**Non-Christian Symbols: Buddhism**

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Buddhism is characterized by a variety of symbols that are highly revered by its adherents. Some of the common symbols of Buddhism are the statues of Buddha. Corduan (2012) notes that these statues are frequently found in Buddhist temples. The statues of Buddha come in one of four possible positions: reclining, sitting, standing, or walking. The reclining and standing Buddha postures are the most commonly found and they respectively represent the serenity that is believed to characterize nirvana and the readiness to the Buddha to teach the four noble truths after attaining nirvana (Buswell, 2004). Statues, as a form of symbolism in Christianity, are embraced by certain denominations, particularly so by Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians, while at the same time, they are denounced by the majority of Protestant Christians. According to the Diocese of Brooklyn (2012), while Catholics defend their reverence of the statues and icons of Mary the mother of Jesus and the saints as a way of displaying their love and respect for these figures, Protestant Christians regard the use of statues and images as idol worship, which is against God’s commandments. Statues are therefore common symbols both in Buddhism and Christianity but they are intended to meet different objectives.

Buddhists and Christians also practice various rituals as part of their religious observance. One such ritual is the practice of meditation. In both religious traditions, meditation seemingly provides a way of escape from a chaotic world into a place of isolation, silence, and recollection. Nevertheless, meditation for the Buddhist presents an opportunity for spiritual purification and merging with the deity towards the attainment of a pure spiritual state (Corduan, 2012). Closely associated with meditation is the Buddhist ritual of mantra. According to Corduan (2012), mantra is the chanting of powerful words. Christians, in contrast, practice meditation as a component of prayer, study of scripture, and personal devotion to God. In the “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation”, the Vatican distinguished the Christian practice of meditation as a focus on the visible Christ rather than the abstract idea of God that characterizes meditation in other religious cultures (Borelli, 1991). Therefore, although present in both Christianity and Buddhism, meditation serves a different purpose in each.

The knowledge of the symbols and rituals of the Buddhism religious is of significance to Christians heeding the great commission in Matthew 28:18-20. While many Buddhists acknowledge their religion simply as Buddhism and practice it as such, a great diversity of beliefs and practices within Buddhism exists (Corduan, 2012). Some symbols and rituals may be specific to a particular school of Buddhism and hence familiarization with this difference may assist in approaching individual Buddhists for evangelism purposes. Acquaintance with the existence of a symbol or ritual may not suffice as much as its significance to the Buddhist. Corduan (2012) observes that the lay Buddhist may not entirely be acquainted with the meaning of the rituals they practice, nor may they care much. Helping them fill this gap in knowledge could provide a way of engaging Buddhists concerning their religious beliefs. The Christian should endeavor to be clear enough when communicating the differences in the meaning of the rituals and symbols that are seemingly alike to those of Christianity such as meditation as they may create the false impression of similar beliefs. As noted by the Lausanne Movement (2018), the differences between Buddhism and Christianity are irreconcilable. Consequently, the knowledge of rituals and symbols of Buddhist religious culture facilitates the Christian mission as articulated by the Lord Jesus.

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