ENGAGING BUDDHISTS

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

— Acts 4:12
PLAN

- Who am I?
- Strategy Refresher: Two ways to engage
- History of Buddhism
- Folk Buddhism
- Christianity vs Buddhism
- Engaging Buddhists
- Sharing Time

- Ask questions as we go along
WHO AM I?

- Malcolm Lithgow
- ECC Elder
- ECC Sunday Axiom teacher
- Co-Founder of Think Christianity (www.thinkchristianity.org)
- Original creator of Reality Bites, now Telos
- Previously a Software Engineer (most recently in smartphone apps)
- Now studying a Master of Arts in Science and Religion at Biola University
TWO WAYS TO ENGAGE

Ideal: master both ways

KNOWLEDGE
Know more
“Always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you”
—1 Pet. 3:15a

TACTICS
Know how to engage
“yet do it with gentleness and respect.”
—1 Pet. 3:15b
Sixth century BC, Vedantic Hinduism (mysticism against priestly ritual)

Guatama Buddha teaches variant of Vedantic mysticism

- Key issue: suffering (existence is suffering, dukha)
- Solution: escape existence (behind illusion of reality, maya, is nothingness, sunyata)
- Means: release all attachments, achieve enlightenment, enter nirvana (lit. “blown out”)
- Failure: locked in samsara (wheel of existence) by karma

“Salvation” is thus through understanding and action
HISTORY: FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

- To live is to suffer, *dukha*
- Suffering is caused by desire, *tanha*
- Suffering can be eliminated by eliminating desire
- Desire is eliminated by following the “noble eightfold path”
HISTORY: NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

- Right view—understanding
- Right intention—willing to achieve enlightenment
- Right speech—saying all and only what is required
- Right action—doing all and only what is required
- Right livelihood—being a monk
- Right effort—directing energy properly
- Right mindfulness—meditating properly
- Right concentration—maintaining continuous focus
HISTORY: THERAVADA BUDDHISM

- Theravada ("tradition of the elders") split from Mahayana ("big raft") around 200BC
- Centres on monks, bikhus
- Holds to Guatama’s teachings
- Main form of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar
- In Thailand, most boys spend a year as monks
- Monks follow the ten precepts (take no life; no stealing; no sexual immorality; no lying; no intoxicating drinks; no excess eating or eating after noon; no attending entertainment, dancing, singing, drama; no decoration of self or use of cosmetics; no high or wide beds; no touching gold or silver)
- Lay people support monks are store up karma for future life
HISTORY: EXPANSION OF BUDDHISM

Map 8.1. Expansion of Buddhism
SCHOOLS OF BUDDHISM

BUDDHA

- Regional variations
- Theravada
  - Mahayana
    - Vajrayana
      - Bön + Tantrism
      - Shingon
      - Nichiren
      - Shinto
      - Ryobu
- Christianity?
- Pure Land
- Zen
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Distribution</th>
<th>Scripture</th>
<th>Distinctives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tendai (rational)</td>
<td>Chih-i</td>
<td>China, Japan</td>
<td>Lotus Sutra</td>
<td>Unity, universality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure Land, Jodo (compassion)</td>
<td>Honen, Shinran</td>
<td>China, Korea, Japan</td>
<td>Sukhavati-Vyuha, Amitabha Sutra</td>
<td>Amida, Nembutsu, western paradise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zen (intuitive)</td>
<td>Bodhidharma, Soto, Rinzai</td>
<td>China, Japan</td>
<td>Platform Sutra</td>
<td>Satori, nondual, “third eye,” koan, mondo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nichiren Shoshu, Soka Gakkai (chanting)</td>
<td>Nichiren</td>
<td>Japan, worldwide</td>
<td>Lotus Sutra</td>
<td>Daimoku, Gohonzen, Namu myo-horengekyo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vajrayana (Lamaist)</td>
<td>Dalai Lama, Panchen Lama</td>
<td>Tibet, northern India</td>
<td>Book of the Dead</td>
<td>Dalia Lama, om madi padme hum, meditation, prayer wheel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shingon, Chenyen (magical)</td>
<td>Mizu, Kobo Daishi</td>
<td>China, Japan</td>
<td></td>
<td>Vairocana, Ryobu fusion with Shinto</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FOLK BUDDHISM

- Difficulty of practicing Theravada Buddhism led to Mahayana
- Weakness of Mahayana (weak link to Buddha’s teaching) led to multiple schools
- Schools are highly syncretistic (anything to get good karma)
- Folk Buddhism is essentially whatever local culture practices
- In Hong Kong Buddhism and Taoism are intertwined in practice and belief (and overlaid with Confucianism)
- In Japan Shinto and Buddhism
- End result? Never assume an individual’s beliefs—always ask
CHRISTIANITY VS. BUDDHISM

- Buddhism: speculative, philosophical foundations
  - Buddha could be fictional and Buddhism would be unchanged
- Christianity: historical, real events as foundation
  - “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” —2 Pet. 1:16
  - If history is false, Christianity collapses
  - “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.” —1 Cor. 15:17
- Christianity encourages engagement with reality, Buddhism discourages engagement
  - This includes how people are treated
  - For Christians people are precious creations of God that will outlive the world
  - For Buddhists people are merely another part of maya (illusion); literally nothing, anatman
CHRISTIANITY VS. BUDDHISM

- **Buddhism: suffering**
  - Is caused by existence
  - Relieved by escaping existence
  - Can be resolved only by ourselves
  - Must continue on the wheel of existence until we “earn” our way off it

- **Christianity: suffering**
  - Caused by human evil
  - We share in human evil
  - Cannot solve suffering by ourselves
  - Must either be damned eternally or saved eternally based on free choice
CHRISTIANITY VS. BUDDHISM

- **Buddhism:**
  - All is illusion
  - Existence is suffering
  - Escape from existence is the goal
  - Negative focus

- **Christianity:**
  - The world (and its people) is real
  - Death is a defeated enemy
  - Eternity with our loving Creator is the goal
  - Positive focus
CHRISTIANITY VS. BUDDHISM

- Buddhism:
  - Syncretistic
  - Reality is illusion,
  - So multiple paths possible
  - Some paths better than others

- Christianity:
  - Exclusive
  - God is author of both reality and the Bible
  - Some things are true, some are false
CHRISTIANITY VS. BUDDHISM

- Buddhism, means of salvation:
  - Cleaving to the eightfold path, or the ten precepts
  - Piggybacking on a Boddhisatva

- Christianity, means of salvation:
  - Accepting God’s grace
  - Giving up our own works
CHRISTIANITY VS. BUDDHISM

- **Buddhism: self-focused**
  - Can only achieve one’s own enlightenment
  - Can only influence one’s own karma
  - Doing good is for one’s own benefit
  - Pray only for oneself
  - Focus on ritual

- **Christianity: other-focused**
  - God is primary focus—does the work and receives our worship
  - “Love your neighbour as yourself”
  - Intercessory prayer
  - Social justice
  - Body of Christ
CHRISTIANITY VS. BUDDHISM

- Christianity: start evil, can be redeemed—hope
- Buddhism: start good, usually can only get worse—hopelessness
ENGAGING BUDDHISTS

- Take an interest in their beliefs
  - How do their beliefs address the core issue of suffering?
  - How do their beliefs relate to their concern or care for others?
- Understand the foundational differences with Christianity
- Point to the differences in reality
  - Jesus Christ really lived and died
  - Amitabha (of Pure Land Buddhism) is legendary
- Seek the “point of tension” between their beliefs and reality
  - Is suffering resolved?
  - Does ritual really make a difference?
ENGAGING BUDDHISTS

- Live out your faith
  - Love God enough to care more about what he thinks than what the world thinks
  - Love others enough to show them the truth
  - The Body of Christ is the best place to practice, learn, receive and give love
  - Most testimonies of converted Buddhists I have heard contrast the difference between the hopelessness of life as a Buddhist with the joy-filled nature of Christians
SHARING TIME

- Share personal experiences with Buddhists