratītya-samutpāda*.

To make a long story short, I believe we must concede two things. One, that we face a serious problem in that modern idea of the person. Two, that our way of thinking in philosophy and theology is not supportive of the admirable idea of the person we have in the doctrine of the Trinity and in the commandment of selfless love. The conclusion may be that we stand in need of a new synthesis of the Christian idea of the person and the Buddhist idea of the non-ego.

We must take seriously, I believe, the Buddhist contention that our ego is such a hard nut to crack that we have to mobilize against it all the powers in our possession, including a strategically fitting way of thinking. To the idea of the ego, then, Buddhism opposes the idea of “non-ego” (*anātman*). This can be said to have a double meaning. A moral-spiritual one: selflessness (a meaning shared by Christianity), and a theoretical one: the non-existence of the ego. This is not the place to go into the various interpretations given in Buddhist history to this at first sight unbelievable doctrine, and I must restrict myself to two remarks.

First, Buddhism does not (is not supposed to) present this doctrine as an absolute ontological truth, but rather as “pragmatic truth” or a “skillful means” to overcome the ego. It is saying: you will never be able to come to selflessness, unless you become convinced that the ego, as you naturally think of it, does not exist, and that it is utterly silly to cling to something that does not exist.

Second, what is centrally negated in the Buddhist doctrine of non-ego is the existence of the ego as a self-sufficient substance. And Buddhism undergirds this *anātman* doctrine by a general worldview called *pratītya-samutpāda*, which says that, in the whole world, there is not a single self-subsistent being; that everything that exists is only a temporary nexus or crossroad of influences from all other things in the universe; that nothing exists apart (“within its own skin”), but all things “indwell” in each other. To give a concrete example: what, for instance, is the reality of the ego called Jan Van Bragt? Does it reside within that figure of skin you see here before you? It clearly rather resides in the air I breathe, in my parents and teachers that educated me, the Christian atmosphere of my native Flanders,

my religious confreres and Nanzan colleagues, my Buddhist dialogue partners—and, most concretely, my reality at the present moment is made up by your expectations toward me as the speaker.

You could turn this around, of course, and say: The reality of Jan Van Bragt is, indeed, sitting here within his skin in front of our eyes. But, when you then ask what is dwelling within that skin, you cannot but answer: The air he breathes, his parents, and ourselves. And it could then further be asked: Where is the ego in all that?

All this is certainly true enough, and if we could become habitually aware of it, and interiorize it (by meditation), we would have very little left to boast about and would be a good distance on our way to selflessness.

The last great contribution from Buddhism to Christianity I want to mention here is that of a “religious philosophy”—something that could be of enormous importance for Christian theology. I can put it here only very crudely and without sufficient nuance and explanation, but the picture as I see it is somewhat the following.

Christianity never developed a “Christian philosophy,” but has continued to use in its theology (for the formulation of its doctrine) the Greek way of thinking (“Greek philosophy”), while effecting some “cosmetic changes” in this way of thinking. Greek philosophy, however, did not try to explain religious reality as such; it was geared at explaining and “grounding” the things of this world and basically took as its prototype of “being” the (immovable forms of the) material “things” around us. Let us have a quick look at the kind of problems this creates for a religious, specifically Christian, way of thinking. For example, if you take the being of a material thing, such as this desk here, as your model, you cannot really say that God “is”; and if you do so anyway, you posit God as a substance over against us and the world—something that has created a lot of problems in speaking about the “existence of God” in the West and may be mainly responsible for the birth of atheism.

Permit me to take another example from my seminary days. I hope this has changed now, but when I studied theology, we started with a treatise called *De Deo uno* (On the One God) and then passed on to a different treatise called *De Deo trino* (On the Triune God). Thus, first of all and as the basic thing, we built an image of God from the things of this world, completely in the Greek vein; then, in a second move, we passed to revelation and were then faced with the impossible task of fitting the Christian God within that framework of the Greek God, the immovable moving substance.

We could point, however, to a more general problem. Greek philosophy was basically a view of reality as “positive being,” and anything that appeared as “negative” could only be recognized as derivative and not finally real. Thus, for

instance, change, which clearly implies negativity, tended to be considered as not finally real, and God as the absolute reality had to be unmoving. Even the good St. Augustine was lured by this into calling evil (certainly a negative thing) a “privatio.”

It is clear, however, that, in comparison with the Greek worldview, “the negative” is much more central in Christianity. We only have to think of the “nothingness” of all creatures before God; the great stress on evil and sin; the “emptying” of Christ; the Paschal Mystery, wherein true life is obtained only through death; the sayings of Jesus about gaining one’s soul by losing it; the already but not yet of the Reign of God, and so on. It can then be said, I believe, that, within its Greek framework, theology has never been able to give these “negative moments” the central place they have in the Christian message.

Buddhism, on the other hand, is in possession of a religious philosophy, a “Buddhist philosophy” in the true sense of the word: a philosophy that developed with the religious insights of the Buddha as its starting point and consists in a rational elaboration and explanation of these insights. Now, in these religious insights of the Buddha the negative is absolutely central. The ensuing philosophy, then, became a philosophy not of “being” but of “emptiness,” nothingness; a philosophy that does not intend to ground the reality of this world, but rather to “unground” it, to pull the rug from under it.

We are entitled to say, I believe, that this philosophy is one-sidedly centered on the negative, and can thus not as such be adopted by a Christianity that strongly asserts the reality of this world as a creature of God, and therefore offers true motivation for activity in this world. Still, it can be hoped that a confrontation with this (inwardly religious) philosophy will enable Christian theology to give the negative elements of the Christian message their rightful place—a theology in which God is nothingness as well as being.