

Asian Christianity in its Interaction with Asian religious traditions - 1 (Maria Sereti)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



It is known that there are many and different religions in the world. Inevitably, it is raised the question of what unites and what separates these religions. Some among them are prevailing worldwide, such as Christianity and Buddhism. Our basic concern is the relations among all these religions and the way each one of them encounters the others. Our study concerns Christianity in Asia. Christianity, as the religion with the largest number of followers, has differences and similarities with the other religions. We are going to describe the relation of Christianity with Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism and Confucianism. We are going to study every religion separately; the god in who it believes, its viewpoints, its traditions and the reasons that make it differ from Christianity. The encounters between people of different religions are difficult, because each one endorses his own truth. It should be stressed that Christianity is a monotheistic religion which recognizes Jesus Christ as the leader and central person of its whole teaching. As a monotheistic religion, it recognizes one God, who created all of humanity “out of nothing”[\[1\]](#), therefore proving the difference between the “a se”, uncreated God and the “ab alio”, created world. Moreover, along with God, there are two other persons, i.e. Christ and the Holy Spirit, therefore it is indicated that God has three expressions or *hypostases* (Father, Son and the Holy Spirit). These Three persons are inseparable and consubstantial (*homoousia*) in their divinity, one in power and in essence. This is one of the basic doctrines accepted by the majority of churches in the Christian world, also known as the Doctrine of the Trinity. Only Christianity reveals clearly the value of each human being as created in God’s image. Every person has before him innumerable paths that lead to deification, which should not be restricted to the personal perspective, as there is also a social aspect[\[2\]](#). Christianity liberated the person and his/her spirit and connected his/her destiny to God.

Christianity-Buddhism, differences and similarities

Buddhism is considered one of the greatest religions of the world with Buddha

being the central person of its teaching. Initially, Buddha was called Siddhārtha Gautama; his family name was Gautama and his name means “The Enlightened One”[3]. He was born in the 6th century and from 560 to 480 BC he lived in Kapilavastu of India. Enlightened Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths[4] in Benares, which are considered his first teaching. His teaching created great impression in India, China, Japan, Ceylon and Burma at such degree that today many people in Asia recognize Buddha as a great master and study his teachings. Buddha was preoccupied by issues such as oldness, illness and death which provoke pain to human beings. According to Professor of Theology Dr. Brandon, Buddhism even though not as historical as a religion, compared to Christianity, is included in the ancient religions and undoubtedly, the content of its theory is soteriological.

Buddhism, coming from Shakyamuni Buddha in India, expanded in bordering regions. One of these regions is Japan, where the approximation of Buddhism and Christianity was favored as Buddhists there spare the philosophical and theological conversations while they are willing to see the spirit of Christ[5]. It is known that Christian rites were held in Buddhist temples. The theory of Buddha is uninfluenced by eastern civilizations or minor traditions. It would be wise to underline the fact that even though Christians who face everyday problems or great pains tend to reproach others, Buddhists are different. Specifically, in Buddhism, his/her unpleasant situation is due to the person him/herself, therefore the person must turn towards his/her consciousness. However, there is also a very important thing in common: both religions are interested in the other, desire to help the others and generally, they are characterized by a brotherly love. The only difference is that in Buddhism, the faithful have learnt to control their minds before reaching the others; in other words, they apprehend the way of thinking of other people, therefore they provide their help through the body, the speech and the mind.

In Christianity, the help provided is either physical or verbal. Christianity, included in the soteriological religions, which focuses on the teaching for the salvation of sinners, was founded by a savior. Christianity, as stressed by Dr. Hodus, can be interpreted by certain Chinese through Buddhism via a movement[6]. The leader of this movement was Chang Chun who supported that it is impossible for Christianity to exist without Buddhism. He maintained that Christianity is “the ultimate religion”, but this is not yet understood in the West let alone in Asia. For Buddhists, Buddha is the only man who achieved the ultimate goal which is the nirvana[7]. For the Christians, Christ was sacrificed in order to save all of the humanity, king of a kingdom beyond this world and had no interest in any kind of power. Buddha does not intend to gain power over the people, but over themselves. What they have in

common is that neither Christ nor Buddha lived under democratic regimes where the people have the authority to choose their own leader. They both deny any sort of authority, because they want to be united with the people. There is only one Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, son of God, who was incarnated once in order to save people. Respectively, Buddha was born 2,500 years ago in Nepal as a human being, while it is said that Buddha has also appeared as a man, an animal, a God. Quite remarkable is the genealogic tree of Jesus compared to previous lives of Buddha. Jesus is considered the symbol of the “continuity of a family” while Buddha of the “variety of nature”.

Christ is included in the historical context, while Buddha is seen within the geographical context. Buddhists consider Christ a God sent Bodhisattva. Bodhisattva is a being which seeks the personal enlightenment (Bodhi) as well as the enlightenment and the happiness of all other beings. Compassion for all is the prime and basic quality of Bodhisattva. Bodhisattva gained a perfect personality through continuous incarnations and by his success comes to the world in order to help others. Christ exemplifies the faithful Christians who try to imitate Him without equating to Him; on the contrary, Buddhists wish that one day they will acquire the title “Buddha” and they will reach the nirvana state. This is feasible depending on the instruction and the national traditions. Currently, it is estimated that Christians worldwide are 1.5 billion while Buddhists are 350 million. Even though Christianity is the most populous religion of the world, it is possible that in the future the numbers may be different. Nirvana, a Hindu term which designates the liberation, is a sleep that extinguishes desire. Paradise is considered a place of happiness. There is confusion between the two religions regarding the Nirvana and the Paradise, because Buddhism has its own Paradises. Moreover, Christianity tried always to unravel the relations between the Kingdom of God and the secular authority unlike Buddhism which focuses exclusively on the individual and not on the destiny of the community.

[1] Christianity, “Dogma” (in Greek), <http://el.wikipedia.org>

[2] Nicolas Berdiaeff, *Christianity and social reality*, (translate) Vasilis Gioyltsis, edit. Pournaras , Thessaloniki, p.191

[3] Gregory D. Ziakas, *Religions and Cultures of Asia*, edit. Sfakianaki, Thessaloniki, 2006, p. 271

[4] Gregory D. Ziakas, *Religions and Cultures of Asia*, edit. Sfakianaki, Thessaloniki, 2006, p. 304 όπου οι τέσσερις μεγάλες αλήθειες είναι οι εξής: «1. Η αλήθεια του

πόνου (dukkha), που διέπει τον κόσμο, 2. Η αλήθεια της αιτίας του πόνου (samudaya), 3. Η αλήθεια για την άρση του πόνου (nirodha), και 4. Η αλήθεια της οδού (patipad) ή της τράπου (marga), η οποία οδηγεί στην άρση του πόνου.»

[5] Panagiotis G. Foygias, *the Christian Religion and the three big religions Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism*, edit. «SYNTHETIKI», Athens , 1968, p. 90

[6] Panagiotis G. Foygias, *The Christian Religion and the Three Big Religions Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism*, edit. «SYNTHETIKI», Athens , 1968, p. 87

[7] Panagiotis G. Foygias, *The Christian Religion and the Three Big Religions Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism*, edit. «SYNTHETIKI», Athens, 196, p. 82 όπου: «Ο Βούδδας λέγει μόνον ἓν πράγμα: διδάσκω θυσίαν και το τέλος τῆς θυσίας, το ὅποῖον εἶναι το Nirvana».