



AMA Building 2  
59 Panay Avenue, Quezon City

**A Comparative Analysis of Hinduism, Christianity, and Buddhism**

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**MIKAELA BRIDGET E. TAMALA**

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As one of the most influential and major religions on a global scale according to numerous scholars, Hinduism shares several key aspects similar to other beliefs—particularly Christianity and Buddhism. However, the differences between the said religions in the context of specific perspectives and cultures are also apparent. Whereas Hinduism perceives a conglomeration of traditionalistic guidance and subjective experience, Christianity emphasizes the importance of archaic aspects, and Buddhism establishes a more personal standpoint.

In comparing Hinduism from Christianity and Buddhism, one must first set apart these religions from each other by recognizing their various unique aspects. These characteristics can be apparent in the founder or the lack thereof within the said religion, the interpretation of God or a divine ruler, and the concept of life after death

Hinduism is unique from the aforementioned religions because of the absence of a human founder. Christianity and Buddhism are intent on the emphasis on Jesus Christ and Siddhartha Gautama or the Buddha, respectively. On the contrary, one of the fundamental aspects of Hinduism is the fact that although a specific founder is untraceable, this can give way to a fusion of beliefs instead of a strictly organized single religion.

Christianity has a strict belief on a solitary divine ruler while Hinduism managed to maintain a particular blend of worshipping multiple deities while also having a monotheistic perspective at the same time. This particular interpretation, also known as henotheistic, is possible since they recognize these deities as mere manifestations of the same God. However, Buddhism is distinct from the aforementioned religion because it maintains a nontheistic approach. The followers of this particular religion do not necessarily believe in worshipping a supreme divine ruler, preferring to focus on achieving “enlightenment” just as the Buddha did so which ultimately

led to the fruition of Buddhism. Enlightenment is perceived to be a state of inner peace and wisdom and if one can fulfill this aspect, it is said that nirvana will eventually follow.

The concept of life after death differentiates Christianity from Buddhism and Hinduism because it believes in two extremes: eternal damnation or eternal life. Contrary to the former, the latter religions have a common understanding that a person is simply caught between a cycle of death and rebirth. Hinduism recognizes this cycle as samsara wherein a person's Atma is reborn into a different body upon death, which may either be instantaneous or undergoes a period of limbo within swarg or narak before rebirth. Buddhism similarly teaches the concept of samsara while additionally believing that one might even experience an infinite number of cycles until the achievement of Nirvana. However, Christianity vastly differs from these religions since the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the fundamental origin of the belief in the afterlife. A majority of Christians believe that the soul is judged before God after dying according to ethical or immoral deeds done while still alive. This judgment will then predict whether the soul is worthy of an eternity in Heaven for living a life following God's will and purpose or the eternal damnation of Hell for the rejection of God's love.

Despite their differences, the three aforementioned religions also have certain similarities that qualify them as influential forces in the first place. These are their capability to hold significant festivals that can withstand the test of time and an emphasis on private prayer that strengthens their faith.

According to the Encyclopedia of Food and Culture (2020), Hinduism observes the Shivratri festival, which literally means "the night of Shiva" wherein devotees of the mentioned deity would abstain from eating food throughout the day and only eat after a night of worship. It

is said that “cooling” foods are paid special attention as an offering since Shiva was known to be got-tempered. Milk, water, honey, and the leaves of the wood apple tree are said to include this particular category. Moreover, Shitvari is celebrated in February and March. A majority of the Christians have several holidays that reminisce about the life of Jesus. The most notable celebration would be Christmas, a celebration of Christ’s humble birth into the world, wherein nativity scenes are usually held to re-enact the momentous event (United Religions Initiative). Within the same context of celebrating the birth of a religion’s founder, Buddhists also celebrate Vesak annually. However, it differs slightly from Christmas since it additionally commemorates the enlightenment and death of the Buddha (History, 2017). During Vesak, followers are encouraged to visit the temple for a whole day of prayer or even bring offerings. Food is also shared among the people while a ritual called the Bathing of the Buddha—wherein water is poured over the people to cleanse their mind from negative thoughts—may also be performed (BBC, 2020). Although the aforementioned religions have diverse traditions and practices as to how they would celebrate their festivals, one thing is for certain that these festivals can commonly be defined as commemorative celebrations held in honor of particular historical events and other important aspects that are passed on from generation to generation to keep the religion from being forgotten.

Prayer in its universal form is a solemn request for help or expression of thanks addressed to God or an object of worship (Oxford Dictionary). Although the specific rituals and methods of prayer may differ among Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism, the main reason in doing so remains to be a constant. All three religions view prayer as an integral part of being a follower, especially in the context of praying privately. Hinduism focuses on private worship rather than a communal one because of its high regard for personal offerings to the various deities (BBC, 2005). Additionally, Christians are advised to worship in private according to the Bible, particularly

Matthew 6:6 wherein Jesus is believed to have said, “But you, when you pray, enter into your private room, and shut your door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.” Moreover, Buddhists are advised to set aside a special area of their home dedicated to prayer as a shrine (BBC, 2006). The necessities of a shrine entail a Buddha statue, an incense burner, and several candles. Practitioners are also reassured that although temple visitation and worship are encouraged, it is also not entirely essential to do so. Rather, the comfort offered by the personal shrine is more than sufficient. These religions ultimately emphasize individual prayers since these are the foundations in creating a close-knit relationship within a particular community.

Although the creation of the universe and humankind has amassed numerous plausible theories in the scientific context, the true origin remains to be indefinite. However, each religious belief can have a firm interpretation as to how life began despite how diverse it can be from other religions.

The Hindu portrays the universe as a constant cycle of existence and non-existence. However, due to the numerous sacred texts that often have various depictions, there is no specific explanation as to how the universe and humankind are created--in contrast to the solitary and universal perspective of Christianity. Nevertheless, the Upanishad contains an interpretation of how the Self or the Atman made the heaven, the sky, the earth, and the underworld or the Ambhas, Marikis, Mara, and the Ap, respectively. Eventually, the Atman formed the Purusha who then separated itself into male and female because it felt lonely. The creation of humankind is portrayed to originate from the embrace of the male and female parts of the Purusha. Much later in the story, the two parts would then transform themselves into different creatures whose offspring became the first animal of its kind (Muller, 2004).

Christians rely on the Bible's depiction of how God created the universe within six days and eventually made man and woman to populate the world. As depicted in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, God is said to bring light unto the empty earth to distinguish night from the morning on the first day (Genesis 1:3). On the second day, God said 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters,' (Genesis 1:6) which resulted in the Heavens or simply the sky. The Creator is then depicted to bring the land into fruition on the third day (Genesis 1:9) wherein a clear distinction is seen from the waters, the sky, and the light and dark. On the fourth day, God managed to make the "greater light" (Sun) to govern the morning and the "lesser light" (Moon) and stars to rule over the night (Genesis 1:16). Respectively on the fifth and sixth day, God created the animals to roam the sky, waters, and land together with man and woman—who is likened to his image—to populate and rule over the animals (Genesis 1:20-31). The Bible then states that God took divine rest on the seventh day and declared everything to be good (Genesis 2:1-3).

On the contrary, Buddhism has offers no particular belief in how the universe and man are created in the first place. As the Dalai Lama expressed in his book *The Universe in a Single Atom*, such belief in creationism would be considered as contradictory to their fundamental nontheistic belief. He further establishes that Buddhism firmly resolves that "the universe is seen as infinite and beginningless..." Furthermore, the Dalai Lama explains that the Buddha never explicitly answered the question of where the universe and humankind came from which may be understood that "...these metaphysical questions do not directly pertain to liberation [i.e. release into nirvana]." Simply put, there would be no point in asking so if it does not directly affect the pursuit of enlightenment and nirvana (Grigg, 2012).

Although the concept of morality is universally accepted to give general meaning of what is qualified as good or bad, there are slight variations as to how these religions describe this concept. However, the emphasis on making an effort to be morally just is constant throughout, Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism.

Practitioners of the Hindu belief also depend on their perception of morality on a conglomerate of their sacred texts. A concise generalization could be found in the Hindu Law and Judicature from the Dharma-Sástra of Yájnavalkya which states, “The Śruti, the Smriti, the practice of good men, what seems good to one's self, and a desire maturely considered—these are declared to be the root of Law.” It should be noted that these considerations of morality are arranged in descending order according to authority. Both the Sruti and the Smitri are the backbone of Hinduism literature where law and social conduct are emphasized among the most authoritative texts in Hindu canon (Eastern Spirituality, 2020). Furthermore, if these texts are for instance too vague for the common practitioner, they may also refer to what is considered to be a standard of what good people are expected to follow in the eyes of the general public. However, the right ethics and actions are ultimately subjective as to what one believes opposes evil and injustice because the most fundamental driving force to do good can be seen within a person’s nature.

Christianity’s definition of morality stems from the Old and New Testament from the Bible. A concrete guide as to what was right or wrong was first established in the Ten Commandments or the Decalogue as depicted in Exodus 34:28, which continues to be a set of general rules followed by Christians. In summary, the Decalogue emphasizes the importance of following strictly monotheistic praise to God (Exodus 20:2-11) and adherence to the practice of respecting people in ways that will not cause any form of harm (Exodus 20:12-17). However, the New Commandment was presented by Jesus among his disciples as portrayed in the New Testament.

Jesus merely commanded the people to “love one another” (John 13:33–35) during the Last Supper, this can be interpreted as a condensed version of the Decalogue where two distinct portrayals of love for God and neighbor is understood as a general commandment.

Buddhism possesses a fundamental principle of morality, both in thoughts and actions, through karma—wherein an individual’s actions in the current life will have an influential impact on the next cycle of rebirth (Patheos). A more concrete guiding principle would be the Eightfold Path, as seen within the fourth Noble Truth. In this particular ethical code, enlightenment is considered to be heavily facilitated in lieu of being merely morally just. The Eightfold Path may be categorized according to nature into three parts namely the “right view”, “right” conduct” and “right practice” which may also be respectively called the Prajna, Shila, and Samadhi. These steps are arranged as follows: the right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and the right concentration. More importantly, this principle pertains to a step-by-step process rather than immediately trying to achieve the last step without considering the preceding ones first. Additionally, the concept of merit is also equally necessary in which acts of generosity are contributed to Buddhist monks to aide in the positive influence of the karma cycle.

Most people spend their whole lives searching for a purpose to fulfill their lives. Religion can be capable of guiding people into understanding this elusive pursuit of meaning. Such as the case with the different answers the aforementioned religions can provide. However, it is also understood that these are merely guidelines in the religious context; thus, it depends entirely on the individual whether to strictly follow them or search for a more personalized answer.



Rather than being entirely subjective, Hinduism considers the fulfillment of one's purpose when one can achieve four aspects, namely Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha. According to Akhilesh Sivakumar, these aspects are said to be interdependent of each other wherein Moksha may be the most difficult to attain since it requires enlightenment which might take a whole lifetime to attain. As further established in ReligionFacts (2016), Dharma in this particular context means fulfilling one's purpose given by the universe. Another facet of Dharma is the repayment of one's debts to the gods, parents and teachers, guests, human beings, and all other living beings which stems from the belief that everyone must fulfill their karmic debts from the gods and other human beings upon their birth. Moreover, Artha is the purpose of prosperity, whether the pursuit of wealth or general success under the ethical codes. The Kama generally means obtaining enjoyment, desire, and satisfaction in life even in the context of sexual needs.

Nevertheless, Christianity provides the belief that the purpose of life can be found in loving and serving God to aid in bringing fulfilling God's belief of a fundamentally good universe (Patheos). As God's creations, people are tasked to contribute to accomplishing God's intention of creating a world where beings can enjoy love and joy. This purpose then guides practitioners to maintain a moral compass to repay what the Creator has done for humans with actions that can be impactful not only for the sake of God and self but also to the lives of other people. Thus, it extrapolates that individuals who manage to realize this particular task are considered to be the ideal followers of Christ.

Buddhism's belief on the primary purpose of one's life involves the termination of suffering. As reiterated in ReligionFacts (2016), the idea of suffering is heavily emphasized by the Buddha and he further established that the main cause of such is when humans continually strive for the pursuit of ideologies that do not give lasting happiness. Although these things may provide

momentary joy in human life, such as material things, friends, and health, the eventual detachment people will experience when these come to an end are said to be the problem that creates suffering. It is then made known that realizing that these things are temporary is the first step to freeing oneself from invaluable attachments, eventually achieving enlightenment and thus completing one's purpose in life.

Destiny's dictionary Oxford definition is the "predetermined course of events often held to be an irresistible power or agency" which may be subjectively influential to an individual's belief in the context of religion since it is an elusive force that different types of religion can have specific interpretations.

Hinduism, for example, relates the human destiny as an extension of karma. It is believed that an individual's actions that influence the present and future life, whether negatively or positively, are the primary guiding force of destiny (Basham, 2019). In contrast to Christianity, Hinduism establishes the importance of how people's state in life is the product of their own actions rather than divine intervention. However, the Buddhist belief functions similarly to Hinduism in the context of more personal influence in an individual's destiny (BBC). Moreover, Buddhism perceives human fate as a path one takes to achieve enlightenment. Although Christianity also honors the free will of humans to shape one's destiny, the emphasis on God's sovereign will is considered to be an essential contributor as well (Ukachi, 2017). Referencing Paul's writing in the Bible reveals that believers are able to fulfill destiny through living like Christ (Romans 8:28-29). The path to living like Christ would require the follower to internalize a God-centric moral compass wherein the particular individual would choose to do the right thing in every situation encountered.

It should be taken into consideration that the feminist movement should not be perceived as anti-men; rather, it should be understood as a driving force to promote equal rights for everyone regardless of gender. Moreover, the archaic and unfair treatment of women throughout history may be attributed to religious influences. Further, an indirect effect of promoting tradition, stability, and security, such as in the context of religion, is the continuation of an unmitigated social hierarchy (Mikołajczak, 2014). However, the role that women are expected to fulfill may differ among various religions, especially the ones that acknowledge female deities.

Take for example the henotheistic perspective of Hinduism wherein the worship of female deities as powerful beings may be emphasized, mortal women are recognized to play a secondary role in society. Although goddesses were highly placed in high reverence for the stories that portrayed their bravery and power, it heavily contrasted against the constricted freedom experienced by women. The views on a woman's responsibility varied among the aspects of being worthy of respect and adoration but also subordination from male counterparts. The widow's position in life during the early era of Hinduism sometimes required the woman to perform sati upon the departed husband's funeral pyre, which also disallowed the widow to remarry. Less intense but equally harsh treatment of these widows would be reclusion within homes under the care of sons or other close relatives. Although the life for Hindu women is significantly better during the present times with the law providing better opportunities and rights for women, these individuals are still subject to discrimination especially from a majority of Hindu men with negative traditional perspectives of the opposite sex (Hinduwebsite).

Similarly to Hinduism, divine women are also highly praised in Christianity as evidenced by the Virgin Mary. According to Christine Joynes (2019), Jesus Christ's mother is considered to be an iconic female representation in the Bible especially in the account of her acceptance of the

responsibility to give birth to the world's savior (Luke 1:26-38). However, some women are also depicted to have negative attributes in the Gospel. An infamous example would be Eve, the woman who committed the first sin of disobeying God's order which led to the couple's banishment (Genesis 3:1-7). Moreover, the repeated subordination of women is also seen in the Bible as evidenced in 1 Timothy 2:11-12, "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet." Some traditionalists may take these verses to justify misogynistic actions, such as the ignorance of a woman's opinions and beliefs, which can be highly problematic. Additionally, the variety of denominations and beliefs within Christianity also offer different opinions on whether women should be allowed to officiate holy masses. The Pentecostal Church of God permits the ordination of women while Roman Catholics strictly establish that women may only become nuns while men are the only ones who are allowed to become priests.

In contrast to the majority of the Hindu and Christian traditionalist perspective in women's role in society, Buddhism does not consider women to be inferior to men. According to the Buddha Dharma Education Association, it was stated in the Buddha's teachings of establishing a world where humans have equal opportunities that wives are considered to share equal responsibilities with husbands as well as an equal dedication to the said tasks. Moreover, women were not limited in simply being the homemaker but they also possess the opportunity of learning the husband's trade-in business or other endeavors to act as a substitute when the situation requires it. As opposed to the ancient Indian perspective, the Buddha was even said to console King Pasenadi of Kosala when he expressed that the birth of a daughter would not be worthy of worry and despair. Although the Buddha was at first against the admission of women as monks, these women or Bhikkhunis proved themselves to be talented and responsible enough in managing the affairs within the

Buddhist Order, thus earning themselves a place in the Bhikkhuni Sangha as depicted in sacred texts.

In conclusion, Hinduism may be considered to be a balance between Christianity and Buddhism in the context of particular practices, traditions, and subjective beliefs. However, Hinduism still maintains to be vastly distinct from Christianity and Buddhism despite its shared characteristics because no other religion can exactly replicate its massive influence on the world despite the mystical features that surround the origin of the said religion.

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