

Part III

Misunderstandings about Buddhism

What is the main issue in promoting Buddhism?

Comparatively speaking, it would be rather easy to convert someone to Christianity. About sixty years ago when I was only seven, I entered a Catholic primary school. I still recall my conversation with a father. The father asked questions and I responded.

Q: Do you see the sculpture over there? Do you agree that someone needed to make it before it existed?

A: Yes. There must have been someone who made it.

Q: Seeing our earth and everything on earth, do you agree that there is a creator?

A: Yes, I agree.

Q: The creator is God. Do you agree that God is the creator of earth and everything?

A: Yes, I agree.

Q: Do you therefore believe in the existence of God and obey his orders?

A: Yes, I agree.

Through the brief dialogue, we can see how easy it is for Catholics to proselyte a young child. Buddhism, to the contrary, is quite difficult to understand, especially for children. The logic of Buddhism can be appreciated only with a mature mind.

As Tony Morris writes,¹ Buddhism is not anti-intellectual. To the contrary, its philosophy is exquisite and refined.” To understand Buddhism, we ought to segregate the essentials from the inessentials. In doing so, it is not difficult to obtain a breakthrough in appreciating what Buddhism teaches. (Having an understanding of Buddhism is still some way from attaining enlightenment.)

Many scholars devote their energies to studying peripheral issues of Buddhism. They engage in disputes over particular details and adamantly exert their efforts to mould different opinions. By misleading readers and distracting the writers themselves, some of these digressions could have a negative effect on Buddhist cultivation.

How should we discern what is important and what is not? Buddhism alerts us not to set “our” view against “theirs.” We should search for guidance in the classics, which offer eighty-four thousand permutations for practitioners to attain Buddhahood. If we are entangled with trivial things, the true meaning of Buddhism will be lost.

¹ Tony Morris, *What Do Buddhists Believe?* (London: Granta Books, 2006), 1.

There are several factors that may cause scepticism towards Buddhism:

1. Misconceptions about Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism.
This will be discussed in the following chapter.
2. Lack of understanding of the various Buddhist schools.
This will be discussed in Chapter 20.
3. Isolated interpretations of “emptiness,” “the four noble truths”, and “the eight correct paths” without reference to the ultimate goal of Buddhism. Unquestionably these concepts are very important, but overly emphasizing them would hinder our understanding of the overall framework of Buddhism. This will be discussed in Chapter 21.
4. A false belief about Buddhism as polytheism. This will be addressed in Chapter 22.