

LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

GRADUATE THESIS:

A CHRISTIAN APOLOGETIC TO A BUDDHIST CHRIST

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO DR. C.F. SMITH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE REQUIREMENTS OF A

MASTER OF ART IN GLOBAL APOLOGETICS

THEO 690

BY

DAVID JAMES FORBES

DECEMBER 15, 2009

LYNCHBURG, VA

Table of Contents

I.	Introduction	
	a. The Purpose	2
	b. Justification	7
	c. Significance of the Study	8
II.	Literature Review	9
III.	Methodology	11
IV.	The Buddhist View of Jesus	13
V.	A Christian Response To A Buddhist Christ	
	a. Historical Accuracy of the Bible	30
	b. Jesus as a Bodhisattva	47
VI.	Christ, the Divine	56
VII.	Conclusion	61
VIII.	Works Consulted	64

I. Introduction

The Purpose

Thich Nhat Hanh tells his readers that no matter one's religious affiliation, if two people want to get married they should not let religion hold them back. If a Buddhist and a Christian were to get married, each person in the relationship should take the religion of the other. In this way the couple will not be Buddhist or Christian but both Buddhist and Christian. He says this would give them two roots instead of one and their children could then be Buddhist Christians.¹

This kind of pluralistic, “salad bar” view of religion has become very popular in the postmodern world. People have grown accustomed to getting what they want in the way they want it. As the Burger King slogan goes, “Have it your way.” The concept is fine when it comes to fast food, but one's eternal destiny does not hinge upon whether or not one would “like fries with that.” The problem comes when people think they can take absolute truth and conform it to their own philosophies.

When countering the pluralistic worldview prevalent in his home country of India Ravi Zacharias says, “Even in India, we look both ways before we cross the street. It is

¹ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Going Home: Jesus and the Buddha as Brothers*, (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999), 202.

either the bus or me, not both of us!”² People like to think that their opinions matter, but if they choose to deny reality for the sake of preference they may be in danger of being hit by the figurative bus. This is true even if one claims not to believe in buses.

The “bus” being discussed in this thesis is truth, not truth in general but specifically the truth of who Jesus Christ is according to the Gospels. As technology has increased it has become easier to study worldviews outside one’s own geographical area. While it used to take several months journey to interact with people on the other side of the globe it is now as simple as accessing a website, watching a television program, or making a phone call. Two cultures that have come together more and more in recent decades have been the eastern and far western cultures. Previously separated by vast cultural and geographic distances, these cultures are now coming together and learning from one another.

An interesting part of this new interaction is the introduction of Jesus to Buddhist culture. As certain Buddhists have studied the various writings concerning Jesus, they have developed a view of him that is cohesive with their worldview. This thesis will analyze this new Buddhist concept of Jesus. As stated before, two contradictory statements cannot both be true. For this reason, if the Buddhist concept of Jesus differs from the traditional Christian view, then logically one or both of these views must be wrong. The contention is that each has a view of Jesus that denies the foundation of the other religion’s worldview. A professing Christian who says that Jesus is not God, is not really a Christian at all. Similarly, if a professing Buddhist claimed that Jesus is God, in

² RZIM, “Faith Under Fire: Jesus Among Other Gods (part 1 of 4),”RZIM online archive. Quicktime player audio file, 13:30, <http://htod.cdncon.com/o2/rzimht/MP3/JT/JTCD402-1-1.mp3> (accessed March 19, 2009).

the Christian sense of the word, then he or she would not be a Buddhist since Buddhism does not believe in a creator God or a personal savior.³

Since the divinity of Christ is the most important element in Christianity, Christians and Buddhists cannot claim to have harmonious beliefs if Christians claim that Christ is divine and Buddhists deny it. Buddhism, being an atheistic religion cannot hold to Jesus being God. However, many Buddhists have a deep respect for Jesus and his teachings. When he is compared with Jesus the Dalai Lama quickly denies the comparison. He states that he is not worthy to be compared with such a great master.⁴ Many Buddhists believe that Jesus was a great teacher, two millennia ago. However, they deny the historical narrative surrounding Him in the Gospels and say that His claims to divinity were first made after his death.

In order to discover the true identity of Jesus this thesis will develop a Buddhist view by examining the writings of the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh and other Buddhist voices. Many books have been written explaining the Buddhist view of Jesus. However, few evangelical Christians have evaluated and responded to their claims. These claims must be answered, not only out of respect for the eastern thinkers who started the conversation, but also out of respect for Jesus Christ of whom they speak. Even though the arguments made by the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh and others degrade the Christian view of Christ, this was not done out of disrespect. Jesus as God simply does not fit into the worldview of the Buddhist. His existence challenges what they believe to be true. With this in mind, one must be fair and respectful in evaluating Buddhist beliefs.

³ Marcus Bach, *Had You Been Born In Another Faith*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1961), 47.

⁴ Beverley, James A. *My Christ, My Bodhisattva*. (April 2004), <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/tib/nytimes.htm> (accessed November 30, 2009).

It is not their intention to throw mud on Christianity but merely to defend their own long held beliefs. If Christ is who Christians claim Him to be, then their path to Enlightenment is a futile one. For the Buddhists as well as for Christians, the cost of truth is grave and one must not muddle sound arguments with emotion or disrespect.

Many agree that the Dalai Lama is currently the most influential Buddhist in western culture. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 and has written many books targeting western Christians and has developed a significant fan base. Included in his fan base are several celebrities such as Richard Gere, Steven Segal and Uma Thurman who is the daughter of Robert Thurman, the first monk in Buddhism to be born in the west.⁵ Considering the Dalai Lama's influence on the culture and his outspoken nature, his opinion is important in the development of the Buddhist view of Christ. This is not to say that other sources will not be equally considered, but his continued and open dialogue with Christians gives a good starting point in discovering a common view that Buddhists have regarding Jesus Christ.

Since, in the Buddhist worldview, Jesus cannot be God, there has to be some other explanation for his purity and wisdom. This thesis will show that some Buddhists regard Jesus as a *bodhisattva*, at least implicitly, in the way they treat him. This would make Jesus not God but an enlightened person who puts off full enlightenment in order to help others on their path.⁶ Jesus' teachings are said to be consistent with Buddhism. However, since the Israelites were not yet advanced enough to understand all of the

⁵ Robert Thurman. "Biography." <http://www.bobthurman.com/biography.html> (accessed May 4, 2009).

⁶ Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, *Handbook of Today's Religions*, (Atlanta: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 322.

Buddha's teachings Jesus did teach some things that were not as cohesive.⁷ He did this not to mislead the Israelites but to prepare them. Perhaps, if they obtained enough merit in this life, they could enter their next rebirth as a Buddhist and attain Enlightenment.

For the Christian, this would mean that Jesus is not Lord. What Buddhists like Hanh do not understand is if the Buddhist interpretation of Jesus is correct then there is no Christian Gospel. If they are wrong and Jesus is who Christians believe Him to be then Buddhism cannot lead anyone to Enlightenment. These religions cannot be married together. Although they have some similar concepts in terms of love and peace, the roots of each religion go deeper than these concepts.

In Christianity Jesus is much more than a teacher - He is God. If Hanh is right in saying that Jesus and the Buddha are conceptual brothers then Christianity loses its root and will be forced to wither away. Conversely, if when Jesus said in John 14:6 "No one comes to the Father except through Me," He excludes any other path to truth, then the Buddha is leading his disciples down a path of fruitless effort.

Buddhists such as the Dalai Lama realize that Christianity and Buddhism have irreconcilable differences. However, in a show of tolerance and in the spirit of Buddhism being non-evangelistic the Dalai Lama will not condemn Christianity as wrong. He has great respect for Jesus, but because of his Buddhist worldview he is forced to look at Jesus in a different light. Since he believes Jesus cannot be God, he must explain this great man in terms of Buddhist philosophy. This thesis will bring to light the Dalai Lama's actual convictions regarding Jesus and Christianity in general. After explaining this point of view and the view of Scripture that allows them, the claims will be tested. If

⁷ Ulrich Luz and Axel Michaels, *Encountering Jesus & Buddha: their lives and teachings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 45.

they can logically be true this will be consented, but if they are not possible this will be made clear. Again, the analysis will be based on Scripture in its historical and grammatical context. The writings of various Christian scholars will be consulted and a conclusion reached.

Justification

Since both religious views about Jesus cannot be true simultaneously, one must compare them to see which has the best supporting evidence. After making clear the view of the Dalai Lama and other prominent Buddhists, this thesis will compare their scriptural arguments with those of Christian scholars.

The main focus of doctrine will be on the saving ability of Christ and His divinity. Salvation in Christianity is made possible through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. This is the most important doctrine in Christianity. In Buddhism salvation, or the equivalent, happens due to one's own efforts and there is no ultimate divinity. In the Buddhist view, Christ could only help guide one on their path to Enlightenment but He could not do the work as a replacement for the student's failure. As a *bodhisattva* he would have access to great wisdom and teaching ability. In fact it would be impossible for Him to make an error.⁸

His error-proof mind would be supplemented by being sinless. The giving nature of the *bodhisattva* is demonstrated in their vow to continue teaching until all sentient beings have achieved Enlightenment.⁹

⁸ Robert E. Van Voorst, *Shogen, the Sutra of the Lotus Jewel: Anthology of World Scriptures*, 5th ed. (Belmont California: Thompson Wadsworth, 2006), 85.

⁹ Richard D. Hecht and Ninian Smart, eds. *Sacred Texts of the World: A Universal Anthology*, (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 272-273.

Although Christians acknowledge that Christ is perfect in His wisdom and purity, the concept of a *bodhisattva* still falls short of who Christ is. Since the historical record is so incredibly detailed and written in such a close temporal and physical proximity to Jesus' place of ministry, it is impossible to deny that there was a Jesus of Nazareth. It is also clear that He was a great man, who lived a pure life, and taught with great wisdom. When thinking about the life of Christ and the definition of what a *bodhisattva* is, it is not hard to understand why Buddhists would understand Jesus in this way. In their religious worldview people such as Christ do not exist apart from Buddhism. They can explain Jesus as a reincarnated Buddhist or a man who studied Buddhism in His lifetime, but someone who in their mind seems so enlightened could not have gained this wisdom apart from the teachings of the Buddha.

The crux of this thesis will be to explain who Jesus is not. Buddhists teach that He was a *bodhisattva* but this undermines the core of Christianity. For this reason this thesis will defend the Christian view of Christ by examining the Buddhist view and showing where it fails. Once one can see that Jesus is not a *bodhisattva* and was not reacting to Buddhist teaching, one must still answer the question of where He got his wisdom, the source of His purity, and the true meaning of His teachings. Since there have been many studies dealing with who Christ is in Christianity this will not be the purpose of this study. Instead, the reader will understand the Buddhist view of Jesus and, based on available evidence, see if logically it can be true.

Significance of the Study

For the Christian, this study will be a very enlightening look at how Buddhists see Jesus. It will show how these two worldviews, while sharing some similar traits, cannot

both be true in their foundational doctrines. The Christian will be able to see that while Buddhists admire and respect Jesus, they do not give Him the honor that He deserves nor do they acknowledge His claim to divinity. The Buddhist writers cited here believe that the Christian Scriptures have been tampered with over time or were originally written with an incorrect and biased perspective. While Buddhists will accept some of Scripture they discount other parts as historically inaccurate or even complete fabrications. For this reason arguments made in this thesis will be made from biblical sources that are acceptable to all parties and sources that have been deemed questionable will be given arguments to support them.

For the Buddhist, this study will help to illuminate some biases that affect their conception of truth. Many of the views that Buddhists have about Jesus are shaped by their unwillingness to accept data that disagrees with their worldview. Since Jesus as presented in Scripture does not agree with their worldview they have sought out and developed teachings that will. This thesis will challenge Buddhists to research carefully the life of Christ and see who He is from the Christian perspective. This will give him or her the opportunity to see that there is a truth more plausible than Jesus as a mere *bodhisattva*. They will see from logic, history, and even their own writings that Jesus is not, and cannot be, a *bodhisattva*.

II. Literature Review

Study for this thesis begins in Buddhist sources and moves to Christian writers. In order to respond to the claims some Buddhist's make about Jesus, one needs to understand completely what they believe and the logic behind it. To do this the study began with readily available books that compared the teachings of Jesus with Buddhist

philosophies. Authors such as the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh are in most bookstores and libraries around the country and they have become the “experts to the masses.” Since the masses are the targeted audience of the apologist these authors offered a springboard into deeper study.

Both authors seem to accept both Christianity and Buddhism as acceptable religious paths but did not go into detail as to why. Hanh believes that the views can be married together while the Dalai Lama recognizes the irreconcilable differences between the two views. This leads to the question of why he could still accept Christianity as a true path.

The reason was discovered in an article presented in Christianity Today by James Beverly. Beverly interviewed the Dalai Lama and discovered his belief that Jesus recognized Buddhist truth. The teachings, which later became “Christian,” were taught as a path of betterment. Their purpose being to lead students into a positive progression of rebirth, this led the students to have their own Buddhist revelations and eventually seek to enter Enlightenment.

How can the Dalai Lama’s view be considered true when compared with the biblical record? An answer was found in the work, *The Buddha’s Gospel* by Dr. Lindsay Falvey.¹⁰ In this book Falvey discusses the similarities between the teachings of Jesus and the teachings of the Buddha. He focuses on sayings of Jesus that have been compiled in what is known as the Q source. This is said to be the original teachings of Jesus. Falvey contends that the Gospels as they exist are fictional narratives, which found their

¹⁰ Lindsay Falvey, *The Buddha’s Gospel: A Buddhist Interpretation of Jesus’ Words*. (Adelaide, South Australia: Institute for International Development, 2002).

inspiration in these original teachings. This explains how Buddhists can accept Jesus without having to compromise their own teachings.

With this question answered more research had to be done with regard to the Q source. The most valuable resource found in this study was *The Lost Gospel* by Burton L. Mack.¹¹ Along with providing the entire text of the Q, he gives some insightful commentary, and even though he is not a Buddhist himself, his work helped to validate the logical possibility of the Buddhist view.

After expounding on the Buddhist argument, the Christian response must be presented. Simple logic and the minds of apologists and theologians will be used to develop a defense for the Christian faith. History and logic will be the major vehicle used to convey the Christian defense. Though the original copies of the Gospels are no longer in existence, one can determine what they would have said from the earliest available copies. In the end it will be shown that the story of Jesus could not be the product of imagination. The events of Jesus' life are too rooted in historical fact and too foundational to the development of the church for them to be anything but truth.

III. Methodology

The conceptualization of this thesis came from the thought that some Buddhists teach that Christianity and Buddhism can live harmoniously with no logical inconsistency. The Dalai Lama even calls Jesus Christ a great master. The Buddhist atheistic philosophy regarding God raises the question of how such a union between Buddhism and Christianity could be possible. In order to find out what Buddhist leaders mean when they say these religions are compatible this thesis will take their view to its

¹¹ Burton L. Mack, *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q & Christian Origins*. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994).

logical end. The logical end will not be guessed at but researched from the writings of other Buddhist scholars who have written on the issue.

After compiling an accurate picture of what a coupling of Buddhism and Christianity would mean, this thesis will show what Christian scholars have said about the various points. The writer of this thesis being a Christian will be writing from a Christian bias but will attempt to be as fair as possible in expanding upon beliefs that counter his own. However, if either view is found to be lacking in credible research or logical consistency, this will be shown.

Limitations in this thesis will be determined by the Buddhist arguments used. Since they argue that Jesus held to Buddhist teachings and the writers of the New Testament invented their story after the destruction of the Jewish temple, it must be shown how this cannot be the case. The argument was made popular by the Jesus Seminar, which attempted to treat Jesus as a common teacher.¹² They argue that his teachings were used later in history to develop a story and from that story developed Christianity. This was the only way they could explain how he predicted the destruction of the Jewish temple so accurately. Their only explanation was a mass conspiracy that distorts the creation of Christianity into a divine following rather than a philosophical teaching. Buddhists have no problem with prophecy or miracles but they do wish to deny Jesus' divine claims. This is why some of them have written utilizing some of the Jesus Seminar's teaching. This thesis will not be aimed at the claims of the Jesus Seminar but at the claims Buddhists have drawn and utilized from them in developing their own view of Christian history.

¹² N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 37.

Since their argument is that none of the writers of the Gospels wrote before A.D. 70, this thought will be the basis of their argument. It will also be respected in the formulation of an apologetic. If not then none of the arguments would be acceptable to the targeted audience and this work would have been wasted.

The Buddhist View of Jesus

For Buddhists, Jesus is a perplexing character in history. In their mind he shows all the qualities of the highest Buddhist teacher but without any known connection to Buddhism. Another conundrum for the Buddhist faith is in the difference in how the Buddha and Jesus attained their wise teachings. Whereas the Buddha only came to his teachings after years of contemplation, trial and error, Jesus' worldview seems to be an innate part of his being.

The Dalai Lama briefly touches on this subject in *The Good Heart*, asking in his interview with Father Laurence, "Jesus Christ does not progress through a series of spiritual stages, isn't that the case?" Unfortunately, Father Laurence seems to not have understood the Dalai Lama's question and answers, "No, the Resurrection is not reincarnation." The Dalai Lama then tries to explain that his point was not in regard to reincarnation but to the concept that normally a person will spiritually progress throughout their life. They will change and refine views as they grow in wisdom and their understanding of reality matures. This happens even as the physical body deteriorates through life. Still Father Laurence did not understand the point and

continued to speak on the resurrection and ascension and never getting back to the Dalai Lama's point.¹³

If the Dalai Lama were looking to make a point to the contrary, he might have mentioned Luke 2:52, which speaks on Christ growing in wisdom and stature. Of course, unlike the stories involving Gautama's birth, Jesus was not born with the maturity of a man and fully capable of verbal communication. Like everyone else, Jesus was born as a child. He could not speak, he could not walk and he could not feed himself. He was completely dependent on his mother Mary and his assumed father Joseph.

An example of Jesus growing in wisdom is recorded in Scripture just before verse 52. When Jesus was twelve years old he went to Jerusalem with his parents during Passover. Becoming separated from them he went to the Temple, his Father's house, and sat there with the teachers of the law for three days until his parents arrived. They had been very anxious because they thought he had been lost though, as he pointed out, they should have known he would be at his Father's house. In verse 51 the passage emphasizes that after this instance Jesus was obedient to his parents. This does not mean he was disobedient in this instance but afterwards that he was more conscientious about his parent's lack of understanding.

Though he may have needed to grow in human wisdom, this passage also demonstrates how his spiritual wisdom, his understanding of Scripture, God and His place seems to have been innate. As Jesus spoke with the religious leaders the passage states that he asked the leaders questions, and they were amazed by his answers. If he were asking them questions, why were they not the ones answering the questions? It

¹³ Dalai Lama, *The Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective On The Teachings of Jesus*, (Boston: Wisdom Publications) 1996, 118

seems Jesus was not using this time to learn, but to teach. Utilizing the same Socratic method of teaching he uses in his future ministry Jesus now asks the teachers of the law questions in order to make them think and discover truth for themselves. Then he comments on their responses to further refine their understanding. From this passage, every indication is given that Jesus did not require the teachings of man, or even self-realization to further his understanding of God.

In contrast to Jesus, Siddhartha Gautama grew into a man and knew nothing of his future destiny or his philosophies. It took many years of trial and error until he settled on his view of the middle path and emptying oneself of desire. His life took place in very defined stages. Early in his life, he delighted in a lavish life of selfish pleasure and was completely ignorant of the pain in the world around him. Even on the fateful day when he encountered sickness, old age, and death, he did not understand his future philosophies, simply that his current life must change. This realization leads Gautama into a reactionary life. Whereas he once lived lavishly, his life would now be humble and poor.

After many years as a monk, Gautama found the austere life of monasticism to be futile. No matter one's determination, the flesh would always have its needs and one could not totally abandon its care. This led him to the concept of the middle way. One night as he starved himself and meditated under the bodhi tree he realized that one could not conquer life through scarcity or excess. One cannot live on too little but one can also never have enough, thus the concept of the middle way was born. The middle way means that one does not deprive one's self from necessities, nor indulge one's self in excess. This comes from the concept that suffering is the result of desiring the unattainable such

as complete deprivation or indulgence. Both are empty pursuits and lead to disappointment and despair. So Gautama, now the Buddha, taught his followers to cast away desire. The final effect of this practice is to cast away this life and its cycle of rebirths, known as *samsara*. Once one can separate themselves from all the desires in this world, they will become enlightened.

Jesus also taught an end to suffering and desire but through a different method. In John 4 it is recorded that Jesus was making his way from Judea to Galilee. On his way he passed through Samaria and sat down at Jacob's ancient well. Soon a Samaritan woman came to gather water from the well and Jesus asked her for a drink. Since Jews do not usually associate with Samaritans the woman asked Jesus why He would ask her for a drink. In His response we learn that the entire situation was a set up so that he could make this one statement. He said, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."¹⁴ And then, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."¹⁵

This concept speaks in direct opposition to the teachings of the Buddha. Water is a basic necessity and essential for life. No matter how austere a monk is, if he denies his body's desire for water he will die. Gautama recognized this and thus denied the austere life and created the middle way. He taught that one can indulge one's desire but not too excess, to the point of necessity but not to gluttony. Jesus taught that fulfilling one's

¹⁴ John 4:10

¹⁵ John 4:13-14

desires with temporal elements is futile. Instead He offers an eternal spring of fulfillment that satisfies every desire and thus will eliminate suffering.

Each man's solution to suffering and desire differ based on their own abilities. Gautama, though brilliant and incredibly wise, was hindered by his own mortality. Certainly Gautama's Four Noble Truths, as described earlier, would be man's best chance at escaping suffering, if such a feat were possible. However, man's limitations are not given as a challenge but rather as cause for humility. Jesus' offer of living water is not a philosophy discovered through His temporal experience but the divine knowledge of an eternal being. For Jesus, the mortality of His human existence is not a barrier to offering eternal solutions. This is because His true identity does not lie in His temporal existence but in eternal identity as God.

The concept of a singular God, though in three persons, challenges the self-effort taught by Gautama. This is because a singular God can demand a singular way to Himself. This is the case in Christianity as Jesus claims to be "the Way."¹⁶ Only offering a singular way does not mean that God is cruel. God is by no means required to offer any way to Himself. Life does not need to have any more significance than a flower which blossoms one day and is forgotten the next. In fact, life need not exist at all. It is only out of love for His creation that God offers a way to continued existence with Him. However, if man chooses to deny God's way, God cannot be held accountable for man's destruction. Like the man who tries to fly from a cliff by flapping his arms, foolish effort brings just returns.

¹⁶ John 14:6

Buddhists deny that there is a singular God over the Universe. This changes the logical dynamic of trying to reach that next level. Instead of one way being offered it is up to mankind to discover a means of ascension. Since humanity is not a collective mind but is broken in to cultures and within the cultures, individuals, it would make sense that they would discover different ways of being released from the suffering in this life. The Dalai Lama, being of this perspective, states that there is no single way to truth.¹⁷ Therefore, Jesus was either mistaken or misunderstood when He claimed to be “the way.” Since the Dalai Lama holds Jesus in very high esteem, calling Him a great master,¹⁸ he would not assume that Jesus was mistaken. Instead, the Dalai Lama and many other Buddhists believe the followers of Christ have misinterpreted His teachings and fallen away from the heart of Christ’s message.

The Dalai Lama recognizes Christ as the founder of Christianity but in a way most Christians would not expect. In an interview with James Beverly of *Christianity Today*, he said that he believes Jesus lived many previous lives. He was born, lived, died and was reincarnated again. This process continued until Jesus reached Enlightenment, in some previous life. He then came back as a *bodhisattva* and a Buddhist master, but instead of finding himself among Buddhists he was born among the Israelites. Sensing the Israelites were not ready for the teachings of the Buddha, he taught them a new way. The Dalai Lama states, “He taught certain views different from Buddhism, but he also taught the same religious values as I mentioned earlier: Be patient, tolerant,

¹⁷ Dalai Lama, xii.

¹⁸ Claudia Dreifus, “New York Times Interview with the Dalai Lama,” (New York Times, November 28, 1993).

compassionate. This is, you see, the real message in order to become a better human being.”¹⁹

Jesus then taught the Israelites, not as a Messiah but as a Buddhist master. He realized the Israelites were not ready to accept Buddhist principles so He taught values. His teachings were later incorporated into the religion later to be called Christianity. The values He taught allowed his followers to become better human beings. With this accomplished they would very likely be born as a Buddhist in their next life and be able to work towards Enlightenment themselves.

The Dalai Lama is not the only Buddhist who believes this. J. Duncan and M. Derrett write, “Jesus, miraculously born, was obviously a *bodhisattva* whose sacrifice has earned him nirvana.”²⁰ In fact, many Buddhists, who deeply respect Christ, have found a place for Him in their own Buddhist worldview. This is made easier because Buddhists readily accept miracles as a sign of an enlightened being and not of an all-powerful God. As demonstrated from the quote above, they even accept Jesus’ virgin birth as a plausible miracle. This is not surprising since the Buddha himself is recorded as having a miraculous birth. The Buddha was not born of a virgin but he was born out of the side of his mother, fully able to walk and talk. In fact, he greeted his inception into the world by proclaiming his supremacy in the entire world.²¹

¹⁹ Beverley, James A. *My Christ, My Bodhisattva*. (April 2004), www.canadianchristianity.com/cgi-bin/bc.cgi?bc/bccn/0404/04buddha (accessed June 30, 2008).

²⁰ John Duncan and Martin Derrett *The Buddhist Dimension of John*. (Leiden Numen, 2004). e-book.

²¹ Noble Ross Reat. *Buddhism: A History*. (Fredmont California: Jain, 1994), 8.

One reason for the Dalai Lama's view of Jesus Christ is the similarities between the teachings of the Buddha and Jesus. For example in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus teaches loving one's enemy. Jesus says in Matthew 5:43-44 that the Jews had been told to love their neighbors, and hate their enemies, but instead they should pray for those who persecute them. Jesus comments that even the tax collectors love their neighbors, so if that is all Christians do, they do nothing really important.

The Dalai Lama relates to this passage from the Mahayana Buddhist text *Compendium of Practices*. In this text Shantideva asks, "If you do not practice compassion toward your enemy then toward whom can you practice it?" Whereas Jesus taught His disciples they must do more than the tax-collector would be willing to do in verse forty-six, the Dalai Lama writes, the Buddhist teaches even the animals know how to care for their loved ones. Those who call themselves spiritual must rise above the standard set by animals.²²

Many religious scholars comment that Buddhism and Christianity share a teaching of love. In this they are not wrong. Both religions value human life and hold that one must treat others with respect no matter their status. Exalting the humble is a common theme throughout Judeo-Christian history. Whether one looks to Peter the fisherman, whom Jesus made the Rock of the Christian church, or the shepherd David, who became the king over all Israel, God does not show favoritism based on someone's worldly position.²³

²² *The Good Heart*, 48.

²³ James 2:1-4, Galatians 3:28

Buddhism, being an atheistic religion, embraces the concept though in a different way. The equality of humanity is not ordained by a religious godhead but through the belief that all beings share the same mind. This is the view of Zen Buddhism. As far as the nature of the mind is concerned, all sentient beings are inherently one.²⁴ The Sutta Nipata states it like this, “As I am so are these, as these are so am I.”²⁵ Therefore, when a person respects others as themselves, they are literally respecting themselves.

In Buddhism, ones' karma is negatively affected by one's lack of respect for others. In Christianity, God's judgment is invited by one's lack of respect for others. The concept of *karma* teaches that for every right action, good will follow, and for every wrong action, harm will follow. The Dalai Lama relates this principle to Jesus' teaching on judgment. He quotes a passage from the Gospel of John where Jesus teaches “I have not come to judge the world, but to save the world. There is a judge for anyone who rejects me and does not accept my words; the words I have spoken will be his judge on the last day.”²⁶ Jesus' teaching is taken to mean that there is not a supernatural person judging the faults of mankind but judgment takes place through the principle of causality. If one lives in a positive way then they will experience desirable consequences.

However, if they act in a negative way they should expect that life would serve its own

²⁴ Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Manual of Zen Buddhism* (Charleston South Carolina: Forgotten Books, 1974), 167

²⁵ <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/sbe10/sbe1035.htm> Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 10: The Dhammapada and Sutta Nipata, by Max Müller and Max Fausböll, [1881], at sacred-texts.com

²⁶ John 12:47-48

punishment. In this way the Dalai Lama teaches that Jesus taught the concept of Karma.²⁷

Of course, Christians disagree with the Dalai Lama's interpretation of the Gospel of John. At this point the divergence from Christ's original message that the Dalai Lama believes the Christian's theological tradition has taken becomes clear. The Christian argues that judgment on the last day is an obvious reference to divine judgment. Buddhist disagrees. Since they do not believe in a divine judge then there cannot be a divine judgment and one might be able to say that the passage could mean the role of karma would continue until the last person reaches Enlightenment. This would be their last day. The punishment for not adhering to Jesus' words could be seen as a delay in being released from *samsara*. If one does not follow the teachings that lead to Enlightenment they may have to suffer through many cycles of life before they are released. They may even have to wait until the last day.

Marcus Borg has taken popular Scripture passages and lined them up with Buddhist passages. He believes these passages to be parallel thoughts. By showing this he tries to make the case that Jesus taught Buddhist truths but used words and concepts that the Israelites could understand.

Perhaps the most well known passage in Christianity is John 3:16. Christians believe that it is this teaching that sets them apart from the rest of the world's religions. It says God is willing to send His Son to earth as a man in order for Him to be the propitiation for mankind's punishment. Borg believes he has found a parallel passage in Digha Nikaya 12.78 in which the writer speaks of Gautama as one who has rescued him

²⁷ *The Good Heart*, 111 - 115.

from a pit into which he would surely fall. Gautama does this by grabbing the man by his hair and pulling him back to safety.²⁸ As Jesus saves humanity from their sin, Gautama saves mankind from their missteps. Through mercy, both do not allow man to reap the consequences of his own ignorance and foolishness.

There are other passages from Scripture that are very similar to Buddhist writings. An example of this can be found in John 15:13 when Jesus teaches his disciples “Greater love has no one that this, than he who would lay down his life for his friend.” The parallel of this verse is written in Sutta Nipata 149-150. It states, “Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her life, even so, cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings.”²⁹

Both of these passages teach that the greatest love is that which would propel a person to forfeit their own life. The Christian text teaches that one should be willing to give one’s life for a friend whereas the Buddhist text teaches that the Buddhist should put the lives of all beings above themselves. This example can act as a proof text for the Buddhist who wishes to prove that Buddhism teaches a deeper form of love than Christianity. Even though the concepts are the same, they are taken further in Buddhism than in Christianity.

A Christian might ask a Buddhist how Christ’s message could have been confused given that it was his followers who wrote out the details of his life and recorded His words. The answer to this question lies in Scripture and in an historical interpretation of

²⁸ Marcus Borg, *Jesus and Buddha: The Parallel Sayings*, (Berkley: Ulysses Press, 1997), 118-119.

²⁹ Borg, 25.

how it was written. The interpreter may choose not to concede that the authors of Scripture were in fact, followers of Jesus. They could contend the Gospels were written after the fall of the temple in Jerusalem and after the death of Jesus' followers. At the time of the temple's destruction pieces of Jesus' teachings had been recorded and were popular as teachings and sayings. These teachings were the source for what would become Christianity. This interpretation of history states that after the destruction of Jerusalem's temple the Jews were without a method of salvation. This led some to create a new salvation around the teachings of Jesus.³⁰ A.N. Wilson sees the invention of historical fact as the only way to account for many of the stories in the Gospels. This is especially the case when referring to the trial and crucifixion of Jesus.³¹ According to advocates of this view, the common teachings of the Gospel are the only parts that are authentic. These teachings have been compiled and are believed to be similar to the source Gospel or "Q." Jews searching for a method of salvation wrote other parts which are the historical sections of the Gospels.

Liberal New Testament scholars attest the so-called mythologies of Jesus' life started to form among groups in northern Syria and Asia Minor. This view interprets Jesus' death as martyrdom, and then, drawing from Hellenistic mythologies, adds the miraculous theme of resurrection.³² These groups knew nothing of Jesus' life except His teachings from "Q" and the resurrection story they had compiled. However, in time the groups started to fall away from a focus on the teachings of Christ. In Jesus' death they

³⁰ *The Buddha's Gospel*, 54.

³¹ Wilson, A. N. *Jesus*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1992, 210.

³² Mack, 218.

had found an easier way to salvation. No longer did they have to strive through life, they were instead forgiven by Christ's sacrifice.³³

Some liberal New Testament scholars believe this view spread more after the destruction of Herod's temple. Since Jews no longer had a means of sacrifice, these scholars believe many of them joined the growing Jesus movement. It was at this time the stories about Jesus' life were penned. In this view these stories were not based on historical records, but were the result of early Christian mythmaking to give the teachings of Christ an historical context.³⁴

Being familiar with the teachings of Jesus, the writer of Mark is said to have written a Messiah narrative to go with the teachings. According to this view, if Mark were written after the fall of the temple, it would have been written sometime during the early 70's. Matthew's Gospel followed during the 80's and was based on the previous book of Mark and "Q" source.³⁵ The book of Matthew was thus the first time the teachings of Jesus had been compiled with the narrative. This combination made the separate teachings, known in modern day as Q, to be unnecessary. The more exciting narrative soon became the focus of the Christian message instead of the teachings. Much of the reason for this was the work of the Apostle Paul. He traveled around the known world and spread the story of Jesus' resurrection as found in the book of Mark. He

³³ Mack, 3.

³⁴ *ibid*, 10.

³⁵ *ibid*, 2-3.

simplified devotion from following the teachings of Jesus to simple faith in Jesus' saving power.³⁶

John's Gospel was then written in the 90's. The writer of John focused on the divinity of Jesus, which has been the focus of Christianity ever since. Luke and Acts soon followed John, in the early second century.³⁷ This book was written much like Matthew, with a copy of the original teachings of Jesus and a copy of Mark. The late dates given to the Gospels make it obvious this interpretation of history does not accept that the Gospels were written by the actual disciples.

This account denies any real knowledge about the disciples. Instead, one must believe the Gospels are stories imagined by Jews, desperate for a savior after the destruction of their temple. Mack writes that the connection between the events of the Gospels and the destruction of the temple, as prophesized by Jesus, could only have been imagined after the war.³⁸ The reason for this is found in Matthew chapter 24. As Jesus was leaving the temple with his disciples they commented on the grandeur of the temple. Jesus replied to them saying, "There shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." For those who do not believe in the authenticity of the Gospels, this passage is too accurate a prophecy to be written before the actual destruction of the temple. In A.D. 70, the Romans completed their attack on Jerusalem. They set the city on fire, which accidentally spread to the Temple. Tradition says this fire melted the gold that ornamented the Temple and it seeped into the cracks of the stones. This caused Titus

³⁶ *ibid*, 219-220.

³⁷ Mack, 2.

³⁸ *ibid*, 3.

to order that the Temple not only be destroyed but also dismantled to the last stone so that Rome could collect all the gold.³⁹ In the writings of Josephus, one learns that the demolition was so complete in Jerusalem, that the walls were laid down to their very foundations, so much so, that future generations might not even know the city had been inhabited.⁴⁰

If the assumption is allowed that Jesus was not who the Gospels portray Him to be, then the only logical conclusion is for the stories of the disciples to be later additions. The question must be asked, if the writers of the Gospels had no personal contact with Jesus, are there any parts of Gospels that can be accepted? Based not only on biblical records but extra biblical writings, one must conclude that there was a real person named Jesus who taught in ancient Israel. Mack agrees with this conclusion but writes that the original followers of Jesus did not think of Jesus as a Messiah or as the Christ. “They did not regard his death as a divine, tragic, or saving event. And they did not imagine that he had been raised from the dead to rule over a transformed world. Instead, they thought of him as a teacher whose teachings made it possible to live with verve in troubled times.”⁴¹

Since the teachings of Q are general teachings and contain no divine claims, some Buddhists have begun to believe Jesus’ miraculous wisdom might have been from Buddhist influence.⁴² Israel being an important thoroughfare for merchants and caravans

³⁹ Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*, (InterVarsity Press, Downers, Illinois, 1998), 53.

⁴⁰ Josephus, Flavius, and William Whiston. *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 750-751.

⁴¹ Mack, 4.

⁴² Falvey, 80.

it is possible for Jesus to have come across the Buddhist message early in His life. He could have studied the philosophies of the Buddha and become a master in His own right.

This brings a new dimension to the teachings of Jesus and creates a Christianity that is more acceptable to the Buddhist worldview. By editing out the history in the Bible, many of the divine aspects of Christ follow. For example, in Q there are only two miracles mentioned, the one being when Jesus casts out a demon from a mute man and the other when a centurion comes to Jesus to ask for the healing of his servant. Even though there are dozens of miracles recorded in the Gospels, these are not included in the Q. However, if the editor's point were to take out the supernatural aspect of Christ, why would he not eliminate all miraculous instances? In Buddhism, there is no conflict for Jesus to have miraculous powers, as long as His reasons for performing the miracle were noble.⁴³ A possible reason for these miracles is that each was accompanied by an important teaching. The miracle was necessary for the teaching so it could not be left out.

When Jesus casts the demon out of the mute man he is accused by the teachers of the law of receiving his power from Beelzebub the king of demons. Jesus replies that if that were true Beelzebub's kingdom would be divided against itself. He said that any kingdom divided against itself would be certain to fall. In this story Jesus does not claim divine power to accomplish his miracle, he simply denies any connection with the ruler of demons, Beelzebub. He then uses the opportunity to teach on the consequences of having a divided kingdom and therefore the importance of unity. From Mack's section

⁴³ Paul Dahlke and Sīlāchāra. *Buddhist Essays*. (London: Macmillan, 1908), 295.

title, “Kingdoms in Conflict,” it is shown how the miracle transitions immediately into a teaching point regarding a divided kingdom.⁴⁴

In the other miracle, a Roman centurion approaches Jesus and asks him to heal his servant.⁴⁵ The centurion tells Jesus that he does not believe himself worthy to have Jesus come into his home but if Jesus would but grant the miracle, he knew it would be performed.⁴⁶ His reasoning being that he has control over his subordinates and his orders are followed with or without his presence. He believed that Jesus had similar control over nature, and therefore his orders would be carried out whether he was present or not. Jesus responded to the centurion that he was impressed with his faith. In fact, it was his faith that had healed his servant. After this the centurion returned home to find his servant healed.⁴⁷

The context of this miracle could be interpreted as the individual’s power in faith over natural occurrences. Jesus did not specifically say that He had healed the servant because of the centurion’s faith, but that the centurion’s faith had done the healing. In this context, this miracle represents a very Buddhist concept. The power to change the world and enlighten one self is not in a guru or prophet of mysterious teaching but in each person, waiting to be found.

In editing the Gospels and developing Q, any story or miracle that was not within the context of the teachings of Jesus was considered to be a later addition. With this in

⁴⁴ Mack, 90.

⁴⁵ *ibid*, 85.

⁴⁶ Matthew 8:8-9

⁴⁷ Matthew 8:13

mind, one may be inclined to ask why Buddhists, or anyone who accepts this view, would continue to accept Christianity as a valid religion. This is not an instance where pluralism would allow both stories to be true. Either Jesus was divine or He was not. If the Gospels of Christianity and the divine claims made about Jesus are mere fantasy then anyone who believes these claims should be pitied and corrected. On the other hand, if the Gospels about Jesus' life are viable first hand accounts, then Jesus is much more than a philosophical teacher and the Buddhist concept of a godless process of enlightenment is the system that should be corrected. The truth of both systems hinges on the same monumental point; who is Jesus?

A Christian Response To A Buddhist Christ

Historical Accuracy of the Bible

The logical end of Jesus being a *bodhisattva*, has been shown to be that Scripture's record of history cannot be trusted. Since the records of the Gospels and Paul's epistles are so clear as to who they believe Jesus to be, it is the thought of some Buddhist as well as secular scholars, that they cannot be actual eye witness accounts. These scholars date the Gospel of Mark at around A.D. 70 and the Gospel of Matthew following in the last quarter of that century.⁴⁸ Thus, every record of Jesus as Messiah must have been written after the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. Even though this seems extreme, one must realize that most common response to questions about the Divinity of Christ are to point to His claims, the resurrection and the circumstances after his death.

⁴⁸ R.T. France. *The Gospel of Matthew. The New International Commentary on the New Testament.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 18.

The apologist may come across people arguing that Jesus swooned on the cross or that his body was stolen by the disciples.⁴⁹ One possible response is to point out how most of the disciples gave their lives for the testimony that Jesus is Lord and rose from the dead.⁵⁰ Furthermore it is highly unlikely that if the story were false, the disciples would pick women to be the first witnesses.⁵¹

The church was born into a time and place in history where allegiance to Christ above Caesar could cost one their life. For the church to grow in spite of three hundred years of such persecution, one would expect that it be based on some kind of foundation. The Roman rulers of early Christianity were baffled as to how Christians would willingly give their lives in order not to deny Christ. The kind of devotion the disciples showed to Jesus is not born out of lies. It is common in religions and cults for the leaders to require the lives of the believers. Islam has suicide bombers, in Hinduism women used to be forced to throw themselves on the burial fires of their husbands⁵² and in some cults, leaders have convinced their followers to commit suicide.⁵³ The examples of these religions all have something in common. They all have a religions leadership asking its

⁴⁹ Gary R Habermas and Mike Licona. *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2004), 97-103.

⁵⁰ Charles George Herbermann. *The Catholic Encyclopedia; An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church*. (New York: Encyclopedia Press, 1914), 791.

⁵¹ William Lane Craig. *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*. (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2008), 368.

⁵² Tanika Sarkar. *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation, Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 203.

⁵³ George D. Chryssides, *Exploring New Religions. Issues in contemporary religion*. (London: Cassell, 1999), 33-76.

followers for devotion unto death. In Christianity the leadership didn't have to ask. Instead they willingly gave their lives instead of denying Jesus and set a precedent for persecuted Christians that continue today.

These are convincing arguments. However, if the story was fictitious to begin with, and not added to Christianity until after the original followers, then those arguments lose their validity. The argument made by Buddhists does not deny that these would make good arguments. They simply say they did not happen.⁵⁴ Some believe that Jesus never died in Israel. Instead, he moved to India where he developed followers, and finally died and was buried in Kashmir. There is still a grave marked to him today.⁵⁵ Others say that he may have not traveled to India, but it is undeniable that India traveled to Jesus and Jesus learned Buddhist ways.⁵⁶

If Jesus' divine teachings were fictitious then C.S. Lewis' point that Jesus was a lunatic, a liar or the Son of God⁵⁷ loses its validity. The Buddhist would say, Jesus wasn't a lunatic or a liar, he was simply misquoted.⁵⁸ Since Jesus did not personally write any of the Gospels, the task of proving his words were not merely misinterpreted by zealous followers becomes the task at hand.

⁵⁴ Falvey, 54.

⁵⁵ <http://www.tombofjesus.com/2007/home/welcome.html> visited June 20, 2009

⁵⁶ James M. Hanson 2005. Was Jesus a Buddhist? *Buddhist-Christian Studies*. 25, no. 1: 75-89.

⁵⁷ Clive Staples Lewis, *Mere Christianity: A Revised and Amplified Edition, with a New Introduction, of the Three Books, Broadcast Talks, Christian Behaviour, and Beyond Personality*. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 52.

⁵⁸ Rita M. Gross and Terry C. Muck. *Buddhists Talk About Jesus, Christians Talk About the Buddha*. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 147.

For this reason, for one to make an argument for Scripture one must show Scripture's story as accepted before the fall of Jerusalem. One must show how the records as recorded in the Gospels can be nothing other than accurate. Without that basis, the rest of the New Testament comes into question as well. If there is not a Jesus narrative before A.D. 70 and no eyewitnesses to collaborate the story then all that is written must be imaginary. That is why it is so important to prove this is not the case.

When sources after A.D. 70 are not considered it becomes difficult to make an argument since all the letters, copies and written historical records from that time have been lost through the ages. Still, there is a case to be made when considering the Gospels of Jesus' disciples. If Mark had been the first notion of the Jesus narratives, then his writing style should support those claims. Being the introduction, it would not assume the reader having previous knowledge of the events it describes.

If the above view were true it would follow that Paul also lived after A.D. 70 and was influenced by the writers of the Gospels since his writings contain so much on the deity of Christ. If this is the case, then supporting evidence should be found when looking at the churches he is said to have founded. Special attention will be given to the Corinthian church since there is no debate as to when Clement of Rome served the church and wrote his letters to the Corinthians. Since Clement served as the Bishop of Rome between A.D. 88 and A.D. 96⁵⁹ then his epistle to the Corinthian church must have been written in that time. Coulombe writes that Clement wrote to the Corinthians in A.D.

⁵⁹ Charles A. Coulombe, *Vicars of Christ: A History of the Popes*. (New York: Citadel Press, 2003), 21.

96 after a schism occurred in Corinth and their local bishop was driven away.⁶⁰ The early date of this schism in Corinth and the proof one has in Clements letter, show the early beliefs about Christ.

Furthermore, within the Scriptures one can find early Christian creeds that must have existed within the first few decades of the Christian movement. Mostly found in the writings of Paul, the theological points must have preceded his writings. The most famous creed for apologists is found in I Corinthians 15:4-8. This creed speaks powerfully of Christ's resurrection and how he allowed himself to be witnessed by so many people after his resurrection.

Last, the writings of non-Christian historians give strong evidence for the beliefs of the first Christians. Their unbiased documentation of the Christians and the events of Jesus' life and death are hard to dispute. Unless the whole of history be fiction, the Gospels stand true.

These facts show that the stories narrated in the Gospels are the actual historical records of Jesus' life. Therefore, if any claim is to be made that Jesus followed the Buddhist path of the *bodhisattva*, that claim should correspond with what is already known about Jesus through the Gospels. If what is to be expected of a *bodhisattva* does not correspond with Jesus' life and teachings then it can be concluded that he was not following the Buddhist tradition. Though some teachings may have similar values, this only proves that wisdom can be contained in more than one philosophy.

If the story of Jesus life had its genesis in the book of Mark, then before this writing there would be no record of the crucifixion, resurrection, or Judas' betrayal. In an

⁶⁰ *ibid*, 22.

original text one would assume the author would build to the point of crucifixion as a twist in the plot and a surprise ending. That certainly was the case for the disciples who lived it. Despite Christ's many warnings, it is obvious that they were unaware that Jesus had to die. This is illustrated when Peter rebukes Christ for teaching of his death⁶¹

Though blind to the meaning of Jesus' words it is clear the disciples did hear his warnings and prophecies regarding his death since they recorded them, but it seems they did not realize he was speaking of a certain future and not a mere possibility. It's hard to believe that an author would write such obvious clues for the disciples to know of their Master's eminent death, without the disciples understanding what was being said. In real life this is more possible because people do not want to believe bad news. Until the worst happens it's very easy to deny that anything might be wrong or is going to go wrong. This is human nature but it would seem odd to be described in a fictional work, especially with no real explanation.

Another aspect of the story that seems odd in the context of fiction is the fact that the end is given away so often through the book. Most novels employ red herrings to throw the reader off from guessing the outcome, but as early as Mark 3:19 when the disciples were being introduced, the readers are told that Judas is to betray Jesus. If the author of Mark was writing the first version of the story it does not make sense that he would reveal the climax so early in the work. A more logical explanation is that the betrayal of Jesus by Judas and his prediction of being raised from the dead, as mentioned in Mark 8:31, were already commonly known facts at the time Mark was written.

⁶¹ Matthew 16:22

Also, if the facts about Jesus' life in the Gospels did not exist before A.D. 70 then the early church would have no knowledge about it and thus the letters of the early churches would not contain the same information. Paul's letters are filled with facts that coincide with the Gospels. In I Corinthians 11:23-26 he speaks of the Lord's Supper and Judas' betrayal of Jesus, in Galatians 3:1, I Thessalonians 2:15 and I Corinthians 15:4-8 he speaks of Jesus' death and resurrection. In order for the Gospels to have been fabricated, all of the New Testament would have to have been fabricated as well.

Such a fabrication could be possible if there were simply one or two writers of the New Testament. Though throughout history, thousands of novels have been written. The authors of these works varied in their degree of talent. Some wrote insignificant works, which would be forgotten in the annals of history before their bound pages even lose their crispness. Others such as Shakespeare, Jules Verne, Charles Dickens and C.S. Lewis had such genius that their works were not only be read in their lifetimes but in the classrooms of their grandchildren's grandchildren and will be for centuries more.

In the writings of Shakespeare, Verne, Dickens and Lewis one would expect consistency. They wrote intricate stories of fiction but since there was only one mind authoring each story, the thoughts remained congruent. If several authors wrote Verne's *Journey to the Center of the Earth* at different times, it would be impossible for the story to remain consistent, nor would anyone expect them to be.

Even though the New Testament was written by possibly nine different authors, there is harmony between them. Each tells their part of one story. Even though the Gospels tell the same basic story, they are told from different perspectives, elucidating on different facts, each adding another layer of richness. Some say their harmony comes

from Mark being written first and then being used by the other Gospel writers to write complimentary accounts.⁶² When reading the Gospels this does not seem to be the case at all. Most focus on the same miracles, the same teachings and have the same story but each also has a diversity of its own.

Even if Luke used Mark's Gospel as a template for his own the facts were not from Mark alone. Furthermore, Luke's Gospel is not that of an eyewitness and this is made clear. Luke did research in order to write an account for Theophilus.⁶³ This research was not based only on Mark and Matthew but many others who had written an account of what they had witnessed. It seems from Luke 1:1-2 that not only had several of the original eye witnesses written accounts of what had happened, but many second generation Christians had written an account as well. So when Luke "investigated everything from the beginning," he worked with not only the writings of Matthew and Mark but many others as well. It is also probable that he had many first hand witnesses still alive and available to speak with. This is the reason he includes things not included in the other Gospels. He took it as his task to write a complete but brief account of what happened and so he included things not included in the other Gospels and also left out certain things covered by the other Gospels in more detail.

One good example of how they all wrote about the same instance in different ways is the story of the blind man in Jericho. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus healed a blind man as he was coming into Jericho.⁶⁴ Then as one looks at Matthew 20 and Mark 10, one

⁶² Stephen C. Carlson, "Synoptic Problem FAQ," December 22, 2000, <http://www.mindspring.com/~scarlson/synopt/faq.htm> (accessed November 23, 2009).

⁶³ Acts 1:1

⁶⁴ Luke 18:35-43

finds the same story but with different details. In Matthew and Mark's Gospels, Jesus is said to be leaving Jericho when he encounters the blind beggar. The author of Mark also includes the blind man's name and the name of his father. He was Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus. Then in Matthew, he is said to have a companion beggar as well. These differences seem to force one to conclude that these are different instances. However, other details in the story fit together perfectly.

All of these events take place around Jericho, the beggar calls out to Jesus calling him the Son of David and asking for mercy and the multitude that is following Jesus in every account rebukes the blind man or men but Jesus commands that the beggar or beggars be brought to him. Unless this was an incredibly common occurrence, these instances seem to be the same moment, but told from different perspectives.

It is very possible that there were actually two beggars who were healed and Mark and Luke only focused on the one.⁶⁵ Seeing that Mark calls the beggar not only by his name but his father's name, it seems that the two had become acquaintances since Bartimaeus had begun following Jesus. Either that or he became very popular among the followers of Jesus and was simply well known in the first century.

The difference in whether they were "drawing nigh" to Jericho or leaving is not as easy to harmonize without more information. John Walvoord addresses this issue in his commentary satisfactorily. He writes that there were not one, but two Jerichos. The old Jericho that had been destroyed and the new Jericho where people lived. This story seems to be saying that Jesus left the new Jericho with a multitude on his way to

⁶⁵ Eric Lyons, "Controversial Jericho," 2004, <http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/578> (accessed November 24, 2009).

Jerusalem. As he walked down the highway and was drawing close to the famous site of Jericho, the city destroyed by God's power, he encountered two beggars. One of these beggars was named Bartimaeus and at their insistence and Jesus' mercy they were healed and followed Jesus from then on.⁶⁶

Whereas now, this passage seems to have a simple explanation, the discrepancy would not exist if the common source for the story were a written testimony and not an experience. This passage shows every indication that three different people experienced it and recorded the events separately, from memory. If a person were basing his story on another's writing, why would he change something so simple as whether they were leaving or coming into a city? Furthermore, if the author was aware of the other accounts, in that they were his source, he would realize the discrepancy would be confusing and would not include it.

Another instance written about in several Gospels is when Jesus preached in his hometown synagogue and was rejected. This story is presented in Mark 6 as well as in Matthew 13. In Mark it is the passage from which people determine that Jesus was a carpenter, but in the context of Matthew 13 that may not have been what was meant. In Mark 6 Jesus is teaching in the synagogue and the people take offense at him because they see him as a carpenter. It seems as if since they are so familiar with him and his family, they become jealous of his wisdom and miraculous power, and for this reason reject him. The passage reads

““Where did this man get these things?” they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! Isn't this the

⁶⁶ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 154-155.

carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him."⁶⁷

In Matthew 13 one finds the exact same passage but a change in the wording. This passage reads

““Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?” they asked. "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" And they took offense at him.”⁶⁸

In the second passage Jesus is called the carpenter's son whereas in the first passage he is called a carpenter himself. Since this is the same conversation, the original could only have contained one of the designations. If the passage in Mark is accurate in ascribing the profession of carpenter to Jesus then there is no reason for Matthew to change this by referring to his father. This seems to be the thoughts of Origen who writes “in none of the Gospels received by the churches is Jesus himself called a carpenter.”⁶⁹

What may be the implication here is that in the eyes of the crowd, Jesus only had the honor of a carpenter since that is what his father was. Although he taught with eloquence and wisdom, in his own town the people could not separate his accomplishments, or expectations for his future, from what his father had accomplished. This seems odd in western culture but in the east it is still common as can be seen in the life of Ravi Zacharias.

⁶⁷ Mark 6:2b-3 (NIV)

⁶⁸ Matthew 13:54b – 57 (NIV)

⁶⁹ Origen, *Contra Celsum*. vi. 36

Zacharias occasionally tells of his own experience with this aspect of culture when he goes back to his home country of India. In a specific instance he had returned to speak to a crowd. He had already attained many personal accomplishments and was known and loved around the world as a Christian apologist. However, when introduced, none of his accomplishments were included in his introductory synopsis. Instead, the many accomplishments of his father were read. In the eyes of the Indian people Zacharias' was given the right to speak because of his father more than himself. The only mention of Zacharias that was made in his introduction was at the very end, after they had overviewed all the wonderful facts regarding his father. Very simply, they opened the floor for him by saying, "and this is his son."⁷⁰

Similar to Zacharias' experience, in his own hometown, Jesus was measured by the accomplishments of his father. Undoubtedly he had already earned the right to speak at the synagogue by his own scholastic achievements but none of that mattered to those who knew his earthly father. Even if Jesus had all the training of a Rabbi, in their eyes he could only be a carpenter.

This explains the difference in wording between the two passages. In one the actual words were used, but in the other the meaning of the words are recorded. Again, this difference would be out of place if the story had not been recorded as a personal experience. It is very likely the two accounts would be written separately but if one relied on the other for its content the quote would not be changed.

Apart from textual criticism of the Gospels, one can learn much about early belief in the church by reading what the early church fathers wrote. The earliest Christian

⁷⁰ Ravi K Zacharias. *Jesus Among Other Gods: The Absolute Claims of the Christian Message*. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub, 2000), 27.

writer who is not found in the New Testament is Clement of Rome. His letter to the Corinthians can be dated at around A.D. 95. His letter is a doctrinally focused and meant to help settle a dispute between the church members and elders in the church at Corinth.⁷¹ This is important because it tells modern scholars that there was in fact an established church in A.D. 95.

If those who say that the Christian story originated after A.D. 70 are correct, then Paul must also be placed in that time period as well as actually starting all the churches he founded. One of the churches founded by Paul was the church at Corinth. Paul founded this church along with the church at Thessalonica during his second missionary journey. After founding the church Paul would write his first letter to them. This letter is mentioned in I Corinthians 5:9 but the content is unknown. Later he wrote a second letter that Christianity has deemed I Corinthians. It is commonly thought that this letter was written six to seven years after the founding of the church.⁷² In this letter Paul spoke of divisions that had grown up within their numbers and urged them to be unified.⁷³ His third letter, known as II Corinthians, was written later after a painful visit. Most scholars place this writing within a few months⁷⁴ to two years⁷⁵ after I Corinthians. Following this

⁷¹ Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence For The Life of Christ*. College Press, Joplin MO 1996), 230.

⁷² Richard N. Longenecker, *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament*. McMaster New Testament studies. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1998), 185.

⁷³ I Corinthians 1:10-11

⁷⁴ Harry Lathrop Reed and James Stevenson Riggs, *Epistles to the Corinthians*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922}, 151.

letter Paul underwent two imprisonments in Rome the second one culminating in his death.⁷⁶

Paul's death in history's timeline does not allow for the Corinthian church to be founded after A.D. 70. Therefore, the Gospel story must have originated before A.D. 70. Clement became the Roman church's head around A.D. 88.⁷⁷ Since Clement was preceded as bishop by Anacletus and Linus, who served for twelve and nine years respectively,⁷⁸ Paul could not have been martyred until A.D. 67 or 68.⁷⁹ The existence of the church with which Clement corresponded, provides evidence for the life and work of Paul. The message he preached, later to be quoted by Clement speaks of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and how the entire Christian church depends on that fact.⁸⁰ Clement had no doubt about the history of the Apostles and the Gospels. In his letter he confirms many aspects of Christ's history. They were his beliefs, those of Corinth, those of Paul, and of the Apostles and those of Christ Jesus. He wrote,

“The Apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus was sent forth from God. So then Christ is from God, and the Apostles are from Christ. Both therefore came of the will of God in the appointed order. Having therefore received a charge, and having been

⁷⁵ Linda L. Belleville, *2 Corinthians. The IVP New Testament Commentary series*, 8. (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 20.

⁷⁶ Michael Counsell, *A Basic Christian Dictionary*. (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2007), 3.

⁷⁷ Coulombe, 21.

⁷⁸ Robert Maguire, *St. Peter Non-Roman in His Mission, Ministry, and Martyrdom*. (London: Seeley, Jackson, & Halliday, 1871), 31.

⁷⁹ Coulombe, 19-20.

⁸⁰ I Corinthians 15:17

fully assured through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and confirmed in the word of God with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth with the glad tidings that the kingdom of God should come.”⁸¹

In this passage one can see several aspects of the early church and their beliefs. Most importantly is that the apostles received the Gospel from Christ directly. Since it is from their testimony that we know Christ, it is important for them also to know him. Clement explains that Christ came from God and his message was confirmed by his resurrection. This gives certainty to anything the apostles said. The message they were supposed to preach is the Kingdom of God and its coming. They did not focus on social injustice or peace and serenity like many Buddhists. Instead they preached that Jesus is Lord and by his sacrifice and resurrection, all who call on His name may be saved.⁸²

A popular early Christian creed among apologists is I Corinthians 15:4-8. This is a hymn that Paul included in his letter that must have been written very early in the Christian era. From the apologist’s perspective the most important part of this hymn is not the hymn itself but the introduction to this hymn as given by Paul is key. In verse three he says, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received.” Paul tells the Corinthian church that he is not writing his own experience or opinion but what he has received from someone else. Then the hymn goes on to give testimony of Jesus’ death and resurrection and appearances to over 500 people including the first disciples.

At some point then, Paul received the message of Jesus’ death and resurrection and appearances. The words “delivered” and “received” are technical terms for passing

⁸¹ Clement of Rome, *Corinthians*, 42.

⁸² Romans 10:13

on tradition.⁸³ The point now is to discover who passed the words on to Paul. This question is answered by a reading of Galatians chapter one. Paul writes, “Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother.” After being a Christian for three years Paul went to Jerusalem to meet with Peter and James. Undoubtedly the discussion would revolve around Jesus, his resurrection and the testimony going throughout the Roman world. This is the point, a mere six to eight years after the crucifixion of Jesus, when Paul heard the story from the very eyewitnesses that were there. This dates the creed in I Corinthians even older. This creed was probably written in the mid A.D. 30's.⁸⁴ Ulrich Wilkens says this creed, “indubitably goes back to the oldest phase of all in the history of primitive Christianity.”⁸⁵ And Joachim Jeremias adds that it's “the earliest tradition of all.”⁸⁶

Other than the history found in Scriptures, there is also the testimony of the early church historians. One well-respected historian is Eusebius. In describing the authority of the Gospel of Mark, Eusebius quotes Papias, who lived in the early second century. Papias writes, “Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered.”⁸⁷ From this, one learns that Mark's testimony was not his own, but that of

⁸³ Habermas, 153.

⁸⁴ *ibid*, 154.

⁸⁵ Wolfhart Pannenberg, Rolf Rendtorff, Trutz Rendtorff, and Ulrich Wilkens. *Revelation As History*. (New York: Macmillan, 1968.) 2.

⁸⁶ Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*. (New York: Scribner, 1988.) 306.

⁸⁷ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15.

Peter.⁸⁸ The apostle John relayed this to Papias who recorded it and in later years Eusebius read it and includes it in his histories.

In the game of telephone, an account is still fairly accurate when only removed two places from the original source. If the message is written then any deviation must be on account of pure and utter foolishness or some kind of devious action. Since no one calls the early historians fools, and since the earnestness of the early believers is clear through the sacrifices they made to not deny them, the possibility of a completely fabricated account is ludicrous. This becomes especially obvious when one considers that this is not the only account passed down by the fathers of Christian history. Eusebius is merely one person, in the undeviated story of Christian History.

Another support for the Gospel accounts is simply the sheer volume of manuscripts of them, which have been found. More manuscripts have been found of the New Testament than any other book from the ancient world. In fact, more than 5300 of these documents have been found.⁸⁹ Each of these manuscripts represents a person, a family or even an entire community of people who accept the claims therein to be true. The earliest of these manuscripts, which represent these many witnesses, are very old. They come from only 100 years after the first century.⁹⁰ If the Gospel story had been given to interpretation and revision, then the 5300 separate manuscripts would grossly differ in content. There was no printing press in the ancient world so all of these

⁸⁸ Blomberg, 123.

⁸⁹ Orr-Ewing, Amy. *Why Trust the Bible?: Answers to 10 Tough Questions*. (Inter Varsity, 2008.), 42.

⁹⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.), 6.

manuscripts were hand copied, not only from each other but from other copies and originally from the originals. Since the majority of copies available have been shown to agree with each other,⁹¹ scholars can know with virtual certainty that they have been accurate since the original autographs.⁹² If they had deviated from the originals early on this would have been made evident by the copies in different areas. As the different copies were distributed around different parts of the ancient world, simple distance and lack of modern communication would have made fixing errors based on other copies impossible. Furthermore there is no evidence in Christian history of such a need. This allows the modern reader confidence to know that his or her copy is accurate to the original words.

Jesus as a Bodhisattva

Since one can have confidence that the biblical account is accurate, the task now is to deduce whether or not Jesus' actions and teachings align him with the aspects of a *bodhisattva* and the teachings of Buddhism. Buddhism teaches that any human can become a *bodhisattva* through a commitment to compassion for all human beings in this and in all coming incarnations.⁹³ However, this does not mean that any human can become Christ. The mind of a *bodhisattva* is said to be completely clear of confusion. In

⁹¹ Wayne A. Grudem, and Jeff Purswell. *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 45.

⁹² Norman L. Geisler. *The Battle For The Resurrection* (Thomas Nelson: Nashville 1992), 72-73.

⁹³ Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*. (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1998), 229.

fact he has passed beyond the point where he could make an error.⁹⁴ *Bodhisattvas* are said to be pure, giving, and untiring in their purpose to teach all sentient beings to achieve enlightenment.⁹⁵ However, they are also limited. In order to dwell on the earth as an enlightened being they must submit themselves to a strict code of rules in order to retain their purity. There are four main rules that are subdivided into many other rules. From reading the Gospels one can see that Jesus does not adhere to many of these rules.

The very first rule given for *Bodhisattvas* is stated like this:

“If a *bodhisattva* or *mahasattva* takes his stand on perseverance, is gentle and compliant, never violent, and never alarmed in mind; and if with regard to phenomena he takes no action but observes the true entity of phenomena without acting or making any distinction, then this I call the practices of a *bodhisattva* or *mahasattva*.”⁹⁶

If Jesus were to observe the true nature of mankind without action then he would have never come to the earth. His entire purpose for coming was to fulfill the Law of God,⁹⁷ and restore the relationship between God and man that had been severed.⁹⁸ Jesus was not interested in his own Enlightenment. In fact, he already had a home in heaven before coming to earth. Jesus took radical action in order

⁹⁴ Robert E. Van Voorst. *Anthology of World Scriptures*, 5th ed. (Belmont California: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006), 85.

⁹⁵ Richard D. Hecht and Ninian Smart, eds. *Sacred Texts of the World: A Universal Anthology*. (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 272-273.

⁹⁶ Watson, 197.

⁹⁷ Matthew 5:17

⁹⁸ Galatians 4:4-5

to become the sacrifice all mankind needed.⁹⁹ In this, Jesus' actions did not correspond to the first rule of the *bodhisattva*.

There are also several instances in the Gospels that show Jesus reacting passionately. When entering the temple to see money changers and tradesmen he overturned their tables in a fit of rage. They were desecrating the Lord's temple with their greed. Jesus said they had made house of prayer for all nations into a den of robbers.¹⁰⁰ When dealing with the Pharisees there were times he challenged them for their wicked hearts and tyrannical leadership among the Israelites. He called them hypocrites, a brood of vipers and classified them as the same type of people who killed the prophets before them.¹⁰¹

In these circumstances, Jesus took clear action to challenge how the Israelites have been relating to the One they called God. According to the first rule of conduct given in the Lotus Sutra this would be in contradiction to how Jesus should behave. Instead of challenging people about their destructive behaviors it would be more appropriate for a *bodhisattva* to ignore them and focus on his own meditation and the students who had been worthy enough to follow him.

In line with the first rule of the *bodhisattva* the third rule states that "One should never engage in frivolous debate," instead one should regard all living

⁹⁹ Philippians 2:6-8

¹⁰⁰ Mark 11:17

¹⁰¹ Matthew 23.

being with great compassion.¹⁰² This shows how the Buddhist sees debate to be unfruitful. Though a person may not agree with a particular argument right now, in the future they may be reborn as someone who would. So the concept of debate is unnecessary since the truth will ultimately be accepted regardless. The reason someone would regard their “would be opponent” with compassion is because they have not yet developed to realize the same truths. This would not be their fault; getting upset with them would be similar to scolding an infant for their lack of wisdom.

While Jesus never entered into open debate, his ministry focused around teaching truths that were not understood by his listeners. Many expected the Messiah to set them free from the oppression of the Romans but he had come to set them free from the oppression of sin. When Jesus questioned Peter as to who people believed him to be there were many answers given. Some thought him to be John the Baptist or Elijah whereas others thought he might be another one of the prophets that had come back to them. Jesus asked Peter his view and Peter responded, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”¹⁰³

After Jesus had sacrificed himself and become salvation for all nations. He commanded his disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”¹⁰⁴ The disciples then went out

¹⁰² Watson, 204.

¹⁰³ Matthew 16:13-16

¹⁰⁴ Matthew 28:19-20

and told the story of Jesus in order to convince all they met that He is the way to salvation. In the book of Acts, Paul is often found going into the synagogues to speak with the Jews there. While there he would reason with them from the Scriptures proving to them that Jesus is the Christ.¹⁰⁵

One can see that debate is an important part of how the Gospel is spread. By elucidating facts and proving that Jesus is the Christ, Christians can share the hope they have in eternal life. Jesus sent out his disciples not simply to feel compassion for the world but to convince it. The *bodhisattva* enjoys peace instead of controversy but if one knows a fellow sentient being is heading in a destructive direction it is not compassionate not to try to correct his or her path. Whereas the Buddhist believes one has many lives to discover truth, Jesus and his disciples knew this was not the case. This is why the disciples acted with urgency and would continue telling the story of Jesus, even when faced with death. In this one can see that Jesus did not hold to the third rule of the *bodhisattva*, nor did his disciples.

Within the main four rules of the *bodhisattva*, there are many directives on the associations a *bodhisattva* may have. Since a *bodhisattva* must honor all sentient beings, one is not permitted to associate with fishermen, who make their livelihood by killing fish.¹⁰⁶ Jesus not only associated with fishermen but approached them and called them to become his disciples. These fishermen became his closest friends. One may say that

¹⁰⁵ Acts 17:1-3

¹⁰⁶ Burton Watson, trans. *The Lotus Sutra*. (New York: Columbia University, 1993), 197.

they left behind their lives as fishermen once they began following Jesus but in the Gospel of John we find that when separated from Jesus some of the disciples went back to fishing.¹⁰⁷ Also, if fishing were so evil in Jesus' eyes why would he have told Peter where to throw his net for a large catch?¹⁰⁸ If the consumption of fish were evil then why would he have fed multitudes of people, on two separate occasions with nothing but fish and bread?¹⁰⁹

The Lotus Sutra says that a *bodhisattva* should not delight in nurturing underage disciples.¹¹⁰ However, Matthew records that only Peter and Jesus were required to pay the temple tax,¹¹¹ this shows that these fishermen were also youths. In Israel only men over twenty years old were required to pay the tax.¹¹² We since only two people from their group were required to pay the tax one can surmise they were the only ones in the party over the age of twenty. Jesus obviously delights in all of his disciples. Jesus never hindered the children from coming to him. He invited them to come and enjoy his presence.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ John 21:3

¹⁰⁸ John 21:6

¹⁰⁹ Matthew 14:13-21, Matthew 15:32-39

¹¹⁰ Watson, 198.

¹¹¹ Matthew 17:27

¹¹² Bruce B. Barton. *Matthew. Life application Bible commentary*. (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 348.

¹¹³ Luke 18:16

Bodhisattvas are also forbidden from talking with unmarried women. This is to prevent themselves from being seduced by them.¹¹⁴ Jesus taught Mary as she sat by his feet, spoke with a woman at a well, and carried on conversations with many other women as well.¹¹⁵ The Lotus Sutra would forbid him from doing the ministry he came to earth to perform. The *bodhisattvas* need such structured rules in order to maintain their purity. It is obviously something they had to attain and not their natural state. Jesus was tempted not only by unmarried women but by Satan himself. There was nothing that could make Jesus lose his purity because he is purity itself. To compare Jesus to a *bodhisattva* is like trying to compare a man to his portrait. One is by nature what the other is only depicting. Though a man may reach the level of a *bodhisattva*, and be disciplined in all things, Jesus is by nature what the *bodhisattva* is trying to portray. The purity of a *bodhisattva* is but an imitation of the pure essence of Christ.

Jesus is not a *bodhisattva*, but could one say that some of his beliefs align with Buddhist philosophy? At the heart of the Buddha's teaching are the Four Noble Truths and the Eight Fold Path.¹¹⁶ Studying the Four Noble Truths help one to realize they must escape from suffering and desire. The tool for them to accomplish this is the Eight Fold Path. In this concept one sees the heart of Buddhism and the stark contrast offered in Christianity.

¹¹⁴ Burton, 197.

¹¹⁵ Luke 10:39; 8:2,10:38-42, 11:27-28, 13:10-17, 23:26-31, Mark 5:34; 14:3-9

¹¹⁶ Thich Nhat Hạnh. *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy & Liberation : the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and Other Basic Buddhist Teachings*. (New York: Broadway Books, 1999) 9, 49.

The teachings of the Four Noble Truths can be most easily compared with Jesus' teaching by looking at the biblical story of the Samaritan woman. The first Noble Truth teaches all life is suffering. This suffering does not mean that one is in a constant state of pain but that one cannot have his or her desires fully met. Every human who has walked the planet has experienced this kind of suffering. The Christian faith does not deny its existence at all. In fact in Romans 8:22 Paul goes even farther than the Buddha. He writes that not only do humans suffer, but also all creation suffers from the curse of sin. Creation groans as it waits for the day when it will be released from sins bonds.

Christ also experienced great suffering. Not only from the physical blows he received and the nails that pierced his skin, but also being sinless, and taking on the sin of the world. On the cross he knew more than just the pain of the nails, he suffered as one who carried the weight of the worlds sin on his shoulders. However, the suffering spoken of by the Noble Truth is simpler than all the suffering that Christ has endured. In the second Noble Truth we learn that the suffering the Buddha speaks of is that of unfulfilled desire. This too can be seen in Jesus in John 4:7 when he asks the Samaritan woman at the well for a drink.¹¹⁷ In this He is acknowledging that he thirsts and therefore is living in a state of not being satisfied. He desires water and thus he is suffering thirst.

Of course this scenario is not by accident. Jesus is at the well in order to point out the woman's needs. He asks for the drink so that she can admit her desire. Jesus speaks to the woman about the living water he offers. This water becomes a spring inside oneself so that one never has to thirst again. The woman immediately sees the benefit in having her thirst quenched eternally as opposed to the temporary satisfaction that comes

¹¹⁷ John 4:7-14

through regular water. She asks Jesus to share with her this living water so that she would not have to come to the well anymore. She readily admits that if she can satisfy her desire she would not suffer anymore. This point is where Christianity parts ways with Buddhist philosophy.

The third Noble Truth states that in order to be freed from suffering one must also be freed from desire. “As this woman realizes, to be freed from suffering is not to extinguish one’s desire, but to fulfill it.” Jesus taught her this by offering her living water. Living is the operative word. One needs water in order to stay alive but eventually everyone dies in spite of how hydrated they are. Their body goes to the grave and wastes away.

More than any other desire, mankind has the desire to live. Water is a symbol of life because without it he cannot survive. Therefore what Jesus was offering the woman at the well was not merely water. He offered her life - eternal life. Just as if one had a spring of water welling inside of them, if one had a spring of life welling up, then death could never take the victory over life. This is what Jesus offered.

If Jesus had written a set of Noble Truths they may have gone something like this. 1) All life results in death. 2) Death is the consequence of sin. 3) If one is to be freed from death one must also be freed from sin. 4) In order to be freed from sin one must be forgiven by and trust Jesus Christ.

The eight fold path of right speech, view, action, mindfulness, livelihood, intention, effort and concentration is condensed in Christianity to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul and with all of your mind and love your neighbor as yourself. Turning one’s heart to the Lord is all that is required of one to

achieve life. All the effort that Buddha speaks of is futile because one can never do enough. He learned this partially when he determined the futility of the ascetic lifestyle but never was able to understand his inability to conquer suffering or death.

Siddhartha Gautama entered life at a great disadvantage compared to Christ. Gautama did not come across purity naturally but had to struggle all his life against his flesh. He spent half of his life indulging in the world's delicacies and then, at a certain point realized how delusional he had been. He then chose to leave his wife and children to search for truth but his faculties were not adept enough to get past himself and find God.

Christ entered life knowing God and having God know him. He did not have to search for truth because the Holy Spirit led him in all truth. He overcame sin because he is the master of righteousness. He did not have to search for any of the things Gautama had to search for. How could one search for truth if one is the truth?¹¹⁸

Christ, the Divine

The divinity of Jesus and His part in the triune nature of God is one of the most debated subjects in human history. From the Ebionites of the second century,¹¹⁹ to the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims, Secular Humanists, and Buddhists of today. It has been debated and denied in every generation. To the Christian, its defense is of the utmost importance. Now that it is clear Scripture is a reliable historical source, it can also be made clear that the claims Jesus made with regard to His divine nature are true. In

¹¹⁸ *Jesus Among Other Gods*, 41-42.

¹¹⁹ George A. Mather, Larry A. Nichols and Alvin J. Schmidt. *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Cults, Sects, and World Religions*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 2006), 389.

order to do this one must look at the Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah's coming, Jesus' claims while he was on earth, the resurrection of Jesus, and the claims of his disciples after his ascension. This will offer a strong argument that Jesus is not only a prophet and a teacher, but the Son of God and part of the Triune Godhead.

This discussion of Christ's divinity will begin with the prophecies foretelling his coming and his deeds. Since it would require a much larger volume to cover all the prophecies Jesus fulfilled, only a few that could not have been purposely fulfilled will be covered. Even though Jesus fulfilled scores of prophecies, a handful is sufficient to prove his claims.

God is the only one with the power to determine when the Messiah would be born. This is important since Daniel prophecies that the Anointed One, the ruler, will come seven 'sevens' and sixty-two 'sevens after the decree to rebuild Jerusalem.'¹²⁰ Each of these sevens represents a particular amount of time. In this case they speak of seven and sixty-two periods of seven years. Therefore, four hundred and eighty-three years after it is decreed that Jerusalem will be rebuilt, Daniel predicts the Anointed One will come.

The rebuilding of Jerusalem came to pass in the time of Nehemiah, in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes.¹²¹ This event began the countdown to the time when the Messiah could enter his kingdom. Many scholars have had difficulty getting the numbers to work out exactly based on secular records. This is because a year

¹²⁰ Daniel 9:25

¹²¹ Nehemiah 2:1

as referred to in biblical prophecy contains 360 days instead of the 365 as in a modern Gregorian calendar.¹²²

Artaxerxes' father Xerxes died in the year 465 BC. This places Artaxerxes' first regal year at 464 BC. Therefore, the first year of Daniel's prophecy began in the month of Nisan 444 BC. Since no date is specified it can be understood from Jewish custom that this happened on the first day of the month, which would be Nisan 1 or March 5th of the modern calendar.¹²³ According to Daniel's prophecy, the Messiah will come into Jerusalem as the Anointed One after 173,880 days or 483 years of 360 days each. The calculation to find the exact day is given by biblical chronologist Harold Hoehner:

“The difference between 444 B.B. and A.D. 33 then is 476 solar years. By multiplying 476 by 365.24219879 or by 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, 45.975 seconds, one comes to 173,855.28662404 days or 173,855 days, 6 hours, 52 minutes, 44 seconds. This leaves only 25 days to be accounted for between 444 B.C. and A.D. 33. By adding the 25 days to March 5 (of 444 B.C.), one comes to March 30 (of A.D. 33) which is Nisan 10 in A.D. 33. This is the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.”^{124 125}

This event fulfilled Daniel's prophecy over five hundred years after it was given.

However, for Jesus to be The Anointed One Daniel wrote of the next part of the

¹²² Josh McDowell. *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 199.

¹²³ *ibid*, 200.

¹²⁴ Harold W. Hoehner. *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 138.

¹²⁵ Matthew 21:7-9

prophecy in Daniel 9:26 must also be fulfilled. This tells the reader that after the 483 years, the Anointed One will be cut off and have nothing. This prophecy speaks of Jesus' being betrayed and crucified just four days after his arrival in Jerusalem.

The prophecies of the Old Testament give sound proof as to Jesus being the betrayed Messiah of the Jewish people. However, simply being the Anointed One does not mean that Jesus must be divine. Proof that Jesus thought of himself as divine can be shown effectively through Jesus' actions during his ministry.

The first example comes through the forgiveness of sins. In Mark chapter two Jesus is teaching in a home when a paralytic man is lowered before him on a mat. The hope was that Jesus would reach down and heal the man from his paralysis but Jesus took the opportunity to teach something about himself. Instead of helping the man to walk, Jesus gave him forgiveness of his sins.¹²⁶ This startled the teachers of the law because they recognized that sins were crimes against God, therefore, only God could forgive sins. Jesus did not dispute that only God could forgive sin, instead, he healed the man of his paralysis saying, "Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" He said to the paralytic, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."¹²⁷ In this example he is proving to the teachers of the law, and all others watching, that he has authority which only belongs to God.

¹²⁶ Mark 2:5

¹²⁷ Mark 2:9-11

The reason this example is important is if Jesus were speaking blasphemy about his ability to forgive sins, he would lose his qualification to be blessed of God and perform miracles.¹²⁸ Even Balaam, who was a prophet of God but also an enemy of Israel, could not speak what was not true.¹²⁹

Many complain that Jesus wasn't clear enough when teaching on his divinity. Much of the reason for this came from his desire that his followers would come to that conclusion on their own. In fact, when Jesus asked Peter who he believed him to be and Peter answered the Christ,¹³⁰ Jesus told him not to reveal who he was to anyone else.¹³¹ So in this section, by Jesus' silence, he all but tells Peter that he is the Anointed One.

To further unravel who Jesus is one can look at a similar scenario with Thomas. When Jesus appeared to Thomas, the doubter, after rising from the dead, Thomas exclaimed in a moment of revelation, "My Lord and my God." Jesus responds to Thomas saying, "Because you have seen me, you have believed." This statement confirms that Jesus believed Thomas' revelation about him to be correct. When reading the writings of the apostles, there is no doubt who they claim Jesus to be, and who Jesus believes that He is. Their belief is confirmed by the miracles and prophecies that point to Jesus as the Anointed One. No one in history has, or will ever be able to, provide more proof that they are the Anointed One. Jesus taught his disciples, in his own way, that the Messiah they had waited for was not merely a ruler and prophet to deliver them from

¹²⁸ John 9:31

¹²⁹ Numbers 22:18

¹³⁰ Could also be translated Messiah or Anointed One

¹³¹ Mark 8:29-30

bondage. This time God had done something much more for his people. He chose to send His Son, part of His Triune nature, to earth as God in flesh. His mission was not to conquer or rule but to settle an ancient debt between God and man. He became the Son of Man so that he could pay their debt. The result of his sacrifice is acceptance for all who would recognize him as the door, and enter into the presence of the Father.¹³²

Conclusion

Though a Buddhist may respect and admire Jesus, there is no way a Buddhist can adopt Jesus into Buddhism without drastically changing the understanding of who he is, of his mission and of the story of his life. While in their philosophy one must empty themselves of desire, Jesus is the fulfillment of the soul's desire. To say that Jesus could be Buddhist is to diminish and nullify the true essence of what he came to teach humanity. He did not come to help us become better but instead to make us better. His death on the cross and subsequent resurrection, freed mankind from the power of sin and the destruction it results in. The Buddha could never offer such a powerful path to eternal life, enlightenment as he called it. The problem that the Buddha faced was his determination to look inwardly for his answers instead of looking eternally.

In this thesis one may see how the Buddhists have tried to converge Buddhism and Christianity, only they have done it by taking away the essential nature of Christianity. The reason is simply because the two religions cannot stand side by side as equals. Though they both call for peace and love, in terms of God and salvation they are fundamentally opposed to each other. One is inwardly focused and the other externally. The fatal flaw with an internally focused religion is one can only go so far as oneself.

¹³² John 10:9

Clearly Christianity had its beginnings in Jerusalem with the death and resurrection of Jesus. The church started right away and from the beginning it preached forgiveness of sins through Jesus' blood and new life through his resurrection. Even when not considering later sources, it is impossible for the history as recorded in the Bible to not be true. The Christian message is not loosely based on some assumptions of how everything happened but on eyewitness accounts, historian's recordings and a story that is fluid though written by many authors.

Apart from the historical reports and quotes by early church fathers, it has been shown through internal evidence in the Gospels that an earlier story of Jesus' life and not just his teachings existed. If this were not the case then Paul could not have had his ministry, the Corinthian church would not have existed, and Clement would have written his letters to someone else and not quoted Paul. One cannot simply dismiss Paul or his beliefs from history. Then if Paul exists so does the resurrection story before him. Through tradition one can have assurance that the Gospels were written before A.D. 70 and therefore Jesus' comments about the temple being destroyed had to be prophecy. However, even if Christianity did not have the Gospels, there would still be a Gospel story. From the unbroken life of the church one knows that Jesus lives. One knows the testimonies of the witnesses are true and one can know in whom they must place their trust.

The Dalai Lama believes that all creatures will eventually be reborn as Buddhists and follow the path to Enlightenment. It is interesting that the Dalai Lama is also a man intrigued by science. Science is a method of discovering knowledge through observation and experimentation. Though this thesis has shown how Christianity has been observed

and recorded throughout history and even had its founder return from the dead as a witness of the afterlife. Buddhists believe that they can achieve in themselves Enlightenment, and if they fail in this lifetime they will be reborn to try again. Unfortunately, unlike Christianity, which has Jesus to assure its future, the Buddhists have no one to insure Enlightenment. Jesus said that he is the way, and he proved this by conquering death and ascending to heaven.¹³³ He told his followers that he's going to prepare a place for them and will eventually come back for them. Whether they are dead or alive he has already proved his power over death so Christians can know that the graves will open and the sea will give back its dead. Those who follow Christ will have inside them a fountain of life so that death can never take a hold on them again.

Though Christians have such an assurance, the Buddhist only can hope. However, their hope of Enlightenment is only legitimate if the Christian message is wrong. Jesus claimed to not only be a way to eternal life but the way. There is no promise of a second chance but the certainty of death. Any Buddhist reading this must realize that in Christ there is hope for a future. There is no guessing because he has already paid the price, he has offered the help and he will personally take his followers into eternity. The Buddha has been gone for 2,500 years and never returned. By following in the path of the Buddha one can only assume to achieve the same fate.

¹³³ John 14:6

- Bach, Marcus. *Had You Been Born In Another Faith*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1961.
- Belleville, Linda L. *2 Corinthians. The IVP New Testament commentary series*, 8. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996.
- Beverley, James A. My Christ, My Bodhisattva. (April 2004), www.canadianchristianity.com/cgi-bin/bc.cgi?bc/bccn/0404/04buddha (accessed June 30, 2008).
- Beverley, James A. *My Christ, My Bodhisattva*. (April 2004), <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/tib/nytimes.htm> (accessed November 30, 2009).
- Borg, Marcus. *Jesus and Buddha: The Parallel Sayings*, Berkley: Ulysses Press, 1997.
- Clement of Rome, *Corinthians*.
- Corduan, Winfried. *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1998.
- Coulombe, Charles A. *Vicars of Christ: A History of the Popes*. New York: Citadel Press, 2003.
- Counsell, Michael. *A Basic Christian Dictionary*. Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2007.
- Dahlke, Paul and Sīlāchāra. *Buddhist Essays*. London: Macmillam, 1908.
- Dalai Lama, *The Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective On The Teachings of Jesus*, Boston: Wisdom Publications 1996.
- Derrett, M. and J. Duncan. *The Buddhist Dimension of John*. Leiden: Numen, 2004. e-book.
- Dreifus, Claudia. "New York Times Interview with the Dalai Lama," *New York Times*, November 28, 1993.
- Falvey, Lindsay. *The Buddha's Gospel: A Buddhist Interpretation of Jesus' Words*. Adelaide, South Australia: Institute for International Development, 2002.
- Geisler, Norman L. *The Battle For The Resurrection*. Thomas Nelson: Nashville 1992.
- Gross, Rita M. and Terry C. Muck. *Buddhists Talk About Jesus, Christians Talk About the Buddha*. New York: Continuum, 2000.
- Grudem, Wayne A. and Jeff Purswell. *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999.

- Habermas, Gary R. *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence For The Life of Christ*. College Press, Joplin MO 1996.
- Hecht, Richard D. and Ninian Smart, eds. *Sacred Texts of the World: A Universal Anthology*. New York: Crossroad, 1993.
- Hoehner, Harold W. *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977, 138.
- Jeremias, Joachim. *New Testament Theology*. New York: Scribner, 1988.
- Jones, Floyd Nolen, *Chronology of the Old Testament: A Return to the Basics*. Green Forest, Arkansas: Master Books, 2004.
- Lewis, Clive Staples. *Mere Christianity: A Revised and Amplified Edition, with a New Introduction, of the Three Books, Broadcast Talks, Christian Behaviour, and Beyond Personality*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001.
- Lonegnecker, Richard N. *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament*. *McMaster New Testament studies*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1998.
- Luz, Ulrich and Axel Michaels, *Encountering Jesus & Buddha: their lives and teachings*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006.
- Mack, Burton L. *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins*. San Fransico: Harper. 1993.
- Maguire, Robert. *St. Peter Non-Roman in His Mission, Ministry, and Martyrdom*. London: Seeley, Jackson, & Halliday, 1871.
- Mather, George A., Larry A. Nochols and Alvin J. Schmidt. *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Cults, Sects, and World Religions*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 2006
- McDowell, Josh. *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999.
- McDowell, Josh and Don Stewart, *Handbook of Today's Religions*, Atlanta: Thomas Nelson, 1983.
- Nhat Hanh, Thich. *Going Home: Jesus and the Buddha as Brothers*, New York: Riverhead Books, 1999.
- Nhat Hành, Thich, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy & Liberation : the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and Other Basic Buddhist Teachings*. New York: Broadway Books, 1999

Origen, *Contra Celsum*. vi. 36

Pannenberg, Wolfhart, Rolf Rendtorff, Trutz Rendtorff, and Ulrich Wilkens. *Revelation As History*. New York: Macmillan, 1968.

Reat, Noble Ross. *Buddhism: A History*. Fredmont California: Jain, 1994.

Reed, Harry Lathrop and James Stevenson Riggs, *Epistles to the Corinthians*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922.

RZIM, "Faith Under Fire: Jesus Among Other Gods (part 1 of 4)," RZIM online archive. Quicktime player audio file, 13:30, http://htod.cdncon.com/o2/rzimht/MP3/JT/J_TCD402-1-1.mp3 (accessed March 19, 2009).

Thurman, Robert "Biography." <http://www.bobthurman.com/biography.html> (accessed May 4, 2009).

Van Voorst, Robert E. *Anthology of World Scriptures, 5th ed.* Belmont California: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006.

Van Voorst, Robert E. *Shogen, the Sutra of the Lotus Jewel: Anthology of World Scriptures, 5th ed.* (Belmont California: Thompson Wadsworth, 2006.

Walvoord, John F., and Roy B. Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983.

Watson, Burton. trans. *The Lotus Sutra*. New York: Columbia University, 1993.

Zacharias, Ravi K *Jesus Among Other Gods: The Absolute Claims of the Christian Message*. Nashville, TN: Word Pub, 2000.