

Project in Interfaith Studies (HPPD7003)

**A Christian and Buddhist Perspective on
the Doctrines of ‘Creation’, ‘self’ and ‘Sanctification’**

Student: Mingyan Sun

Student no.: 1705373

A. Introduction

In today's global age, the advancement of technology and science is bringing people of different religions and cultures together and interfaith encounters in everyday life have become very common. Although this phenomenon seems to offer good opportunities for strengthening mutual understanding and enhancing social cohesion between individuals and communities of different faiths, however, issues such as religious differences, unique truth claims and religious superiority have been the causes for conflict and disharmony in society. While interreligious relations can play the role of a peace ambassador, it can also be a major source of conflict. So for the vision of peace building, interreligious exchange should pay significant attention to the proper understanding and interpretation across religious traditions. Just as the prominent Christian theology Hans Küng once stated:

‘The noted Christian theologian Hans Küng once stated that: “There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions, no peace among religions without dialogue between religions, and no dialogue between religions without investigation of the foundation of the religions (Schmidt-Leukel eds. 2005, 200).’

Christianity and Buddhism are two major world religions from the West and East respectively. The doctrines of the two religions are believed to be very different and distant by many, as opposed to the similarities between the three Abrahamic religions which the West is most familiar with. The field of Buddhist and Christian dialogue is relatively new as Buddhism has only started to gain recognition and popularity in the West from mid-twentieth century. This paper will aim to outline the fundamental doctrinal differences within the two religions on three seemingly most investigated areas by contemporary scholars, the doctrines of ‘creation’, ‘self’ and ‘sanctification’, while endeavour to discover some inherent similarities.

B. Creation – The Origin of the Universe, Earth and Life

I. A Christian Perspective

It is recounted at the outset of Genesis 1 that God, a supreme being who is omniscient and omnipotent, in six days, He created the heavens and earth. Cosmic order and the natural world were created in the first five days; human creatures were created on the sixth day. Christians believe that no pre-existence substance lived before God created the universe. As stated in the Hebrew Bible, ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep... (Gen. 1:1-2).’ In other words, God brought the earth and its creatures into existence out of formless void (nothing). This central idea followed by the adherents of Christianity is known as *creatio ex nihilo*. So this implies that nothing existed prior to God’s creation except for God Himself, establishing the fundamental principle that God’s being does not depend on the existence of the universe (Burrell eds. 2010: 35). God’s being is independent, whereas the existence of the Earth and the creatures depend on God, His almighty power and voluntary act of creating are demonstrated by this theory. God’s creation is described by Christian theologians as a free and voluntary act or a divine donation, without any internal or external incentives. God is understood to be perfect before the event of creation, indicating that the free creation of Earth and creatures does not add anything new to God’s all perfections or further fulfill any form of potential (Aquinas 1920: 1a.4.2).

God and His creation are one unity but with irreducible asymmetry, it is a relationship of ‘non-reciprocal dependence’ (Burrell 2011: 349). God exists in Himself as He is the source of all things and the only creator in the universe, and everything else exists only by participation in God’s existence. The relation of creation to God in Christianity is the participation in the persons of the Trinity in which eternal self-donating love is communicated. So it is reasonable to contend that every creature on Earth is directly related to God and the aims of their behaviour were embodied in creation from the beginning. As Hoover states that human creatures do not bring their acts into existence by themselves (Hoover 2009:6); the acquisition of human acts is determined by God. For Christians to respond to God, a divine interface of “grace” is provided. (Burrell 2011: 54).

Christianity is a religion of monotheistic nature. The Nicene Creed clearly depicts God as the only One to be worshipped, ‘We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.’ Both the Hebrew Bible and the New

Testament describe God as the ‘one’ (Exod. 3:14; Deut. 6:4), ‘eternal’ (Deut. 33:27; Ps. 90:2; Isa. 40:28; Rev. 22:13) and “omnipotent” (Rom. 1:20). God is considered transcendental above all things as well as the sustainer of this world. Although God’s divinity and glory are beyond human comprehension, it is believed that He has revealed Himself to the people through the Trinity, God the Father along with the generation of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit. Burrell argues that this revelation is not opposed to the concept of free creation, but is merely a manifestation of the creator’s inner life (Burrell 2011: 350-351).

In God’s creation, human creatures are believed to have a closer relationship with God than other creatures. Humankind were created on the last day of creation and this day is perceived as the pinnacle of God’s creation, not only were they created in God’s own image and likeness but they were also gifted with a rational nature that gives them entitlement to have dominion over everything that creeps upon the earth (Gen. 1:26-28). Genesis 2 describes the process of the formation of man. God made man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being (Gen. 2:7). Humanity’s “shared likeness with God” means human nature is not exactly the same as the nature of the other earthly creatures; when it shares the same animal nature with the other creatures, it also has the gift of the angelic nature. The animal nature entails the formation of the body and basic desires and needs such as warmth and food; the angelic nature encompasses rational principles that act like a moral agent, enabling human creatures to know and love what is virtuous and righteous. Therefore, God endows humanity the stewardship of all the other earthly creatures (Gen. 1:26). Much reference can be found in the Bible on humanity’s close relationship with the environment (Gen. 1:29; Psalm 104; Lev. 27:30; 1 Pet. 4:10; 1 Cor. 4: 1-2; Jn. 6:12), especially their responsibility to tend to the welfare of the environment.

Overall, the origination and existence of the universe, Earth and life are made possible because of God’s creation; without God’s almighty power, the universe would still remain a formless void.

II. A Buddhist Perspective

The Buddhist interpretation of creation is very much the opposite to that of the Christian belief. Buddhism does not acknowledge the presence of a creator nor does it worship God as the only source of everything, so Buddhism is a religion of nontheistic nature. Buddhism believes that the truth of the universe lies in the nature of causality, in which the causal conditioning leads from one thing to another. Buddhism has its own theory on the generation

of the universe and all its phenomena known as the doctrine of “dependent origination”, “dependent arising” is also used. In Buddhism, there is not a creator behind the existence of the Earth and the earthly creatures, nor is there a divine being who sustains the being of all things. The Buddhist thought describes the origination of all things as a result of the unceasing interactions and constant connection between dependent conditions from the formula of the twelve links (*nidana*). The chain of twelve links demonstrates a pattern and structure of causal conditioning (Gethin 1998, 141). As the formation (origination) of all existence depends on causal conditioning, then all phenomena, from everything in the natural world to human creatures, are not considered to possess a substantial essence, meaning that they are not true substance of beings but a manifestation of “dependent origination” with a transient nature. It is also worth to note that the manifestation of all phenomena is of transience nature as the gatherings of dependent conditions for existence arise and pass away at an unimaginable speed, so they are described by some Buddhist sutras as a perception of illusion.

The Diamond Sutra is one of the most important sutras on the teaching of the illusory nature of all existence. As its most famous four lines state, ‘There is no reality of self, and no reality of others, no reality of living beings and no reality of life (trans. Bhiksuni Heng Ch’ih 1974, 109).’ *Diamond Sutra* also teaches Buddhist practitioners to perceive all conditioned dharmas (all phenomena) as dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows that only exist for the very short time like the existence of dew drops and a lightning flash. Buddhists should contemplate accordingly (CBETA: T08n0235, trans. M. Sun). This analogy by the Buddha is indeed true according to *the Sutra of Benevolent Kings*, ‘There are ninety split-seconds in a moment, and within a moment, each split second experiences nine hundred rounds of its arising and passing away. The manifestation of all condition-dependent phenomena abides by this law (CBETA: T08n0245, trans. M. Sun).’ It is certainly impossible for human creatures to witness such rapid movement with the naked eye, so it is often natural for man to perceive all things as real without the capacity to confirm that they are only illusory emergences that arise and pass away in a flash under the law of karma. Permanent being does not apply to any existence, even world-systems undergo periodical destruction (de Silva 1979, 27), so the minor things in our surroundings including ‘one-self’ are of no exception.

The Buddhist thought of “dependent origination” is thus the driving force behind the formation of all things in this world and beyond. As mentioned earlier, the twelve links

(*nidana*) formulate the structure of causal connectedness by interacting with one another and in turn form the illusory occurrences of “dependent origination”. The twelve links are known as ignorance, formation, consciousness, mind-and-body, the six senses, sense-contact, feeling, craving, grasping, becoming, birth, old age and death. Causality operates according to the twelve links in the following order: conditioned by ignorance are formations, conditioned by formations is consciousness, conditioned by consciousness is mind-and-body, conditioned by mind-and-body are the six senses, conditioned by the six senses is sense-contact, conditioned by sense contact is feeling, conditioned by feeling is craving, conditioned by craving is grasping, conditioned by grasping is becoming, conditioned by becoming is birth, conditioned by birth is old age and death (Gethin 1998, 141-142). It can be gathered from this sequence that the effect of causality begins with the arising of ‘ignorance’; hence ‘ignorance’ is understood to be the first cause of all the ‘dependent origination’. In the *Dirgha Agama*, Buddha taught that the renouncing of ignorance can end all origination (CBETA: T01n0001_001, trans. M. Sun).

In order to clearly explain the event of ‘dependent arising’, Gethin believes that the twelve links can be divided into four sections of ‘past cause’, ‘present fruit’, ‘present cause’ and ‘future fruit’. In that ignorance and formations represent ‘past cause’, being the cause of ‘present fruit’, consisting of our consciousness, mind-and-body, six senses, sense-contact and feeling; we react to those with grasping, grasping and becoming and such reaction form the ‘present cause’ that bears fruit as the conditions for our future birth, ageing and death (Gethin 1998, 151). All together, the links form fragments of the chain of ‘dependent origination’ that determine the transient existence of certain beings within the ever arising and perishing causal cycle. It is evident that the nature of the twelve links is impermanent, all existence follow this law known as *anicca* (impermanence).

It is also worth mentioning the law of karma here as it governs the nature and quality of one’s rebirth, and ‘rebirth’ is a form of dependent origination for all creatures (sentient beings in Buddhist term). The movement of sentient beings in the cycle of *samsara* (reincarnation) is determined by their intentional deeds, good or evil, from the past. All deeds acted become their causal conditions for origination and are repositied in their consciousness leading to future fruit, in this case, the rebirth. This causal cycle is known as the law of karma (Harvey 2013, 39). Buddhism understands *samsara* to be of suffering (*dukkha*), as long as rebirth continues as delivered by karmic force, a sentient being will be reborn in one of the five states of existence according to his/her past actions. Buddhist sutras talk about the five states

of existence in the cycle of reincarnation being the ‘lower worlds’, the animal kingdom, the spirit sphere, realm of human beings, and the realm of higher beings and deities. The five states of existence are different in their degrees of suffering, with the ‘lowest worlds’ being the most painful and unpleasant, often described as ‘hell’, to the deva-worlds being with the most pleasant experiences (de Silva 1979, 39). All of these existences are certainly a result of causal connectedness from ‘dependent origination’; this is the fundamental theory of the “creation” of all phenomena in Buddhism.

C. The Notion of ‘Self’

I. A Christian Perspective

The Biblical view of man is not of dichotomous nature, but is holistic. The Bible conveys the concept of man as a unity of soul, body and mind; none of the components can separate themselves from each other and continue to live after death. The ultimate fulfillment is the salvation of a man’s entirety; hence the idea of an immortal soul that leaves the body at one’s death is not quite exactly the Biblical perception of ‘soul’ as found in Greek and Hindu thought. Both Karl Barth and Paul Tillich had made remarks against the false dualistic notion (de Silva 1979, 76). Genesis 1 describes the creation of man as a composition of two essential life-giving principles, which are the soul and a material body (breath) (Gen. 1:26-28). Robinson argues that there should be no contrast between body and soul as human nature is a unity; in the Hebrew Bible, the idea of personality is not connected with an incarnated soul (de Silva 1979, 79).

The Hebrew Bible uses the term ‘*nephesh*’, it has been translated as ‘soul’ in some of its older versions. But ‘*nephesh*’ does not correspond to the notion of an immortal soul as it is dependent on the existence of the material body and ceases to exist upon death (Gen. 35:18). It is more commonly rendered as “life” in modern translation indicating the sentience of man. The term ‘*psyche*’ used in the New Testament continues to convey the same meaning as expressed in the Hebrew Bible; ‘*psyche*’ is particularly used to describe man’s vitality, feeling, thought and will; it has also been used in the New Testament for an individual person, referring to the wholeness of the person (de Silva 1979, 82), thus when one sins, it is not only part of the person that sins. But none of the usage of ‘*psyche*’ suggests a disembodied and ever-lasting soul.

The Bible describes man as creatures created in God’s own image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-28); the creaturely nature of man denies the possibility of eternalism and the creation in

God's image negates nihilism (de Silva 1979, 86). The notion of human's shared likeness with God denotes a direct relationship between man and God, this kind of relationship is described by '*ruach*' (spirit) in the Hebrew Bible. '*Ruach*' is different to the meaning of *nephesh* or *psyche* where the latter two mainly denote the life in man and can be controlled, but '*Ruach*' is bestowed by God and is only ruled by Him. Genesis 6 makes it clear that God is Spirit and man is flesh (Gen. 6: 1-4), and if God takes away man's breath of life, man dies and returns to dust; if God sends His spirit, man lives (Ps. 104:29-30); hence God did not make man immortal. Only God is eternal, and it is only through the relation to the Eternal that human creatures can gain immortality. The creation of man in God's image implies that man, his body, soul and spirit, do not exist independently but is possessed by God. This idea is further explained by another term '*pneuma*' from the New Testament, this term also contains the meaning of "breath". Stacey identifies six essences of *pneuma* from the Pauline corpus, three of which demonstrate the difference between the spirit of man and the Spirit of God. *Pneuma* not only applies to God, Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Jesus, but is also created within man so that man can cultivate communion with God, but the natural possession of the *pneuma* in man is similar to the concept of '*psyche*', it should not be confused with the divine nature of God's Spirit. Man's *pneuma* enables fellowship with God but is not directly connected to the *pneuma* of God (de Silva 1979, 88). However, there is a difference between man's natural *pneuma* and that of *psyche* and *nephesh*. As well as sharing the same connotation of aliveness and vitality with *psyche* and *nephesh*, which are also possessed by animals, *pneuma* is only possessed in the life of human creatures. As stated in I Corinthians that 'The first man, Adam, became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. (1 Cor. 15:45)'.

Here, the living beings refer to the *psyche* of man and the life-giving spirit is man's *pneuma*. According to Romans, 'man who set their mind on the living of the flesh will face death, but man who set their mind on the living of the Spirit will have life and peace, for setting the mind only on the flesh is hostile to God and living in the flesh cannot please God (Rom. 8:5-8).' Thus, de Silva argues that '*psyche* is the life of physical existence and is separated from God, but *pneuma* is the life derived from God (de Silva 1979, 89).' In other words, the spiritual minded self is the true self and is possible to receive immortality from God.

As mentioned earlier in this section that man is not of dichotomous nature, this idea is further confirmed by Jesus's saying in Matthew, 'Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Mat. 10:28). Oscar

Cullmann comments that this is about fearing God who has the power to give one complete death when he does not resurrect one to life (de Silva 1979, 82). This suggests that the soul seems to be the condition for resurrection, it is not necessary to fear those who kill the body as it can still be raised from the dead, but the immortal nature of the soul cannot exist without a body. So the body and soul (and spirit) are one unity to make resurrection possible. I Thessalonians also mentioned that man's spirit, soul and body need to be preserved in his wholeness for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (Thess. 5:23). Therefore, the notion of 'self' in Christianity is not a reference to a single entity of substance, but a unity of a man's body, soul and spirit.

II. A Buddhist Perspective

As seen from the previous section on creation, Buddhism believes that every existence in the world is a result of causality depending on the continuous interaction and connection between conditions of the twelve links (*nidana*), known as the theory of "dependent origination". So under the foundation of this theory, the Buddhist notion of 'self' is merely an outcome of causal connectedness that does not have independent sustainability. The continued existence of the so-called 'self' (a person) is condition-dependent and transient due to the rapid arising and perishing nature of all phenomena, so Buddhism does not recognise the temporary and impermanent existence of 'self' as a true substance of being. Therefore, the Buddha taught about the doctrine of 'non-self' (*anatta* in Pali) and it is considered a fundamental principle on which the great canon of Buddha's teachings is built.

The *anatta* of persons follows the same principle as the other phenomena, a person is without exception also a conditioned being. The commonly recognised Theravada *Pancakkhandha* theory entails that every man is constituted by five elements of physical and mental events that arise dependently, they are known as the five aggregates (CBETA:T29n1558); each one of the five aggregates cannot be perceived as a true partial existence of the 'self' as each one is also condition-dependent and of transient nature under the law of 'dependent origination'; so it can be argued that if each individual aggregate is not a constant true substance, then the combination of the five constituents would not generate any form of constant true being, hence it is not unreasonable to confirm that a person who is an embodiment the five aggregates satisfies the notion of 'non-self'.

The character of each aggregate will be explained here to enhance the understanding of their impermanent and transient nature. Every person is known to be constituted by the five

aggregates of matter (*rupa*), sensation (*vedana*), perceptions (*sanna*), volition or mental activities (*samkhara*) and consciousness (*vinna*). Matter (*rupa*) consists of four essential elements, earth (rigidity, compactness of matter), water (liquidity, viscosity), fire (heat and cold, different temperatures), and air (expansion and motion); *rupa* stands for the dynamic aspect of matter. Sensation (*vedana*) consists the six organs of sense, namely sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste and mind. Perceptions (*sanna*) is the faculty that receives impressions of physical and mental objects, including the kinds of colour and shape, sound, odour, taste, touchable things, and non-mental objects. Volition or mental activities (*samkhara*) consists of fifty mental activities and has a wide range of meanings which are difficult to translate into the English language from its original Pali terms. Consciousness (*vinna*) is a response based on one of the six faculties and one of the six external phenomena as its object. Consciousness is known as pure sensation without any content, so it should not be interpreted as the Western thought of ‘mind’, for mind is always active. Consciousness cannot arise independently but always need one of the senses and an object of sense. Such as the consciousness of vision, it is formed by pure consciousness, with the sense of vision, an object of vision and some kind of colour or shape. The element of consciousness acts like a mirror that reflects whatever it captures (de Silva 1979, 19-20). By examining the character of the five aggregates, it is not hard to see that the theory of Pancakkhandha is reinforcement for the conception of ‘non-self’. As the existence of the elements in the five aggregates is impermanent, when they disintegrate, where can one find the constant existence of the so-called ‘person’ or ‘self’?

Anatta-lakkhana Sutta has the Buddha’s teachings on the ‘non-self’ nature of the five aggregates:

‘If form, feeling, perception, determination and consciousness were self and permanent, then they would not lead to affliction or change, one could determine how they are. So, any kind of form, feeling, perception, determination and consciousness arisen, whether past, present or future, whether in oneself or external, whether lofty or low, whether far or near, one must understand that the reality is that “This is not I, this is not myself.” (*Anatta-lakkhana Sutta* 1993, trans. Ñānamoli Thera).’

The well-known ‘chariot’ analogy used by Arhat Nagasena in a conversation to King Milinda illustrates the relationship between the five aggregates and the notion of *anatta* (Pesala eds. 2001, 32 - 34). Venerable Nagasena says to the king that ‘Nagasena’ is merely a label for

convenience, no reality of a 'person' exists. The king became confused and was not in agreement with this idea. Then the Arhat asks whether the king travelled by foot or in a chariot, the king replies that he came in a chariot. Venerable Nagasena asks the king whether the different parts of the chariot, such as the axle, wheels or the yoke, can be considered as the chariot itself. The king admits it is none of these, the chariot is in dependence upon the different parts but the different parts on their own cannot be considered as the chariot, hence the term 'chariot' is also a convenient label. Upon the king's realisation on this analogy, Venerable Nagasena further explains that his name and the notion of 'person' are merely used as labels when all the five aggregates are present, such 'person' does not exist independently. It could be gathered from this story that any one of the aggregates should not be perceived as the true 'self' and that the notion of 'self' is merely a label given to the combination of the five aggregates; there is really no constant substantial essence in a so-called 'self'.

If the 'self' is not a permanent being or an immortal soul, then who is being reborn in the cycle of *samsara* (reincarnation)? Needless to say, the manifestation of a so-called 'person' will encompass the five aggregates, but the five aggregates do not reincarnate as unchanging elements from one's previous life to the next. As we know, the law of karma governs the nature and quality of one's rebirth, but what carries the old karma to the new manifestation of life? One's consciousness stores previous karma in its repository while receiving the unceasing transmission of new karma, when the required dependent conditions meet and interact, the effects of karma will come into effect in a new manifestation of life. The life of a 'person' is a conditioned existence, so the material body loses its liveliness upon death as a result of the disintegration of the five aggregates; although there is evident change in the material matter, but the movement of the consciousness does not perish or stop, it streams on carrying the karma generated, a new conditioned existence originates when the corresponding conditions are met and connect. A new material body is formed, but the karma carrier behind the act of rebirth has been in the same life continuum. So the event of turning from one life to the next is really two different stages of conditioned existence in the on-going cycle of death and rebirth, karma is ever-changing according to one's intentional actions which determine the quality of rebirth; hence a so-called eternal existence, understood by many as the 'soul', is neither the driving force behind *samsara* nor a requirement for it to take place. The Buddhist theory of reincarnation is not the reincarnation of the 'soul' (as the notion of 'soul' does not even exist according to the doctrine of '*anatta*'), but the transference of karma by one's consciousness in the origination of a new manifestation.

Despite the belief of '*anatta*', Buddhism does not refute the manifestation of all phenomena; the physical existence of sentient beings and the natural world is not denied in Buddhist thought. The Buddha gave great emphasis on the teaching of 'non-self' as the erroneous view of 'self' can evoke strong 'self-grasping' and 'craving', ultimately leading to all kinds of evil deeds. The practice of 'non-self' is hoped to help man view the existence of all phenomena in their impermanent and 'dependent origination' nature, so as to forgo man's habitual grasping of self and self-possession.

D. Sanctification

I. A Christian Perspective

Christianity believes that death is not the end for man, there is an eternal afterlife and its nature is judged by God for their deeds during their lifetime. The significance of one's actions on the quality of an afterlife seems to coincide with the Buddhist theory of karma. Orthodox Christianity supported the theory of 'Double Predestination' in that an afterlife is either in eternal happiness (Heaven) or in eternal damnation (Hell). Many, Christians and non-Christians, have found this theory daunting. Christian theologian Nicholas Berdyaev once criticised this notion as hideous and morally revolting, as eternal damnation seems to be an unreasonable amount of punishment for the sins committed in such short time of one lifetime (Berdyaev 1937, 279). Paul Tillich concurs with this view and thinks that one's ultimate destiny should not entirely rely on the moment of death (de Silva 1979, 116), if so, is it then ethical for infants and young adults who haven't had enough time to do so many good deeds to achieve eternal happiness be condemned for eternity? Archbishop William Temple claims in his book *Nature, Man and God* that there are no passages within his knowledge that announce the condemnation of the 'lost' to eternal suffering (Temple 1960, 464). De Silva contends that not a single man deserves to suffer eternal damnation; similarly, not a single man is perfect enough to receive eternal happiness (de Silva 1979, 116). He thinks this mistaken view may have arisen from verses such as 'the unquenchable fire (Mt. 3:12)' or 'the worm that dieth not (Mk. 9: 44, 46, 48)' from the Bible.

Modern biblical scholarship seems to have moved towards the less firm division between the saved and the lost. In Tillich's view of essentialism, he points out that eternal life should be a progressive process developed from the positive elements of life, but the ambiguity of human existence displays difficulty for too much positive. He suggests that no man can be completely good or completely evil, the theory of 'Double Predestination' certainly makes an

extreme distinction of the two, leading to the becoming of destiny more of an individual affair (de Silva 1979, 117). Contrary to the notion of 'Double Predestination' is the idea of progressive sanctification, where there is a period of waiting time after the termination of the material body until the final consummation, this intermediate state is a process of purification until sanctification (perfection) is achieved in the Kingdom of God. This process of purification is by many recognised as the doctrine of Purgatory. Purgatory is a process of cleansing the unrighteous constituents in man through which the positive is gradually actualized and the negative lessened; the mental and spiritual conditions of a person continue to develop after death. During the intermediate state, the envisaged suffering is not considered punishment for one's wrongdoings, but rather an exercise to renounce one's ego-centered self and discover one's true being (de Silva 1979, 119). The sanctifying process does not begin after death but starts in this life on Earth and moves towards perfection in the 'waiting period'. The duration of this period depends on the amount of unsanctification left to be rectified (Hick 1966, 382-3). Therefore, when compared with the theory of 'Double Predestination', the doctrine of Purgatory depicts eschatology on a dynamic level where the final destination is not preset; there is not a clear cut distinction between the good and the bad so it leaves potential for man to grow towards arriving at a positive and fulfilling ultimate destination. John Macquarrie affirms the validity of this doctrine and he states that under this conception, 'Heaven, Purgatory and Hell are no longer separated entities, but form a kind of continuum through which the soul may move, perhaps from near-annihilation of sin to closest union with God (Macquarrie 1966, 328).'

The conception of the existence of an 'intermediate state' is not just a proposal by modern theologians, its source can be found in the scriptures. For instance, the word 'Hades' appeared in the parable of Dives and Lazarus, 'Hades' means the abode of the departed spirits, in this place Jesus descended to preach to the departed spirits so it cannot be the place for man's ultimate destiny. As the story describes, after Lazarus dies, the angels carried him to an abode of bliss; so this place is not filled with torments, it is often implied in Christian writings as the intermediate state (de Silva 1979, 119-120). Another example on preaching to the dead can be found in I Peter: 'For this is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does (1 Pet. 4:6).'

The Christian thought of sanctification is not completed in one lifetime on Earth or upon death; it is rather a development towards the actualization of the positive and righteous in the

intermediate state. Just as stated in II Corinthians, man is not transformed into a perfect being upon death, but undergoes progressive sanctification from one degree of glory to another until they are in the same image as God (2 Cor. 3:18).

II.A Buddhist Perspective

Sanctification or the ultimate goal for Buddhists is the realisation of Nirvana (*Nibbana* in Pali). The component of ‘*Ni*’ indicates negation, ‘*vana*’ means craving (de Silva 1979, 63). So Nirvana is the state of being when one has completely departed from the notion of craving or desire. As discussed earlier, the condition and arising of ‘craving’ is like a rope that ties sentient beings in the cycle of *samsara*, ‘craving’ acts like a catalyst for the continuous generation of new karma. Once the rope is cut, the driving force behind the karma stops to function, thus the “endless” cycle of reincarnation disappears and such a being has emancipated and reached the other shore (Nirvana). In some Buddhist texts, Nirvana is also understood as the extinction of lust, hatred and ignorance, those conditions are so often described as ‘fire’ in Buddha’s teachings, implying a sense of danger. The complete renunciation of craving will result in the detachment of the five aggregates, which is believed to be one of the main causes for suffering (*dukkha*). So in other words, the realisation of Nirvana is the ultimate way to cease all forms of suffering. There are two phases in the attainment of Nirvana. Firstly, it is the stage achieved by arhat called the *sa-upadisesa-nibbana*. At this stage, the five aggregates remain even after the renunciation of all defilements; it is often illustrated as the glowing embers after the extinguishment of fire. The second stage is known as *an-upadisesa-nibbana* where the five aggregates are also extinct.

Much description has been given to the state of Nirvana to explain its experience. Some scriptures say it’s a state of peace and happiness; others portray it as the highest bliss, the harbour of refuge, liberation, the transcendental, the tranquil, the medicine to cure all evil, the supreme joy, the ineffable and so on (de Silva 1979, 71). All in all, they wish to convey the message of its magnificence and the level of happiness from complete freedom of suffering. However, some scholars and philosophers question the rationality of the state of Nirvana because of the notion of ‘*anatta*’. If the doctrine of ‘*anatta*’ denies the permanent existence of true beings, then who experiences the happiness? Paradoxical answers are often given, one of which is recorded in the conversation between Udayi and Sariputta. Sariputta excitedly claims the experience of happiness in Nirvana, Udayi then questions him how is happiness experienced if the consciousness of sensation had been forsaken? Sariputta replies that the

absence of sensation itself is bliss. It is the thought of existence and the 'cessation to existence' that evokes paradoxical answers, Buddha explained the conception of Nirvana as beyond the possibility of literal and conceptual interpretation. Indeed, the height of its transcendental essence is beyond measure and can only be understood by those 'who' have attained this level of enlightenment.

There are also opposing voices from contemporary scholarly literature on the concept of Nirvana. Scholars such as Oldenberg, Burnouf and Dahlke perceive Nirvana as complete annihilation and nothingness; furthermore, they construe Nirvana as a negative state that makes the philosophy of Buddhism appear pessimistic. Other scholars like Max Muller and William Stede are against the claim of nihilism, but see Nirvana as a positive state of ethical values; but this is also a negation of Nirvana's transcendental nature (de Silva 1979, 70). What seems to be a more pertinent proposal is Dev's suggestion of Nirvana's 'ethical immortality'. As man become free from the yoke of craving and desire, this attainment is for eternity and will not be changed after death; the ever-soothing peace within this enlightened being remains in the state of Nirvana. According to this view, Nirvana can be understood as an ethical event of immortality nature (Dev 1969, 149). Regardless of how the attainment of Nirvana is perceived by scholars and philosophers, for practising Buddhists who strongly believe in and detest the suffering of *samsara* and seek for eternal inner peace, then the attainment of Nirvana is their salvation and the sanctification worth striving for.

E: Conclusion

Having examined the doctrines of 'creation', 'self' and 'sanctification' that mark the 'origination of all things', 'human's existential being' and the 'ultimate destination' respectively, it is evident that the views of the three conceptions from both religions have fundamental differences, but yet share some ideas in common.

The conception of 'creation' forms the monotheistic nature of Christianity and the non-theistic nature of Buddhism; the first depends on an almighty creator who is behind the occurrences of all events on Earth, the latter is a result of the interactions of dependent conditions from the formula of the twelve links. They are very different processes of creation, but what's common is that both are controlled by a very powerful source of initiation, God the creator for Christianity and the condition of ignorance for Buddhism (the condition upon which all the other eleven conditions originate). Some may think that the creation process in Buddhism is more of a self-generating process, but it must be realised that the defiled

conditions are extremely difficult to overcome; hence creation in Buddhism is not an autonomous event but also depends on powerful sources. In addition, Buddhism emphasises the illusory nature of all existence, implying that the truth of the universe is emptiness; as for Christianity, it is confirmed in Genesis 1 that the earth was formless and empty before God's creation (*creatio ex nihilo*). Secondly, the doctrine of 'self' seems to offer greater parallels between the two religions. The five aggregates that constitute the so-called 'person' in Buddhism are similar in nature to the Christian descriptions of the properties in the body, soul and spirit of man. Christianity does not acknowledge the mere physical existence of man but also takes into account the significance of the spirit as it is the life derived from God. In this view, both Buddhism and Christianity do not recognise man's ownership of 'self', in relation to the identity of the temporary existence of 'self' in this life, the conception of '*anatta*' can be applicable to both religions. Finally, the ultimate goal of both religions seems to follow a similar path, a path to the perfection of one's ethics in order to attain sanctification where eternal bliss and peace await. Both destinations, the Kingdom of God and the state of Nirvana, cannot be reached in this one lifetime or immediately after death, it is a development over time towards the diminishing of the unrighteous elements and the actualization of perfect goodness. All views considered, it can be argued that religious conceptions with fundamental differences at first glance can possess some similar inherent characteristics. This paper merely examines three areas; there are many more subjects between Christianity and Buddhism that are worth further exploration.

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