

Part I

Introduction

Guide to Reading the Book

There are three focal points in this Book: 1) the concept of religion, 2) basic knowledge of Buddhism, and 3) religious thinking's adverse impact on contemporary society and how to address it. Here is the simple fact: the world is in total chaos. It is a matter of opinion whether or not the chaotic world is correlated with religion. If we were to follow the traditional way when dealing with problems caused by religions, our chance to resolve them would be slender.

This book analyses the reasons why religion has generated a variety of paradoxes and proposes a solution to this problem. It aims to enlighten people by breaking them away from the hold of discriminating minds (Skt. *citta-vikalpa*) and by harmonizing human relations. In order to understand the method offered by the author, the reader shall thoroughly understand the definition of "religion" in the first place, which is clearly elucidated in Chapter 1.

I believe that three types of readers will find the book's arguments particularly illuminating to read. These readers include:

- 1) Buddhists
- 2) Believers of theocratic religions, such as Protestants, Catholics, and Muslims
- 3) Atheists

What are the arguments presented in this book? To allow readers to conveniently comprehend my overall thinking, I have summarized the main tenets that are elaborated in each of the chapters.

Understanding “Conditioned Phenomena” and “Unconditioned Phenomena”

Buddhism categorizes the myriad sorts of things into “conditioned phenomena” (Skt. *saṃskṛta-dharma*) (“有為法”) and “unconditioned phenomena” (Skt. *asaṃskṛtā-dharma*) (“無為法”).

There is an alternative way to explain “conditioned phenomena” (transient phenomena) and “unconditioned phenomena” (eternal phenomena).

“Conditioned phenomena” (有為法) can be described as the transient aspects of matters which, including life, have a beginning and an end.

“Unconditioned phenomena” (無為法) can be described as the permanent aspects of eternity.

Conditioned phenomena has been incessantly and deeply explored in the sciences, and their achievements are universally recognized. In contrast, unconditioned phenomena denote the eternal and absolute condition. I consider that unconditioned phenomena go far beyond human intelligence and can only exist in our imagination. No one knows for certain what

unconditioned phenomena contain. This is true regardless of whether a person is a theologian, member of the clergy, a scientist, or a layman. Section 7 of the *Diamond Sutra* states: “all sages and highly respected scholars are different in one aspect, and that is the way they understand or appreciate the permanent nature of eternity.”¹ At this moment in the twenty-first century, this recognition is full of insights, because:

The Christian God worshipped by his followers refers to the Holy Father and Jesus, who engage with eternity. Muslims believe in the One and Unique Allah. The two religions hold different views toward everlasting unconditioned phenomena. Conversely, Buddhism does not provide any instruction on the issue. To me, “all sages and highly respected scholars” that the *Diamond Sutra* refers should cover the reverend priests of the Christians faith, the imam of Islam and the Buddhist teachers. Different understandings of unconditioned phenomena result in distinctions between religions, which should all be treated with equal respect.

Perceiving Unconditioned Phenomena

Buddhism demonstrates subtle and superb knowledge about unconditioned phenomena (eternal phenomena). Regarding the eternal condition of unconditioned phenomena, Buddhist sutras do not give any explanation; on the contrary, the *Diamond Sutra* points out that there is fundamentally “no Dharma to be explained”. It is commonly understood that Buddha preached sutras and scriptures for forty-nine years after attaining enlightenment; but Section 21 of the *Diamond Sutra*

¹ 金剛經第 7 分: “一切聖賢, 皆以無為法而有差別。”

asserts: “Anybody who would say such things as ‘The Tathāgata (Buddha) has taught the Dharma would misrepresent me, on account of wrong learning’”². Why does Buddha declare that he never teaches the Dharma? Since human conduct and morality belongs to conditioned phenomena, it is therefore not surprising at all for Buddha to have taught something. When it comes to unconditioned phenomena, however, there is nothing to be taught. Should not humans know that the eternal condition, namely, unconditioned phenomena, is incomprehensible to our intellectual capacity?

I would like to discuss a question worthy of consideration: What circumstances lead to the nothingness taught by the Buddha? The only reasonable and conceivable explanation in the imagination is that human intelligence is limited and fatuous, and worldly languages and means of communication are possibly lacking in the capacity to convey the dynamics of unconditioned existence. Therefore, no Dharma can be taught.

Religion and the Truth

Every religion believes that it has found the Truth; yet, permanent Truth is exactly unconditioned Dharma, which is something humans can never attest to. Since the Truth is un-attestable, shall we humbly admit that we are still searching for it? If that is the case, world peace would come in the near future.

² 金剛經第 21 分: “若人言如來有所說法, 即為謗佛, 不能解我所說故。”

What are the paradoxes of religion?

When exploring the truthfulness of things, in other words, investigating conditioned phenomena, scientists generally share and collaborate with each other. Conversely, when exploring unconditioned phenomena, people always tend to be opinionated and narrow-minded. Missionaries and sermonizers constantly maintain that they have found the True God. Nevertheless, is there any True God? Who is the True God? What characteristics does he possess? What are his likes and dislikes? That no one is able to provide reasonable answers to such questions is paradoxical.

For humans to achieve a harmonious world requires putting aside our prejudices, acknowledging the absence of scientific and dialectical methods in studying unconditioned phenomena, and respecting those who simultaneously walk on the road of pursuing the Truth. This kind of thinking is completely opposite to the thinking of those who are obstinate and narrow-minded.

Opinions of atheist scholars

Atheists refute religion completely. This seemingly extreme view is caused by their misunderstanding of the term “religion”. In effect, all the mainstream religious thinking guide people toward benevolence. Antithetical oppositions have been created, as whether or not the everlasting and unchanging conditions exist is not testable. The more devout the believers, the riskier it is that conflicts will flare up between those with differing religious views. Consequently, atheists feel that religious thinking endangers society. The remedy I offer now is that one has to wholeheartedly keep on looking for the Truth. While understanding that the recognition of unconditioned

phenomena exceeds human intelligence, what harm does it do to encourage religious believers to continue seeking the Truth?

Views of theocratic religious believers

How do believers of theocratic religions see the world? For them, it is the creator who creates and manipulates heaven, earth, and everything in the world. When one encounters difficulties walking life's road, one needs to be aware of whether one's conduct abides in God's will; everyone can communicate with God and live with his blessing.

Buddhist view

There is no creator in Buddhism. For Buddhists, the being of a creator does not really matter, as all states of existence result from causes (Skt. *hetu*) and conditions (Skt. *pratyaya*). Buddhists believe in karma, and in everyone having inherent self nature. Originally pure, our inherent nature is defiled and polluted because we long for the conditions we once perceived. We will be able to attain enlightenment, as long as we purify and return to our own nature and act in accordance with the true principle.

Searching for the Truth

Regardless of the religious inclinations of the reader, he or she shall realize the importance of the search for the Truth, and shall facilitate conditions to help everyone attentively search for the Truth, inasmuch as he or she regards that there exists a further form of existence after the end of life. The method is to diminish the discriminating mind; this is the first step for a peaceful coexistence among religions.