
Chai-Shin YU, *Early Buddhism and Christianity: A comparative study of the founders' authority, the community, and the discipline*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981. 214pp. Rs. 60.

The aims of *Early Buddhism and Christianity* make it a promising piece of work. As the author rightly points out, a comparison of these two great world religions during their first hundred years is more than justified by the contribution each has made to civilization, and there seems no more logical place to focus than on

the personality of their founders, the way their early communities took shape, and the nature of the discipline that held them together. The author has made use of a good number of classic sources on Buddhism and a reasonable selection of sources on Christianity. The problem is, however, that in dumping his research material into that frame, Professor Yu seems to have suffocated most of his feeling for the question. We are left with what amounts to a doctoral thesis informing us that the writer has read much of what there is to read on early Buddhism and early Christianity (the title not quite correct), and catalogued much of it into some sort of order, but that he has not yet been able to digest it enough to make sense of it all. The reader does not take well to being dragged through so much familiar material, so many long strings of quotations that get into a tangle with one another and obscure the line of argument, and so much inattention to what seem obvious issues.

To begin with, the terms of comparison are not clear. The basic tripartite division immediately cries out to the critical reader for some treatment of historical context. Were we to be served with a comparison of the phenomenon of early Christianity with, let us say, that of early Islam, we should be shocked to find the birth of those traditions set alongside of one another merely in the light of their scriptural evidences without any attention to the differences of social structure, political reality, and intellectual environment that separate them. Yet this is precisely the way the birth of Buddhism and Christianity are compared. Moreover, Christianity is studied from the viewpoint of the faith-consciousness of the early Christian community (which saves the author from having to deal with the historicity of the resurrection event), while Buddhism is studied with no such bracketing and scriptures composed centuries later are cited as if faith-consciousness made no difference.

I do not dispute that there are important comparisons to be made, nor that the sources at our disposal make them possible, nor even that the author has hit upon some of them. It is just that the problem is more complex and deserves more attention than he gives it. The second paragraph of the conclusion will give the curious a good sense of the uneasiness and waffling that mars the statement of the fundamental question throughout, and the rest of the conclusion should help to show the additional difficulties that arise from the use of terms without regard for their time or context. What conclusions there are, by the way, are the intuitions one would bring to the book before ever opening it, and do not seem to justify the trip through the body of the text.

There are other problems that come up along the way. For example, Yu's criticisms of Watsuji Tetsurō seem wide of the mark; his restriction of the notion of discipline in the Buddhist community to rules and their sanctions (which accounts for his misunderstanding of the wider connotations of "discipleship" that the word can sometimes carry, as on p. 119); and his characterization of Bud-

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dhism as “gnostic” and Christianity as “eschatological” is misleading at best. But it would be pedantic to go any further.

The book should have been sent back for a rewrite, so that the hard work that obviously went into it might be preserved and refashioned for use by the academic community interested in Buddhism and Christianity. The publishers are at fault here, as well as in the presentation. They should have standardized more of the English; arranged for a proper proofreading; corrected the errors in the Greek; consulted with someone more familiar with Japanese than the author, whose transliterations are a mess (on facing pages, 228 and 229, there are no fewer than four different readings offered for *kyōdan*, three of which are entirely the creations of the author), and sent the jacket (an artistic abomination with two anachronistic portraits of Buddha and Jesus, both of them *kitsch*, set on opposite faces of what looks like an oval locket, crowned with a title penned in Gothic script) back for redoing. It is hard to see how the interests of anyone involved—the author, the reader, or the publisher—have been served by rushing this sort of work into print.

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