

Buddhism and the Issue of Religious Fundamentalism

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What is fundamentalism?

- ◆ The term 'fundamentalism' in a technical sense was first used in North America in the early decades of the 20th century. It was used by a Protestant Christian Movement to refer to their commitment to the fundamental teachings of Christianity.
- ◆ This movement arose as a reaction against the secularization of society due to the impact of science and technology. The movement wanted to preserve and consolidate the Christian World-View against the emerging scientific World-View.

Wider Meaning of Fundamentalism

Now, the term 'fundamentalism' is used by sociologists and philosophers of religion as an umbrella term to embrace all religious phenomena and movements which have emerged as a reaction against some kind of perceived danger, as for instance, the marginalization of religion due to the secularization of society, with the onset of science and technology.

Main Features of Religious Fundamentalism

- ◆ According to *Fundamentalisms Comprehended: An Anthology of Articles*, edited by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, some of the basic ingredients that go to make religious fundamentalism are as follows:
 1. **Ultra-orthodoxy**: The recognition of the absolute accuracy of the religious scriptures, based almost on a very literal interpretation of what the religious scriptures say.
 2. **Ultra-orthopraxis**: The practice of religious life strictly according to the religious rules and regulations.

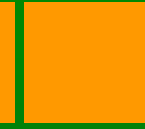
Main Features of Religious Fundamentalism (continue)

3. **Millennialism**: The belief that history has a miraculous culmination, when the good will eventually triumph over evil.
4. **Messiah-ism**: The belief in a Messiah or Saviour, an all-powerful mediator who will usher in the ideal spiritual society.
5. **Militant Piety**.
6. **Exclusiveness** and **Fanaticism**.

Other Sources of Fundamentalism

- ◆ Religion is not the only source of fundamentalism. Fundamentalism could arise in relation to one's own race, ethnicity, culture, as well as language.
- ◆ However, our discussion is on religious fundamentalism.

Earlier Manifestations of Religious Fundamentalism

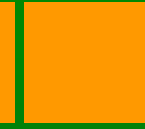


Although the term 'religious fundamentalism' is of recent origin, the idea of religious fundamentalism is certainly not new. It was there earlier as well. We should not forget that ideas can exist without formal terms and labels attached to them.

The Inquisition and the Crusades

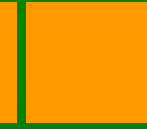
- ◆ An earlier phase of Christian fundamentalism can be seen in the Inquisition, which was initiated by the Roman Catholic Church. It started in the 12th century France. Its aim was to fight against heretics, i.e., followers within the Church who held non-orthodox views, views that that did not conform to mainstream orthodox Christianity.
- ◆ Then there were the Crusades, a series of wars launched by the Christian states of Europe against the Muslims, between 1095 and 1291.

Inter-Religious and Intra-Religious Fundamentalism



Religious fundamentalism could arise in one of two ways: Either between two or more different religions (= inter-religious), or between two or more sects of the same religion (= intra-religious). A good example for the second kind of fundamentalism is the fundamentalist religious movement that arose among the more conservative Shi'ite Muslims against the secularized Shi'ite Muslims, and later against the Sunni Muslims.

Exclusivism: The Root Cause of Religious Fundamentalism



There can be many reasons for the emergence and prevalence of religious fundamentalism.

Nevertheless, modern philosophers of religion identify “exclusivism” as the root cause of religious fundamentalism.

What is Exclusivism?

The most comprehensive, and therefore, the most acceptable definition of exclusivism can be found in the teachings of the Buddha. It is the dogmatic attachment to one's own view, saying: **“This alone is true; all else is false”** (*idam eva saccaṃ; moghaṃ aññaṃ*). In Pāli it is called *“idaṃ-saccābhinivesa”*, i.e., **“adherence to one's own view/dogma/ideology with strong tenacity.”** It is also called *“sanditṭhi-rāga”*, i.e., **“infatuation with the rightness of one's own view.”**

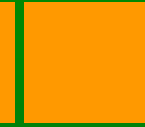
How Exclusivism Manifests

- ◆ It is, in fact, this kind of warped mind-set that provides a fertile ground for bigotry and dogmatism, and for over-bearing self-opinionated stances and equally self-opinionated arguments in justifying them.
- ◆ Its external manifestations, as we all know, are acts of fanaticism due to militant piety, indoctrination and unethical conversion, religious fundamentalism and religious persecution, not to speak of inter-personal conflicts, often leading to internecine warfare.

Attachment to Views is More Dangerous than Attachment to Material Objects

From the Buddhist perspective, therefore, dogmatic attachment to views and ideologies, even if they are right and true, is very much more detrimental and fraught with more danger than our inordinate attachment to material things. A good example for this is today's fast-growing practice of suicide-bombing. A person committing the act of suicide-bombing is prepared to sacrifice his own life for the sake of the agenda he is pursuing.

Non-Religious Ideological Fundamentalism



Another good example of dogmatic attachment to ideologies is the Cold War, between America and Russia, which began after the end of the Second World War and continued up to the collapse of Communism in Russia. It was a conflict for supremacy between two political ideologies, between Capitalism and Communism, between Individualism and Socialism. The Cold War, as we all know, brought the whole world almost to the brink of a nuclear devastation.

Absolutism and Fundamentalism

One major reason for religious, or for that matter, any kind of ideological fundamentalism, is absolutism. Absolutism is best understood as the direct opposite of relativism. Buddhism distances itself from all forms of absolutism.

How Buddhism Looks at Views

- ◆ For Buddhism a view is not something absolute. Rather, a view is only a guide to action. A view is not some kind of icon to be ritually adulated, but a vehicle to be used. In his well-known Discourse on the **Parable of the Raft** (*Kullupūmā*), the Buddha tells us that his teachings should be understood, not as a goal in itself, but only as a means to the realization of the goal.
- ◆ As a view, the Dhamma has only relative value, relative to the realization of the goal. As the Chinese Buddhist saying goes, the Dhamma is like a finger pointing to the moon. If we focus our attention only on the finger we cannot see the moon. Nor can we see the moon without looking at the finger, either.

The Dhamma as a Description of Actuality and Why the Description can be made in Many Ways

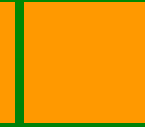
1. The Dhamma is not the actuality as such.

Rather, it is a description of actuality. The Dhamma is a conceptual framework describing the actual nature of reality through the symbolic medium of language. Since the Dhamma is only a description, it can be presented in many ways, from many perspectives. In one discourse the Buddha says that his Dhamma has been presented in many different ways, adopting many different perspectives.

The Dhamma as a Description of Actuality and Why the Description can be made in Many Ways (continue)

2. Accordingly the Buddha says that one must not stick to one presentation and argue with another who bases himself on another presentation.
3. What this clearly demonstrates is that what is true, and therefore what accords with actuality, can be presented in many different ways. There is no one absolutist way of presenting the Dhamma, which is valid for all times and climes.

The Dhamma as a Description of Actuality and Why the Description can be made in Many Ways (continue)



4. The Dhamma is not a holy hymn or a sacred mantra. A holy hymn or a sacred mantra cannot be presented in many ways, nor can it be translated into some other language.

Why Buddhism does not have a Holy Language

1. If the Dhamma can be presented in many ways, it can also be communicated through many languages. When it was suggested to the Buddha by two of his disciples that his Dhamma should be rendered into the elitist language of Sanskrit, the Buddha did not agree to the suggestion.
2. The Buddha's attitude on this matter is that each person has the liberty to adopt his own dialect or language in understanding the Dhamma. This is precisely why Buddhism does not have a holy language.

The Buddhist Attitude to Other Religions

The Buddha refers to all other religious teaches as *Kammavādino*, i.e., those who uphold the moral life, those who maintain that society should have a moral foundation.

Four Kinds of Religion

- ◆ When it comes to other religions, Buddhism refers to four kinds:
 1. A religion based on divine revelation (*anussava*),
 2. A religion based on the claimed omniscience of its Founder (*sabbaññutā*),
 3. A religion founded on logical and metaphysical speculation (*takka-vīmaṃsa*),
 4. A religion based on pragmatism, with a skeptical or agnostic foundation (*amarāvikkhepa*).
- ◆ The Buddha does not condemn any of these four religions as “false” (*micchā-diṭṭhi*). What he says instead is that none of them are satisfactory (*anassāsika*).

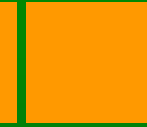
Spiritual Eternalism (*sassatavāda*)

According to Buddhism, all religions that recognize something eternal, as for example, an immortal soul or an eternal Creator God, come under “**spiritual eternalism**” (*sassatavāda*).

Nowhere does the Buddha describe any of these religions as upholding the “**wrong view**” (*micchā-diṭṭhi*). This does not mean that the Buddha recognized them as true religions.

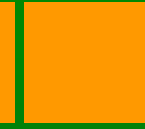
The reason for this is the method adopted by the Buddha in responding to all metaphysical views and ideologies.

The Buddhist Psychology of Ideologies



This method we would like to introduce as the “**Buddhist Psychology of Ideologies**”. It is the diagnosis of the origin of ideological positions by delving deep into their psychological mainsprings. The idea behind this is that our desires and expectations have a direct impact on what we choose to believe in. Therefore, from the Buddhist perspective all metaphysical and theological views are rationalizations of our deep-seated desires and expectations.

As a Religious Teacher, the Buddha recognizes that all other religions have a right to exist



We can give two examples for this:

1. As recorded in the Upāli Discourse of the Majjhimanikāya, one day a well-known disciple of Nigaṇṭhā Nataputta, the Founder of Jaina Religion had a long debate with the Buddha on the subject of Karma. At the end of the debate Upali was convinced that the Buddha was right. So he told the Buddha that he wanted to become a disciple of the Buddha.

As a Religious Teacher, the Buddha recognizes that all other religions have a right to exist (continue)

Then the Buddha said: “*You have been a long-standing disciple of Nigaṇṭhā Nataputta. Therefore, it is proper for such well-known people like you to investigate thoroughly before you make a decision*”. Eventually Upāli became a disciple of the Buddha. Then the Buddha told him:

“*House-holder, your family has long supported the Nigaṇṭhā Nataputta. You should therefore provide him and his followers with alms and other requisites when they come to your home.*”

As a Religious Teacher, the Buddha recognizes that all other religions have a right to exist (continue)

2. In the Buddha's Discourse to Sigāla (Dīghanikāya), the Buddha tells him: "In five ways he should minister to the *samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas*:
 - a. by lovable deeds
 - b. by lovable words
 - c. by lovable thoughts
 - d. by keeping open house for them
 - e. by supplying their material needs
- What is most instructive to note here is the use of the words, "*samaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas*" The two words mean all religious teachers and their disciples.

The Possibility of Emancipation/ Salvation outside Buddhism

- ◆ The Buddha is neither an Incarnation of God, nor is the Buddha a Prophet of God. The Buddha is one who discovers the truth, not one who has a monopoly of the truth.

This leaves open the possibility for others to discover the truth. The Buddhist idea of “Individual Buddha” (Pacceka-Buddha), one who discovers the truth for himself, is a clear admission of this fact. As a matter of fact, in the Suttanipāta the Buddha says:

“I do not declare that all other samaṇas and brāhmaṇas are sunk in birth and death” (Nāhaṃ sabbe samaṇa-brāhmaṇāse jātijarāya nivutā ti brūmi; Suttanipāta, v. 1082).

The Possibility of Emancipation/ Salvation outside Buddhism (continue)

- ◆ “Samaṇa-Brāhmaṇa” is the expression used by the Buddha to mean all religious teachers and practitioners, not necessarily the followers of the Buddha. This is a clear assertion of the possibility of emancipation outside Buddhism. Nevertheless, this should not be understood as a blanket certificate given by the Buddha to validate all other religions.
- ◆ What it clearly demonstrates is that truth is one, but it is not the monopoly of the Buddha, others too can realize the truth for themselves.

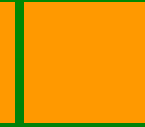
Buddhist Pluralism

- ◆ Another important reason why Buddhism can avoid some kind of “Buddhist fundamentalism” is what we want to introduce as Buddhist Pluralism.
- ◆ Pluralism could be understood as the direct opposite of totalitarianism. Buddhist pluralism can be seen in many aspects of Buddhist thought and practice.

Pluralism in the Concept of the Buddha

- ◆ The very fact that the Buddha is a discoverer should show that the Buddhahood is not the monopoly of one individual. This is why Buddhism says that there had been many Buddhas in the remote past and there will be many Buddhas in the distant future as well.
- ◆ This concept of Buddhahood is in contrast to the concept of Saviour in Christianity. For Christianity, Jesus Christ is the one and only Divine Saviour. Islam recognizes a large number of Prophets who were earlier than Prophet Mohammed. But Prophet Mohammed is considered as the last of the Prophets. His is the final divine revelation.

Pluralism in the Concept of the Buddha (continue)



When we consider the immensity of time and the vastness of space with billions of galactic systems within it, with the possibility of many kinds of living beings inhabiting them, to speak of one single Saviour and one last Prophet, appears rather naïve and parochial.

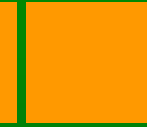
Buddhist Doctrinal Pluralism

- ◆ What the Buddha taught has given rise to a bewildering number of doctrines and doctrinal interpretations, which we find incorporated in three main Buddhist traditions: Theravāda in South Asia, Vajrayāna in North Asia, and Mahāyāna in East Asia.
- ◆ There are two main reasons for this situation: One reason is that the Buddha has encouraged his disciples to elaborate the Dhamma. The more one elaborates the Dhamma, the more it shines” (*vivaṭo virocati*). The other reason is that Buddhism does not recognize an “official interpretation of its doctrines.

Buddhist Scriptural Pluralism

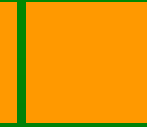
Buddhist scriptural pluralism is equally bewildering. There are four, and not one only, Buddhist Canons: the Pāli Buddhist Canon, the Chinese Buddhist Canon, the Tibetan Buddhist Canon, and the Mongolian Buddhist Canon. They are not translations into four different languages of one and the same Buddhist Canon, although they have many commonalities as well as differences.

Buddhist Scriptural Pluralism (continue)



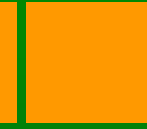
This is in contrast to the religious scriptures of other religions, which have one single scripture: The Old Testament of Judaism. the New Testament of Christianity, the Qu'aran of Islam, the Granth of Sikhism. It is true that some of these scriptures, such as the Bible and the Qu'aran, have many translations into many languages. Nevertheless, we should not forget the fact that it is the same Bible, or the same Qu'aran that has been rendered into many languages.

Buddhist Scriptural Pluralism (continue)



Cf. “People of the Book”, this is the expression used in the Koran to refer to the followers of the three Abrahamic Religions, namely, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Buddhist Cultural Pluralism: Mono-Culturalism vs. Multiculturalism



When it comes to religious culture, Buddhism could be the most pluralistic religion in the world. To whichever country Buddhism was introduced, Buddhism did not level down its cultural diversity to create a mono-culture. The Buddhist culture of China is different from the Buddhist culture of Japan, and both from that of Thailand or that of Myanmar.

Buddhism is Not a Culture-Bound Religion

Because Buddhism promotes cultural pluralism, therefore Buddhism does not become a culture-bound religion. What does this mean? It means that just as a bird can fly from place to place leaving behind its cage, even so Buddhism can fly from one place to another, for instance from Hong Kong to America, leaving behind its cultural baggage. This is not so in the case of some other religions, as for instance, Hinduism and Islam.

Pluralism and Buddhist Cosmic Perspectives: Man and his Place in the Universe

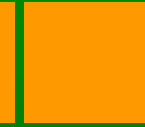
- ♦ The Buddhist view of the world/universe is not confined to our earthly existence. From its very beginning Buddhism recognized the vastness of space and the immensity of time. In one Buddhist discourse, we read:

“As far as these suns and moons revolve shedding their light in space, so far extends the thousand-fold world system. In it are a thousand suns, a thousand moons, thousands of earths, and thousands of heavenly worlds. This is said to be the thousand-fold minor world-system. A thousand times such a thousand-fold minor world system is the twice-a-thousand-middling world-system. A thousand times such a twice-a-thousand middling world-system is the thrice-a-thousand major world-system (Aṅguttara-Nikāya).”

Pluralism and Buddhist Cosmic Perspectives: Man and his Place in the Universe (continue)

These world-systems are, however, never static. They are either in the process of expansion (*vivaṭṭamāna*), or in the process of contraction (*saṃvaṭṭamāna*). These cosmic processes take immensely long periods of time. They are measured in terms of aeons (*kappa*).

Pluralism in the Organization of the Buddhist Monastic Order



We can find Buddhist pluralism in the Buddhist Saṅgha organization as well. The Saṅgha is not a pyramid-like organization, exhibiting an ascending hierarchical order, where at the top you find a supreme head. It is not centralized, but decentralized. The principle of organization is not perpendicular, but horizontal. This allows for diversity within the Saṅgha community. It is this characteristic that makes it resilient.

The Unity and Oneness of the Humankind

1. Where Buddhism avoids pluralism is only when it comes to emphasize the unity and oneness of the humankind. The Buddha totally rejected the Brahmanical social hierarchy, which was based on four castes. Among several Buddhist arguments against the caste system, one of the most important is the biological (*jātimaya*) argument. The argument begins by saying that different kinds of species, such as the ants, worms, the birds, and four-footed animals have different biological differences.
- ◆ But when it comes to human beings we cannot notice such biological differences: *“Not as regards their hair, head, ears, mouth, nose, lips, or brows; nor as regards their neck, shoulders, belly, back, hip, breast, anus or genitals, nor as regards their hands, feet, palms, nails, and calves are there any biological (jātimaya) differences between two human beings”* (Vāseṭṭha-Sutta of the Majjhimanikāya).

The Unity and Oneness of the Humankind

(continue)

2. Addressing a Brahmin called Assalāyana, the Buddha questions him: *“What do you think, Assalāyana? Suppose a mare were to be mated with a male donkey, and a foal were to be born as the result. Should the foal be called a horse after the mother or a donkey after the father?”*
- ◆ Then Assalāyana replies: *“It is a mule, Master Gotama, since it does not belong to either kind.”* (Assalāyana-Sutta of the Majjhimanikāya).

The Unity and Oneness of the Humankind

(continue)

3. This biological argument was also presented by the Buddhist sage Aśvaghoṣa in his *Vajrasūci* (1st century c.e.):

“The doctrine of the four castes is altogether false. All men are of one caste. Wonderful! You affirm that all men proceeded from one, i.e., Brahmā the Creator God; how then can there be a four-fold inseparable diversity among them. If I have four sons by one wife, the four sons, having one father and one mother must all be all essentially alike. Know too that distinctions of race among beings are broadly marked by differences of conformations and organizations. Thus, the foot of the elephant is very different from that of the horse; that of the tiger unlike that of the deer; and so of the rest, and by that single diagnosis we learn that those animals belong to very different races. But I never heard that the foot of a Ksatriya is different from that of a Brahmin or that of a Sudra. All men are formed alike, and are clearly of one race.”

Pluralism and the Buddhist Social Philosophy

Another important factor that helps Buddhists to distance themselves from religious fundamentalism is the liberalism and elasticity of the social philosophy of Buddhism. What we mean by this is that Buddhism does not interfere with our ways of living by imposing on us unnecessary restrictions: We never hear of a Buddhist Dress, Buddhist Food, or Buddhist Medicine, which are valid for all times and climes. Why? Because these are things that change from time to time, from place to place.

The Buddhist Attitude to Marriage

- ◆ There could be many forms of marriage: monogamy, polygamy, polyandry, and so on. Today in the modern world the legally recognized practice is monogamy. Nevertheless nowhere does Buddhism say that other forms of marriage are immoral.
- ◆ The form of the marriage can change. If it changes, then there is no problem for Buddhism. For Buddhism marriage is only a social institution. It is something entirely mundane, not a religious “sacrament”. Nor does Buddhism say that marriage is an indissoluble bond. Therefore if two married partners are incompatible, they can divorce, provided they follow the laws of the country as enacted for such situations.

The Problem of Abortion

Since abortion involves taking of life, it goes against the First Precept. However, in our opinion abortion can be condoned in cases of serious health hazards, if abortion is the lesser evil. In this connection it is instructive for us to remember two things: One is that according to Buddhism what really matters is the volition (*cetanā*). It is, in fact, volition that the Buddha has identified as karma. The other thing is that in following morality, we are not expected to do so by grasping morality (*aparāmaññham*).

Disposal of the Dead

There are many ways of disposing the dead body, such as burial, cremation, or mummification as in ancient Egypt. But the two main practices are burial and cremation. Buddhism recognizes both practices. Muslims follow only the practice of burial, never cremation. Early Christians followed only the practice of burial. But now both Protestants and Catholics follow both methods.

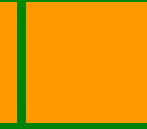
Religious Pluralism

Religious pluralism is based on the idea that all religions are but different manifestations of one and the same Truth. We find this idea for the first time in a hymn in the R̥g-Veda of ancient India, where it says **“Truth is but one; the wise people proclaim it in different ways.”** Another religion that believes in religious pluralism is Bahaism, a religion that arose in Iran in the 19th century. Then we have the Theosophical Society and a non-religious movement called Perennial Philosophy, also called the Continuous Tradition.

Religious Pluralism (continue)

What both these two movements maintain is that despite the seeming differences, all religions say the same thing and, therefore, it is possible to speak of a “Transcendental Unity of Religion,” a unity that transcends all apparent differences and all denominational and sectarian colourings.

Is This Kind of Religious Pluralism the answer to Religious Fundamentalism?



In our view, it is certainly not. For all those who speak of religious pluralism or the transcendental unity of religion believe in a God or an impersonal God-head as the ultimate ground of existence. Buddhism does not subscribe to such a notion. So we have to count out Buddhism from what is called religious pluralism.

Buddhism and Religious Inclusivism

1. As a religion, Buddhism does not categorically assert that what is good and noble is confined to Buddhism. In this connection, there is one statement which we find in a Pāli discourse as well as in a Mahayana text:
2. *“Whatever is said by the Buddha is well-said. Whatever is well-said is said by the Buddha.”*
3. What the first sentence says is clear enough. It is the second sentence that appears rather intriguing.

Buddhism and Religious Inclusivism

4. What the second sentence really says is that if there is anything well-said, no matter by whom, no matter where, no matter when, it is also said by the Buddha. We have the liberty of elaborating this to mean that if there is anything well-said, whether it is in the Bhagavadgītā of Hinduism, or in the Old Testament of Judaism, or in the New Testament of Christianity, or in the Qu'aran of Islam, or in the Grantha of Sikhism — in all these non-Buddhist religious scriptures as well as in all non-religious works we do find the Buddha-Word.

Buddhism and Religious Inclusivism

(continue)

- ◆ We must not overlook the fact that it is only what is “well-said”, and certainly not what is “ill-said”, that we have to consider as the Buddha-Word. If a particular religious text approves killing of animals either for consumption or as a sacrifice to the God or gods, then it is not “what is said by the Buddha”.
- ◆ Accordingly, in relation to “all that is well-said” Buddhism is inclusivist. In relation to “all that is ill-said”, Buddhism is exclusivist.

Buddhism: The First-Ever Missionary Religion in the World

- ◆ Addressing his first 60 disciples who became Arahants, the Buddha exhorted them: *“Go forth, O Monks, and spread the Dhamma, for the good of the many, for the well and welfare of the many, for the blessing of the many. Let not two of you take the same path.”*
- ◆ This is how Buddhism started as a missionary religion during the time of the Buddha himself. There is no historical evidence to suggest that any religious teacher during or before the time of the Buddha resorted to missionary activity. We can, therefore, conclude that Buddhism is the First Missionary Religion in the world.

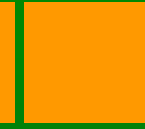
The Wheel of the Dhamma (*Dhamma-Cakka*)



- ◆ As a matter of fact, the missionary spirit and the missionary thrust of Buddhism can be seen in the very expression, “**The Wheel of the Dhamma**”, which we find in the title given to the Very First Sermon delivered by the Buddha in Benaris. Its title is: ***The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of the Dhamma***. It is in this sermon that we find the emphatic assertion:

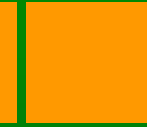
*“The Buddha set in motion the Wheel of the Dhamma, which cannot be turned back by any living being in the world, not even by God (Devena vā), not even by Mara (*Marena vā*).”*

The Second and the Third Settings in Motion of the Wheel of the Dhamma



One School of Mahayana Buddhism says that the Wheel of the Dhamma was set in motion, not once as some believe, but thrice. This is a symbolic and emphatic way of saying how what the Buddha taught gave rise, in the course of time, to three major doctrinal interpretations: the Dharma Realism of the early Buddhist schools, the Doctrine of Emptiness of the Madhyamaka, and the Doctrine of Mind-Only of the Vijnanavada.

The Fourth Setting in Motion of the Wheel of the Dhamma



Some modern scholars of Buddhism go further than even the Mahayana. They proclaim that the Wheel of the Dhamma came to be set in Motion for a fourth time as well, this time at the turn of the 19th century of the Common Era. What they mean by this is the unprecedented awakening in Buddhist Studies that swept across the three continents of Asia, Europe, and America, during and after the 19th century. What led to this situation is the “discovery” — we use the word in a qualified sense — of the literary sources of the three Great Buddhist Traditions in the continent of Asia, Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana, together with the discovery, sometime later, of the priceless Buddhist manuscripts and artifacts of the lost Buddhist civilization of Central Asia, a civilization that lasted over one thousand years.

EPILOGUE

Harmony between Buddhism and Other Religions

- ◆ As a fitting epilogue to what we have been saying so far on the issue of religious fundamentalism we would like to draw your attention to two edicts issued by the Buddhist King Asoka of ancient India.
- ◆ In one edict issued in 256 before the Common Era, King Asoka says:
“Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, honours both ascetics and the householders of all religions, and he honours them with gifts and honours of various kinds. But Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, does not value gifts and honours as much as he values this — that there should be growth in the essentials of all religions. ...”

Harmony between Buddhism and Other Religions (continue)

Growth in essentials can be done in different ways, but all of them have as their root restraint in speech, that is, not praising one's own religion, or condemning the religions of others without good cause. And if there is cause for criticism, it should be done in a mild way. But it is better to honour other religions for this reason. By so doing, one's own religion benefits, and so do other religions, while doing otherwise harms one's own religion and the religions of others.

Harmony between Buddhism and Other Religions (continue)

Whoever praises his own religion, due to excessive devotion, and condemns others with the thought “Let me glorify my own religion”, only harms his own religion. Therefore cordial contact (between religions) is good. One should listen to and respect the doctrines professed by others. Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, desires that all should be well-learned in the good doctrines of other religions.

Harmony between Buddhism and Other Religions (continue)

Those who are content with their own religion should be told this: Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, does not value gifts and honours as much as he values that there should be growth in the essentials of all religions. And to this end many are working — Dhamma Mahamatras, Mahamatras in charge of the women's quarters, officers in charge of outlying areas, and other such officers. And the fruit of this is that one's own religion grows and the Dhamma is illuminated also."

Conquest by Dhamma is the Supreme Conquest

- ◆ In another inscription King Asoka says:

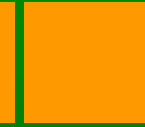
“Now it is conquest by Dhamma that Beloved-of-the-Gods considers to be the best conquest, and the conquest by Dhamma has been won here, on the borders, even 600 yojanas away where the Greek King Antiochos rules, beyond there where the four kings named Ptolemy, Antigonas, Magas and Alexander rule, likewise in the south among the Cholas, the Pāndyas, and as far as Tāmraparṇi (Sri Lanka).

Conquest by Dhamma is the Supreme Conquest (continue)

Here in the king's domain among the Greeks, the Kambojas (Persians), the Nabhakas, the Nabhapamkits, the Bhojas, the Pitinikas, the Andhras and the Palidas, everywhere people are following Beloved-of-the-God's instructions in Dhamma. Even where Beloved-of-the-God's envoys have not been, these people too, having heard of the practice of Dhamma and the ordinances and instructions in Dhamma given by the Beloved-of-the-Gods, are following it and will continue to do so.

THIS CONQUEST HAS BEEN WON EVERYWHERE, AND IT GIVES GREAT JOY – THE JOY WHICH ONLY CONQUEST BY DHAMMA CAN GIVE.”

The End



*Thank
You*