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## Are all religions equally salvific?

I shall understand by a ‘religion’ a system which offers a ‘deep well-being’ in this life and normally (though not necessarily) finding a final fulfilment after death, a well-being which — following Hick — I shall call salvation. A religion involves two elements — a way and a creed. By a ‘way’ I understand a life-style, a collection of kinds of action. In *The Acts of the Apostles* the Christian religion is often called ‘the way’; and living the Buddhist life is often called following the ‘noble eight-fold way’. A creed is a doctrinal system associated with following the way. Each religion teaches that one reason for pursuing its religious way, though not necessarily the primary reason, is to obtain salvation for oneself. I shall show, later in the paper how the creed of a religion is necessary in order to explain why pursuit of its way will achieve salvation for oneself and the fulfilment of the other goals of religion. I shall argue that, contrary to Hick,<sup>1</sup> different religions have different conceptions of salvation and that some kinds of salvation are much more worth pursuing than others; and claim (though not argue have) that the pursuit of one religious way is much more likely to attain its goals than is pursuit of other religious ways.

To follow the Christian way, a person must do the actions of the kind commanded or commended by, and refrain from actions of the kind forbidden or discouraged by the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount and St.

<sup>1</sup> Hick claims that while each of the major religions has its own understanding of salvation, ‘if we stand back from these different conceptions to compare them, we can very naturally and properly see them as different forms of the more fundamental conception of a radical change from a profoundly unsatisfactory state to one that is limitlessly better, because rightly related to the Real.’ (‘Religious Pluralism and Salvation’ in (ed.) PL. Quinn and K. Meeker, *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 55.) ‘The Real’ is Hick’s word for what he regards as the transcendent divine reality conceptualised in different traditions as personal or as impersonal.

Paul's Letters. This way is often given more detailed form in the teaching of different Christian denominations, and especially in the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

Some of the actions commanded — it is highly plausible to suppose — are morally obligatory and some of the actions forbidden are morally wrong (that is, obligatory not to do) anyway, that is whether or not there is a God. It is obligatory to pay one's debts, and to feed one's children; wrong to lie and steal — whether or not there is a God. Many of the actions commended are good (even when not obligatory) anyway whether or not there is a God. It is good to devote one's life to helping many people (including oneself) to lead a deeply happy life, which will include understanding the world and beautifying it, and developing friendships. Some such actions are (at any rate if there is no God) supererogatorily good (that is of a kind that are obligatory, but of a degree which goes beyond obligation), for example devoting one's life to feeding and educating the poor in distant lands, or throwing oneself on a grenade to save the life of a comrade.

But any religious way normally involves doing other actions also beyond those that are good for non-religious reasons. For example, pursuing the Christian way involves doing many actions which would have no point (would be neither obligatory or supererogatory or otherwise good) if there were no God. It involves worship of God; and more particularly, it involves being baptised, joining in the eucharistic and other worship of the Christian church, and private prayer. The prayer will include seeking forgiveness from God for the wrongs we have done to him (our sins), petitionary prayer for the well-being of oneself and others, and attempting to persuade others to pursue the Christian way; and much else. Spending quite a lot of one's time doing such actions is obligatory — on a Christian view. And all actions which would be obligatory anyway if there were no God become doubly obligatory if there is a God — we owe it both to God who made us and them and to our children, to feed our children. And some actions which would be good but not obligatory, e.g. supererogatory, if there were no God become obligatory. Giving more of one's money to feed the poor than would otherwise be obligatory perhaps comes into this category.

By the Christian creed I mean the system of Christian doctrine captured in embryo by, for example, The Nicene Creed. God the Holy Trinity created us. When we sinned, God the Son became a human being, as Jesus Christ, and allowed his life and voluntary death to constitute a sacrifice for our sins, through

which we can obtain forgiveness of them; and he plans to take those of us who try to follow the Christian way to Heaven.

Other religions commend other ‘ways’, other life–styles. The ways of many religions overlap to a significant extent with each other and with the Christian way. For most other religions, as for Christianity, it is good to feed the starving and obligatory to pay one’s debts; but they give different teaching about whether and how God or gods are to be worshipped, and also about how far it is good or obligatory to convert others to that religion. Buddhism for example overlaps to a considerable extent with respect to those actions whose goodness does not depend on the existence of God, but it commends also different actions (instead of those whose goodness depends on the existence of God). Following the Buddhist way involves above all the seeking of wisdom by meditation. The ‘wisdom’ on which we should meditate involves the central doctrines of Buddhism to which I will come shortly. Various ritual practices such as devotion to stupas and images of the Buddha will help anyone in this process. And certain semi–ascetic practices are prescribed especially for monks, — fasting, wearing old clothes, and sleeping rough. Although there is clearly some overlap in the techniques of meditation commended by Christianity and Buddhism, the aim of meditation is very different; for the Christian it is access to God, for the Buddhist wisdom and freedom from mundane desire. For the Buddhist it is especially good to seek to become a bodhisattva, one committed to achieve Buddhahood for the sake of others, and this involves spreading Buddhist doctrine. A Buddha is one who is perfectly enlightened.

Although Buddhists and those who follow other Eastern religions are reluctant to talk of their religion as having a ‘creed’, they do have certain doctrinal teaching associated with following the way, and — I shall argue shortly — they need to have such teaching. I will call it their creed. For Buddhism this seems to me to consist in the law of karma (‘according to which virtuous actions create pleasure in the future and non–virtuous actions create pain’<sup>2</sup>), the law of rebirth (that after death, unless we have become enlightened, we live again), the doctrine of no self (that — strictly speaking — it is not the same unique self who is reborn, but only a conscious being whose consciousness is some extent continuous with

<sup>2</sup> Donald S. Lopez, *Buddhism*, Penguin Books, 2002, p. 21.

the earlier self), and the doctrine of the final nirvana (that those who are ‘enlightened’ escape the cycle of rebirth and pass to ‘nirvana’).

Now what is the point of following a religious way? As I have noted, some of the actions which any religious way includes are ones good to pursue anyway for non-religious reasons. But what additional reasons are provided by the creed of a religion for doing these actions, and for doing the other actions of its religious way? I shall rephrase this question as — what religious reasons are there for pursuing a religious way? There seem to me at most three kinds of reason which religions have given why it is good to pursue their religious way. It is good to follow a religious way in order to render proper worship and obedience to any God or gods there may be, to attain one’s own salvation and to help others to attain theirs. The first reason is of course only a reason for following the way of one of the religions which affirm there is a God or gods. It is good to do some action in order to attain a certain goal in so far as the goal is a good goal, and in so far as it is probable that by doing that action you will attain that goal. Hence it will be good to follow a certain religious way insofar as the goals which it seeks are good goals, and insofar as it is probable that by following the way you will attain the goals. We shall see in due course that it is only in so far as the creed of the religious is probably true, that it is probable that following its way will attain its goals. So there must always be two aspects to evangelism — presenting the goals of the religion as good ones, ones worth giving one’s life to pursue; and secondly showing that the creed of the religion is probably true.

I seek in this paper to pursue the first task and to illustrate by the examples of Christianity and Buddhism that different religions have different goals, and that the Christian goals are better than the Buddhist goals.

The first religious reason for following a religious way is to render proper worship and obedience to whatever God or gods there are. Theistic religions, including Christianity normally claim that we have an obligation to do this, although they may also allow that is supererogatorily good to do more than obligation requires. People ought to acknowledge other persons with whom they come into contact, not just ignore them — and this surely becomes a duty when those persons are our benefactors. We acknowledge people in various ways when we meet them, e.g. by shaking hands or smiling at them, and the way in which we acknowledge their presence reflects our recognition of the sort of individual they are and the kind of relation they have to us. We should reverence the

beautiful and the holy. Worship is the only response appropriate to a God, the perfectly good source of all being. And if a God gives us each new day our life and all the good things it involves, much thankful worship becomes our duty. If God came to earth as a human, Jesus Christ, to live a life and suffer a death by which he identified with our suffering and made available to us atonement for our sins, such a heroic act of supererogatory goodness must merit great devotion and service. If God has given us our instructions that as to how to use our life and behave towards our fellows, then we have a duty to follow these instructions. God is the source of my being and I have failed to use aright the life which he has given me by rendering to him proper worship and obedience, I ought to seek forgiveness from God for having failed to fulfil my obligations.

The Christian creed — claiming that there is a God who has done various things for us — explains why following the Christian way by worshipping and obeying him in the way it lays down will enable us to achieve the first goal of religion — that whatever God or gods there are properly worshipped; and so explains why not following that way will lead to our not achieving that goal.

If the Christian creed is true, I have these obligations and I will fulfil them by following the Christian way — by worshipping, seeking forgiveness etc as God has told me to do so. For this reason it will be very good to follow the Christian way. If the Christian creed is false it will be a waste of time to follow the Christian way; if there is no God, there is nothing good in worship. But in this life, we depend on probabilities. It is a plausible principle of morality that we are culpable, blameworthy, if we do not do what we believe to be probably obligatory. Hence if on our evidence we believe that it is probable that the Christian creed is true, we are culpable if we fail to follow the Christian way. But suppose that we believe that it is not on balance probable (that is, more probable than not) that the Christian creed is true, but we believe that there is quite a chance that it is true and so that we do have the obligations which it claims? Would it still be good to follow the Christian way for this reason? I think so, for life and all the benefits which are ours if the creed is true, are such good things, and if there is a God, he has given them to us. If we receive a parcel containing a great gift and we do not know who sent it, but we think that it is moderately probable (though not more probable than not) that some particular person sent it, then surely it would be good to express much gratitude to that person. It would be such a bad thing for a generous donor to be unthanked, that it would good to thank the most probable

donor even if he is less probably than not the donor. Worship seems appropriate to the possible donor of life, even if of a qualified and maybe limited kind.

The second religious reason for pursuing a religious way, a reason common to all religions, is to attain one's own salvation, that is deep well-being. Well-being belongs to someone, I suggest, in so far as he performs good actions in a situation where it is good to be and he knows that he is in that situation and wants (that is, desires) to be there doing those actions. This world is a good place to inhabit. It is a beautiful place, many of us are often happy through the satisfaction of good desires, and so many of our good actions make important differences to things. And, if there is a God as described in the Christian creed, pursuing the Christian way on earth provides a depth to our well-being here which constitutes a limited salvation, even for those for whom life does not provide much by way of very ordinary well-being. It is good for me now (not just good for God, and an obligation upon me) to live a life of worship and service to God, because it is good for me that I should fulfil my obligations and seek further to please my creator and sustainer. And it is good for me to help other people by fulfilling my obligations to them and being of use to them in various ways beyond obligation. It is of course good for me to do these latter things for non-religious reasons, but a theistic religion provides a further reason why it is good. If I am of use to others, that pleases God who made both me and those others. If however, there is a God and I fail in my obligations to him, then clearly it is good for me that I should seek forgiveness from God and reconciliation to him. All of us have to some extent spent so much of our lives in trivial and unworthy pursuits. And so it is good that we should seek and obtain from our creator who has given us our lives for worthier purposes, forgiveness for wasting it. On the Christian view, God answers our petitionary prayers, sometimes by bringing about what we request and sometimes by meeting the need which led to our prayer in a different way. To many Christians it seems to them that they are aware of God's presence in their prayer, and if there is a God, they are indeed thus aware. On the Christian view we are in interaction with God on earth.

A crucial part of salvation is having a good character, that is desires to do good actions and be in good situations, and true beliefs about which actions and situations are good (or bad), Doing an action of some kind when it is difficult makes it easier to do an action of that kind on another occasion, and so doing good actions helps us to form a good character (a system of good desires).

Christianity holds that having a good character involves desiring to do those actions and be in situations which Christianity holds to be good; and will be promoted by doing those actions and by certain practices of prayer. And Christianity has normally held that not merely is it good to desire to do the actions, but it is good to desire that these actions should be successful. It is good to desire to feed the hungry, not just because such an action is good, but also because it is good that the hungry be fed and so we should desire that they be fed. Christianity derives from Judaism the idea that many (but not all) mundane desires with which we find ourselves are such that it is good to do the actions which aim to fulfil them — in appropriate circumstances.<sup>3</sup> A good character will therefore include having such desires. I believe that on the whole Christianity has held that it is good to desire to (that is to feel a longing to) eat, drink, sleep, have sexual intercourse with a spouse,<sup>4</sup> have the company of other humans and be liked by other humans; to desire to live in a nice house, walk in beautiful country, listen to good music etc. etc. And it is good to desire to rebuke the wrongdoer, and to grieve at the loss of loved ones. In the case of many of these desires, it is bad to indulge them and so bad to have them, beyond certain limits — to desire to eat so much that you become obese, or drink so much alcohol that you become drunk. And it may be good sometimes (or for some people always) not to indulge and so not to have these desires at all for the sake of higher goods (e.g. not to eat food at all on Good Friday in order to identify with Christ's suffering; or to avoid seeking to be liked in order to tell people an unpopular truth; or — for some people — always to avoid sexual intercourse). But the view is that there is normally something bad about you if you don't have such desires at all. Love is the best of desires; it is above all good that we shall love others (including — on the Christian view — desiring their company and their deep well-being) in ways

<sup>3</sup> 'The passions incline us to sin insofar as they are uncontrolled by reason; insofar as they are controlled by reason, they are part of the virtuous life' – Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a. 2ae. 24.2 ad 3.

<sup>4</sup> As even Augustine, with his deep concern about the evil of lust, recognized when he wrote with approval of the 'mutual affection' which Adam and Eve had for each other as that of 'faithful and sincere marriage', which would include procreation. 'They always enjoyed what was loved'. What went wrong subsequently, claimed Augustine, was that 'mutual affection' got out of rational control, so as to become inordinate lust. See Augustine, *City of God* 14.10. (translated by M.Dods T&T Clark, 1871).

appropriate to their relation to ourselves. Desiring the company and well-being of children involves desiring a different kind of involvement with them and different kind of state of them from what desiring the company of one's spouse involves. And the love of God, which Christianity claims to be the greatest of loves is an extension of ordinary human love of friends; it is the desire for the company and well-being of our supreme benefactor as well as our greatest friend. The goodness of some of these desires depends on the truth of the Christian creed; others are good to have, even if the Christian creed is not true, but their goodness is increased in the latter case (e.g. because God wants us to have the desires).

Again we can only be guided by probabilities. In so far as it is probable that the creed is true, it is probably good to have these desires for religious reasons. But again, even if it is not on balance probable that the creed is true, it may still be good to have the desires to avoid our failing to please God, if there is a God.

Unfortunately in this world some of our desires are bad (for non-religions as well as religious reasons) bad desires — we desire to humiliate or insult others; or desires which move us to action where it is bad to indulge them — we desire to have a good reputation when we do not deserve this, to exercise power for its own sake, to drink more alcohol than is good for us, and so on. And because we yield so often to the bad desires, we hurt others and they hurt us. One reason for following the Christian way is to help us to resist our bad desires, and to improve our character so that we have only good desires, but to achieve this is work which needs effort and persistence. Natural processes make our situation bad and unhappy — we suffer from diseases and lose our friends. So often God's presence is not too evident to us; and too often the Christian church fails to help us on our journey. The salvation available on earth is indeed a limited one.

The Buddhist tends to have a more pessimistic view of this world than does the Christian. He tends to hold that the disordered desires of humans and their consequent suffering makes this world on balance a place where it is not good for us to be. For the Buddhist, as for the Christian, we can attain a limited salvation in this life by following the religious way. And any limited well-being here depends on having true beliefs about what are worthwhile actions and which situations are relatively good ones. Note that among the ten standard bad actions listed by Buddhism are 'wrong view'. In particular for Buddhism having a right



view involves holding the doctrinal propositions which I listed earlier and which are all of them contrary to Christian doctrine.

For the Buddhist, as for the Christian, a good character — having good desires — is part of our limited earthly salvation. A bodhisattva, an aspirant Buddha, requires a feeling of pity or compassion and an active wish to free all beings from suffering.<sup>5</sup> But Buddhism seems to advocate a life free from mundane desires for our own well-being, free that is from the eight worldly concerns for ‘gain and loss, fame and disgrace, praise and blame, happiness and sorrow.’<sup>6</sup> For the Buddhist becoming ‘enlightened’ involves ‘dispassion’, the abolition of mundane desires as illustrated by the mother who does not weep for the death of her son saying, ‘Why should I grieve? He fares the way he had to tread’.<sup>7</sup> And very occasionally in this life someone can attain complete enlightenment (and thus become a Buddha). He will have an earthly nirvana which at death will lead to the final nirvana (see later). But I suggest that all this represents a highly unsatisfactory conception of salvation. We ought to mind about being liked or disliked, gaining or losing a friend. ‘Dispassion’ of the kind exhibited by the mother who does not weep would not be a good thing to have. To respond with the right emotions to good or bad events is to show the right sort of respect to the people involved in those events.

So while Hick is right to claim all religions hold that one’s own salvation involves ‘having love or compassion’ for others,<sup>8</sup> since this involves promoting their well-being, it will amount to something very different in so far as one has a very different idea of what their well-being consists in. And even as regards salvation in this life, Christianity and Buddhism have significantly different conceptions of what salvation consists in. The difference is far more acute when we consider that for both religions, the primary constituent of salvation lies outside this life. For both religions this life is a far from perfect mode of existence. But the two religions have different accounts of how eventually an after-life can remove the imperfections of this life. Most importantly — while for Christianity

<sup>5</sup> Lopez, *Buddhism*, p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> op. cit. p. 265.

<sup>7</sup> op. cit. pp. 218–9

<sup>8</sup> ‘Religious Pluralism and Salvation’, p. 56.

many of our desires need to be improved (some removed, others better directed) and many of us need some new good new desires and many of the obstacles to the fulfilment of our best desires need to be removed, for Buddhism much of the trouble with this world is that we have mundane desires and the final solution is to remove them.

For the Christian salvation consists in going to Heaven. Well-being belongs to someone, I have claimed in so far as he performs good actions in a situation where it is good to be and who knows that he is in such a situation doing such actions. Good actions include reverencing beauty and holiness, developing our understanding of the world and beautifying it, developing our friendship with others, and helping others towards a deeply happy life. Good situations are ones which have the feature, among other features, that the goals of such actions are achieved (both by oneself and others); where the good triumphs. Such situations will include having pleasurable sensations, (for pleasurable sensations are just the ones we want to have happen to us) but they are the better for coming from the doing of worthwhile actions and being in worthwhile situations. It is better to get the sensations of sexual pleasure through the development of a personal relationship, not by themselves. It is better to drink alcohol in company than alone. And so on.

If all this is correct, the occupations of the inhabitants of the Heaven, the saints, as depicted in the New Testament and by traditional Christian theologians would be supremely worthwhile, and so would their situation be. If the world depends for its being on God, a personal ground of being, holy, other, and beautiful, he is the proper object of unending worship. The fullest development of understanding will be growth in the understanding of the nature and actions of God himself. Becoming aware of God will be a central occupation of Heaven, traditionally called the 'Beatific Vision' of God.<sup>9</sup> Christian theology claims that God will be present to the inhabitant of Heaven as intimately as his own thoughts. God will be ultimately victorious over all evil, and we shall fully realize this.<sup>10</sup> This contemplation of God, the source of all things will lead to the saints

<sup>9</sup> 'By a single, uninterrupted and everlasting act the mind of a human being will be united with God in that state of beatitude' – *Summa Theologiae*, 1a. 2ae. 3. 2 ad.4.

<sup>10</sup> This is a theme of Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (trans. E. Spearing, Penguin Books, 1998), e.g. The Long Text section 32. She is much concerned that 'one

responding in grateful adoration in what is another central occupation of Heaven—worship.<sup>11</sup> The saints reign with Christ in glory,<sup>12</sup> and so have other work to do — interceding before God for humans on earth or elsewhere and executing God’s purposes in other ways; and thus bringing others into the sphere of God’s love. These others may be, like many on Earth, half-developed beings ignorant of their capacities for the work of Heaven, with wounds of body and soul to be healed. So the relation of the saints to God will be one of loving interaction, that is friendship — God showing himself and the saints responding in worship and service — but a friendship in which their mutual access and response are, unlike our friendship as earth, total and unclouded.<sup>13</sup> Since God is a being of infinite goodness, power and knowledge, it can take beings of finite power an eternity to comprehend him. Those who ‘follow the way of God’s wisdom’, wrote Origen, should think of themselves as living in tents, ‘with which they always walk and always move on, and the farther they go, so much more does the road still to walk grow long and stretch out endlessly... [The mind] is

point of our faith is that many shall be damned’, and so it seems ‘impossible that all manner of things shall be well’. And yet ‘there is a deed which the Holy Trinity shall do on the last day’ which is to make all well that is not well’ and God tells her that ‘You shall see for yourself that all manner of things shall be well’ ‘at the end of time’.

<sup>11</sup> ‘This will be the life of the saints, the activity of those at rest: we shall praise without ceasing’ – Augustine, *City of God* 22.30, cited in B.E. Daley, *the Hope of the Early Church*, Cambridge University Press, 1991. I am indebted Daley for his very full description of the understanding of the after-life by the Christian theologians of the first five hundred years of Christianity. He brings out how there is virtually total agreement among these theologians about the nature of Heaven, although there is much less agreement about whether there is a purgatorial stage through which some have to pass on the way to Heaven, and about the fate of those (if any) who do not get to Heaven.

<sup>12</sup> See Christ’s words to his disciples: ‘Truly, I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.’ (Matt. 19:28.) ‘Judging’ may mean here ‘ruling over’

<sup>13</sup> Thus Paul: ‘Now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face’ (I Corinthians 13:12).

always called to move on, from the good to the better and from the better to still higher things'.<sup>14</sup>

Heaven will also involve friendship with good finite beings, including those whose who have been the companions of the saints on Earth. The task of comprehending and worshipping God will be a co-operative one, one in co-operation with those who have shared their work on Earth. Augustine wrote that the description of Heaven as 'the city of God' would have no meaning 'if the life of the saints were not social'.<sup>15</sup> Christian theology has always stressed both that Heaven will involve a renewal of earthly acquaintance, and that the enjoyment of such acquaintance will not be its main point. And of course, one always enjoys acquaintance the better if it serves some further point — if one and one's fellows are working together in a task. Traditionally too, people will get bodily pleasure out of life in Heaven.

A person's happiness consists in his (believing that he is) doing what he wants (that is, desires) to be doing and having happen what he wants to have happen. It follows that a person's deepest happiness is to be found in pursuing successfully a task of supreme value and being in a situation of supreme value, when that person has true beliefs about this and wants to be only in that situation pursuing that task. Hence the life of the Christian Heaven would provide deep happiness for the person who wants to be there and wants nothing else, but not for those who have other wants.

But, however nirvana is interpreted, Buddhism offers a very different kind of salvation in the after-life from that offered by Christianity. For the Buddhist, the point of following the less demanding parts of the Buddhist way is to secure rebirth either in this world of humans or in a better world of demigods. But the point of following the more demanding parts of the way is to attain the final nirvana. The final nirvana supposedly involves the end of the cycle of death and rebirth, and an end of suffering and mundane desires and of ignorance; but just what else is involved is unclear. There seem to be within Buddhism a range of very different understandings of the final nirvana.<sup>16</sup> On one extreme view it is,

<sup>14</sup> Origen, *Homily 17 on Numbers*, cited in Daley, *op. cit.* p. 50.

<sup>15</sup> City of God 19.5, cited in Daley p. 147.

<sup>16</sup> For an outline of the whole range of such views, see Keith Ward, *Religion and Revelation*,

as etymology suggests, literally ‘nothingness’, the end of existence. On another view it is unconceptualizable — nothing can be said about it. On other views it is infinite peace and joy. But no positive reason seems to be given as to what makes nirvana a joyful state; there is only the negative reason of the absence of mundane desires. One thing that seems fairly clear however is that nirvana does not involve friendship with an all-good creator God, or even with humans whom we have known on earth. The issue is complicated by the Buddhist doctrine of no-self. Strictly speaking, from one moment to another there is no continuing unchanging soul which gives the person his identity, only a stream of consciousness. So what survives into another world, let alone into nirvana (if anything survives into nirvana) is only somewhat the same person as existed on earth. So, strictly speaking, Buddhism offers no hope to me of a blessed heavenly life, let alone one involving God. And so there is to my mind considerable plausibility in maintaining that an after-life without God would not be as happy as life in the theistic Heaven. For friendship is with persons. If there is no God, the only friendship to be attained could be with persons with limited ability to satisfy our needs, limited natures to reveal to us, limited abilities to do things for us and satisfy our curiosity. But anyway continued friendship with other humans, let alone those who have shared our earthly pilgrimage, seems no part of nirvana. All told, the salvation offered by Buddhism seems to me definitely inferior to the salvation offered by Christianity or Islam.

Hick claims that ‘the basic expectation of a limitlessly good fulfilment could be correct without any of our present ways of picturing it is proving adequate.’<sup>17</sup> True, but in assessing whether some goal is worth pursuing, we must depend on our ‘present way of picturing it’—we have no other. And if what one religion offers you doesn’t look at all like ‘a limitlessly good fulfilment’, there is no reason to suppose that really it is, and so there is less reason for seeking it rather than some other goal.

The Christian creed explains why following the Christian way will lead to me attaining salvation here and hereafter. For if it is true, following its way will help us to develop the right character on earth, and that will make us fitted for Heaven. For only those with the right desires would enjoy the supremely good

Clarendon Press, 1994, pp. 161–73.

<sup>17</sup> John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, MacMillan, 1989, p. 361 n8.

occupations of Heaven. Someone who had always made evil choices would have allowed himself to become someone without any moral sense, and the Christian creed says that there is no Heaven for such a person. And one reason for that is that he would not be happy there. And even a Buddhist who had acquired total dispassion would need a great deal of reformation before he would be happy there. Conversely the Buddhist creed explains, by means of the law of karma, why the good on earth will have better lives hereafter and the bad will have worse ones; and that total enlightenment will in fact lead to the final nirvana. No Christian with Christian passions and attributes could acquire that enlightenment. The third religious reason for following a religious way is to help others to attain their salvation. Part of following any such way (whether Christian or Buddhist) involves telling others how to achieve their salvation and encouraging them to do so. And clearly in so far as any religion offers a worthwhile salvation, it is good for us to help others to achieve it. I suggest that not merely is it good but there is an obligation on those who have a responsibility for the upbringing of others (e.g., our own children), and that means most of us, to help those others find their way to their own salvation. And again, the creed of each religion explains how its pursuit by me will help you to achieve your salvation — first because I can teach you how to gain that salvation; and secondly (at any rate in the case of Christianity) because acts of prayer by me will help you to do so. It is because part of the way to attain one's own salvation is to help others to find their salvation that there is nothing selfish in seeking one's own salvation. It would only be selfish to seek one's own salvation, if getting involved making it harder for others to get it, but in fact (according to these creeds) the opposite is the case.

From considering the two examples of Christianity and Buddhism, I conclude that different religions have different goals, including different conceptions of salvation, and so following one religious way may be better than following another because it offers better goals.

The other factor in the choice of which religion to pursue must be how probable is it that by pursuing the way of that religion we shall attain the goals which it offers us, more probably than by pursuing the way of some other religion or no religion, and I have shown that depends on how probable is the creed of one religion as opposed to another. I believe that public evidence renders the Christian creed more probable than the Buddhist creed or indeed the creed of

any other religion, but I have not argued that in the present paper. However, I claim to have shown that, even if that were not so, there are still good reasons for following the Christian rather than the Buddhist path.

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This paper is a shortened version of Chapter 5 of my *Faith and Reason*, second edition, Clarendon Press, 2005. That book is concerned with the question of what is the relevance of the judgements of probability (either the particular judgement which I reached, or a different one—e.g. that it is very improbable that there is a God) to religious faith.

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