

Compatibility of Buddhism?

Living in a high income suburb of Western CT, my niece has become attracted to aspects of Buddhism. Mildly alarmed by this and lacking good knowledge about that philosophy/faith, I have been doing some research with which to present to her for consideration. Below is an edited version of an article I found on Catholic.net penned by Peter Mirus. <https://www.catholicculture.org/commentary/articles.cfm?id=121>

The essentials of Buddhism revolve around the Four Noble Truths:

- There is suffering in the world, both of the mental and the physical variety.
- Suffering is the result of inordinate attachment to one's desires.
- By doing away with inordinate desires (or attachments) you can do away with suffering.
- There is a definite method by which one may achieve this goal: the Noble Eightfold Path (pursuing right view, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, concentration).

The inexperienced soul might run down the check list:

- The Church admits to the existence of mental and physical suffering
- The Church frankly admits that separating oneself from inordinate desires (or exercising control over the passions) is critical to personal holiness.
- Naturally if everyone is holy there will be less suffering.
- Nobody should disagree with this. We should all have right intention, only speak in a respectful and honest manner, act in peaceable and humble ways, pursue a career that does no harm to others, exert oneself with an eye towards self improvement, thus being able to see things clearly and attain a level of holiness where all ego has disappeared.

Additional "points in favor":

The Catholic Church encourages spiritual meditation, and Buddhism encourages meditation. Comparative studies have been done of the sayings of Buddha to the words of Christ. Many (if not most) do so with the intention of pointing out the similarities so as to promote greater dialogue and a sense of mutual purpose between the two religions.

These things can be inviting to wandering Catholic souls fed up with the world's egocentrism, but who

feels that their own faith is, by contrast, considerably bulkier and complex. There is a feeling among many Catholics that to be truly Catholic in every action necessitates extensive time for research, and that you have to be an intellectual to practice spiritual meditation. Buddhism, I regret to say, is probably better "marketed" than the Catholic faith.

But Pope John Paul II threw water on that fire in 1994's Crossing the Threshold of Hope with comments regarding Buddhism that received a good amount of press at the time (and also a lot of debate). In his comments, our late pontiff really didn't pull any punches, calling Buddhism "in large measure an 'atheistic' system'." He pulled the carpet out from under comparisons to Catholicism by pointing out that the ultimate end of man for Christians is union with God, while for Buddhists it is Nirvana (complete detachment, or a state of nothingness).



But the Pope is right: for Buddhists, salvation is a privation of individual consciousness; for Catholics salvation is an eternally fulfilling relationship with a loving Creator. There is no comparison. Thus the Pope also comments that Catholic spirituality picks up where Buddhism leaves off. For both Buddhists and Catholics "detachment" is important, but **for Catholics detachment is not an end in itself**. St. Francis de Sales preached that man must desire to "possess his soul" rather than allow it to be possessed by worldly things. Catholics pursue this for the purpose of elevating their soul by offering it back to Christ. So detachment is a means to a rich and meaningful "higher awareness" (if you will) that reaches its culmination in seeing God face to face.

In truth, from its individual practices to its ultimate goal, Buddhism possesses nothing of value that is not already possessed and perfected by Catholicism.