

## Helping and Solidarity in other World Religions

### 1. Introduction

The globalisation of the economy, of the industry and of the markets has also involved the globalisation of its negative influences, e.g. in form of psychological social grief, psychosomatic diseases, crises between countries, expulsion, material injustice in form of unemployment or uprooting etc. The result of this process is the spiritual and moral change of people. Helping and solidarity, as practised for centuries within the family and secured by culture and religion, is breaking off<sup>1</sup>.

The charity welfare and social work for suffering people, especially in countries of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> world which were injured and disrupted socially and morally by the western economy, can only succeed if Christians in America and Europe cooperate on the basis of mutual humanitarian social-charity dialogue with the predominant cultures and the religious traditions. The globalisation of human need – as a result of the neo-liberal world economy – inevitable requires the globalisation of the social resources of the world. All social power and options of religions and cultures are to be mobilised in order to enable people – despite suffering and need – have life and have it fulfilled (John 10,10).

The modell of heteronomy, as practised in the economy and industry, cannot be the method of charity welfare and social work. Self-determination is one of the most important conditions for an successful solidarity and effective help.

According to my practical experience with other religions and cultures I have learnt the following:

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the fact that this distruction comes from western countries, these countries are greatly responsible for the poverty in the 3<sup>rd</sup> world.  
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1. God revealed his social and moral wisdom for a successful life to other religions too, as it is shown in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council of the Roman-Catholic church in its Mission Decree (*Erklärung über das Verständnis der Kirche zu den nicht-christlichen Religionen*) and by Pope John Paul II in view of the year 2000<sup>2</sup>. By studying these religions I discovered that many aspects of the logic of successful life, as handed over by Christianity, are to be found in other cultures and religions too, at least in some aspects<sup>3</sup>. Due to this experience in other religions I felt myself strengthened in my faith and on my way to help and encourage people, especially in situations of pain and need.

Within three thousand years of cultural as well as economic exchanges between countries, especially within the Mediterranean area, the Middle East and East Asia<sup>4</sup>, there has been an exchange not only of goods, of artistic ideas and technical utilities but probably also of ideas imbued with Christian principles, which already in the first century have flown into other cultures and religions, and certain Christian characteristics were to be found in those religions from beginning up to the present<sup>5</sup>. If in the 5<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> century the Korean art was featured by Persian influences<sup>6</sup>, why should the Mahajana-Buddhism not be featured by the widespread Christianity in Persia in those times?

The options for helping are an important condition concerning the social-caritative deacony of religions for the suffering people of the world.

If the aim of Christian-charity welfare is to follow the message of Jesus: „I have come, to give them life and to have it fulfilled“ (John 10,10), then Christian welfare should include all available social forces and options, i.e. cooperate with them. Jesus does

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<sup>2</sup> The dialogue with other religions should be carried on especially in view of the year 2000 in a more intensive manner. John Paul II said: „As we are opening ourselves in the dialogue with the others, we open ourselves towards God“. So he is asking us to be respectful, to estimate things and to cooperate with other religions, and points out that part of the Catholic teaching is that in nonchristian religions we can find elements of truth too. Comp. Konradsblatt 82 (1998), Nr. 38, 5.

<sup>3</sup> „Therefore is she urging her sons to appreciate with a sense of wisdom and love, through communication and cooperation with members of other religions as well as through their testimony of Christian belief and way of life those spiritual and moral goods and together with social-cultural values which are to be found at them. II. Vatican, Erklärung über das Verhältnis der Kirche zu den nicht-christlichen Religionen, n.2.

<sup>4</sup> Comp. e.g. the contacts across the silk-road etc.

<sup>5</sup> The structural and individual concepts, methods and options for help developed in Europe and America, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> world are determined by medicine and socialwork. The leading anthropology of these methods is more or less of a christian character.

<sup>6</sup> Comp. corresponding historical works of art in Kyongju National Museum Korea.

not know about competition between social services, if the competitors don't offend his human and theological principles<sup>7</sup>.

On the level of practical work there should come to an exchange of the various resources and options of deacony for needy and searching people by setting up a social charity convergence within the world religions. This does not mean to lose one's own religious identity<sup>8</sup>, but according to my experience, to enrich or enlarge this identity.

This is of course difficult to realise within the so-called book-religions, i.e. Judaism and Christianity, due to the fact that there are strict demarcations from other religions. More open are for example Hinduism and Buddhism. The **President of the World-society of Buddhists Upsaka Ko Ping-Yip underlined at the 9<sup>th</sup> General meeting of the International Lutheran Union in Hongkong 1997** said the following: *„In order to promote the mutual understanding, the dialogue between religions must start at their common points. In this way we do not offend each other and we can reach a peaceful coexistence within all societies and nations of the world“<sup>9</sup>*. Our mutual devotion to people who are mentally or physically suffering or to people who are in social or material need is a way towards the growing together of religions for the good health and happiness of mankind. Upsaka Ko Ping-Yip stressed **at the International Meeting of the Lutheran World Union** in his speech *„Called to witness in a multireligious and multicultural world“*.

I think, the way towards the approachment between religions begins with our **practice of love** towards our common faith and not the other way round it was done in the same way by the mutual **practice for the Interreligious Peace-Prayer** organized in Bucarest/Romania in 1998<sup>10</sup>. The dialogue of religions on the basis of their common faith places the cooperation of religions above the cooperation on the level of love and charity. By the practice of love for seeking and needy people and through the dialogue about the resources and options, about the power and wisdom

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<sup>7</sup> John said to him: „Master we had seen someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he didn't follow us.“ Jesus answered: „Do not stop him. Nobody who makes miracles on my behalf is able to speak so easily evil of me. For who is not against us, is on our side“. Mk 9,38-41; Lk 9,49-51. Jesus does not deny the social competence and helping motivation of members belonging to other religions (compare his parable about the merciful Samaritanian).

<sup>8</sup> It was also emphasised by the delegates of the General Meeting of Lutheran World Association in Hongkong in July 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Comp. International Buddhist Community argues for a good cooperation of religious similarities as starting points for communication – General Meeting of Lutheran World Association in Hongkong; in: FAZ 15.07.1997, 6.

of this activity people and religions will be most likely converted towards the faith in the one God and the veneration of the one God, although it is an asymptotic approach which will probably come to its fulfillment in the infinity.

## 2. Judaism

Love for ill people and people in need is theologically motivated and widespread within Jewish religion. The Jewish understanding and its use in practice is very similar to a Christian practice and does not have to be explained specially. The professionalisation of Jewish welfare services since the 18<sup>th</sup> century has changed the Jewish „Sedaka“ – similarly to Deacony and Caritas – into a big welfare service. Today one of the 6 leading welfare services in Germany is the „Central Jewish Welfare Service of Germany“ (founded in 1917 in Berlin). The state **Israel** has a well-structured welfare service next to a culture of private helping. In the so-called **western states** the Jewish practice of charity should be similar – depending on the different national welfare systems. Synergetic cooperations with charitable organisations and Jewish welfare services are relatively easy.

## 3. Islam

In Christianity and Judaism the practice of charity and the proclamation and realization of social equality are central motivations and aims of bringing God's kingdom into the world. The **main motive of social deeds** in Islam is **the honorable admission into the gardens of Paradise**. This is similar to the aim in life of many Christians. Charity hides many misdeeds: „Above all, hold on to mutual love; because love covers many misdeeds“ (1 Peter 4,8)<sup>11</sup>. The court speech (Matthew 25,31-46) in the New Testament says that man's ability to become part of God's community will be judged in the end by his deeds of charity. If they want to get into heaven Moslems have to help the poor. In the Sunna, the tradition (Hadith), you can read: the prophet „*warned me seven times: love the poor and be near to them.*“

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<sup>10</sup> Comp. NN, a „unique experience“ Bucarest: 12. Following Meeting to the Assisi-Prayer of religions, - Konradblatt 82 (1998), Nr. 37, 4.

<sup>11</sup> This is to be read at the earlier Christians fathers too.

One of the **five duties** (five pillars)<sup>12</sup> of every Moslem is giving alms. Next to this a **tax** is raised from which fellow-believers can benefit in public charity. The Coran (Sura 9,60) says for whom this social tax should be used: for the poor and needy, for people in social services, for people who are to be won over to the Islamic faith, or people whose converting puts them into danger of life or poverty; for people on „God’s path“, who make themselves available for teaching or defending the faith and for this reason have no other income, and travellers who encounter difficulties. Furthermore there are recommended **virtues**, which are also reasons for solidarity and helping (Sura 49,10; 9,71; 5,2): forgiveness, fairness, charity<sup>13</sup>, truth, fraternity and goodness. Helping the needy, especially followers of the true faith, is a religious duty. Solidarity and fraternity between the faithful show themselves when they help and feed the weak, the poor and the orphans (Sura 107,1-2) and when they are hospitable to travellers (Sura 2,215; 9,60). This duty of social help is also known in the western Christianity. It derives possibly from Hellenistic philosophy.

As God (Allah) is almighty it is his omnipotence and will that decides the fortune of every person (mercy). **Devotion to God’s will** is a central spiritual element. Suffering, poverty and illness are to be seen as God’s irrevocable decisions: „*Allah has given, Allah will take it*“<sup>14</sup>. On the other hand the rich Islamic upper class will use medical help and facilities. This fatalism reduces the creation of socio-therapeutic organisations and services in contrast to Judaism and Christianity<sup>15</sup>.

The large community of the faithful (Umma) with their mosque-parishes has no **hierarchical order or organisational structure** as in the great Christian Churches. The Moslem lives in one helping community together with all brothers and sisters in faith<sup>16</sup>. The Islam is an egalitarian theocracy. However, it has various authorities: Sultans and Kalifs as worldly leaders, the Imam as head of the religious community,

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<sup>12</sup> To the five duties/pillars of the Islam belong: the creed, the ritual prayer, the alms-tax, the month of Ramadan and the pilgrimage to Mecca.

<sup>13</sup> Comp. Trutwin, Wege zum Licht – Die Weltreligionen. Düsseldorf 1996, 230.

<sup>14</sup> The highest moral duty is to obey the Will of God in an absolute obedience.

<sup>15</sup> Similar is the Moslem belief: there are no nature laws as physiology, pharmacology etc., for medicine and the various directions in psychology for psychotherapy and educational theories which could be derived from the life reality created by God. Processes of recovery are for the Islam an imaginary experience of the human nature (a construction similar to that we can find in present philosophical constructiveness). If God wishes another course of events, they will change: the fire will no longer burn and the water will no longer be wet. Social and charity acts do not base on natural pre-determination, but depend on God’s will. On the other hand, there are attempts in the Islam in South-Asia to bring the Islamic faith closer to psychotherapy practices, comp. Azhar, M.Z., „Einbeziehung der islamischen Religion in die kognitive Verhaltenstherapie in Malaysia“, in: Verhaltenstherapie (1997), Nr. 7, 34-39.

<sup>16</sup> The basis of solidarity in Islam is no longer blood-relationship, tribal membership, but the religious community. In the social sphere solidarity is to be seen from the perspective that the Moslim is giving the poor the right to take part in his own property and take no shares from poor people if he lends them money.

jurists (Mufti), judges (Gadi) etc.<sup>17</sup>. As the Islam is not institutionalised and has no special responsibility for charity, structured organisations like Caritas or Deacony could not be created.

The Islam has something in common with Jews and Christians, but no expressed solidarity as to its own brothers and sisters in faith<sup>18</sup>. It is more like a certain form of tolerance which is allowed through a special tax (Sura 9,29). The Coran says that Christians are „nearest in love“ to Moslems because they have the question of God’s will (Sura 5,82).

In addition there is no **separation of spiritual and public affairs**<sup>19</sup>. In the Islamic community of faith the state and its institutions are responsible for religious affairs as well as for charity. **Recently** help for the poor and ill has been institutionalised and organized in the „**Red half-moon**“<sup>20</sup>. In the face of Western European social guidelines a free charity service was founded by Moslems in Germany in 1985 („*Muslime helfen e.V.*“), which is actually not a charity service for Germany but a help for other Islamic countries, similar to Christian organisations like „*Brot für die Welt*“, „*Misereor*“, and others.

In some Islamic countries, especially in religiously mixed regions (Bosnia and Croatia) there is a **charity service** similar to Caritas/Diacony (**Mehemet**). This is more religious than the „Red half-moon“. While Islamic charity services accept help from Caritas and Deacony, they themselves seldomly support Christian charity services directly.

After all, the helping charity is positively motivated in different strengths in all three Abrahamitic religions. „Fairness-charity“, especially in view of every single person, is not very accentuated in Islam. In Christianity helping behaviour has the greatest institutionalisation and openness for all suffering people.

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<sup>17</sup> Every office is open to every suitable faithful person (man).

<sup>18</sup> Believers in many religions (polytheists), atheists and apostates have no community and no sense of solidarity, comp. Trutwin 1996, 239. 200 persons had been publicly executed in South-Arabia, mostly because they converted from the Islam to other religions, Trutwin 1996, 243.

<sup>19</sup> For the identity of religion and state there is no alternative. Tolerance towards Jews and Christians can never mean equality, as it is the case in western countries based on the constitutional right of the freedom of religion.

<sup>20</sup> As an Islamic state-welfare organisation it differs from the Red Cross. The German Red Cross as well as the Diakonisches Werk and the Caritasverband are not state dependent organisations. They are free organisations of a religious and secular character. In the Orthodoxy as well as in the Islam the welfare is a public affair. The welfare services in Islam as well as in Eastern Christian communities have not such an extended institutionalised network.

## 4. Hinduism and Buddhism

In Hinduism and Buddhism religiously inspired and motivated social help and solidarity are more indirect than in the Abrahamic religions. The state and communes are responsible for solving social problems.

### 4.1 Hinduism

The world is not God's creation<sup>21</sup>. It has no beginning or end (cosmogonia). It is part of an **eternal cycle** (Samsara) and a **constant return** (ages, seasons and times of day always repeat themselves). The world is different from the **transcendence**, the **all-only**, which is **not causal**, absolute, spiritual, **godly Brahma**<sup>22</sup>, not to be seen as **a person**, but parts of which can be found in various deities, e.g. in the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. In addition Vishnu has the possibility of a godly exposition (Avarata) to humanity<sup>23</sup> in form of God's son Krishna, who is supposed to fight against the evil and to show the way to love, to God.

In Hinduism and Buddhism **existence and life** are always connected with suffering. Suffering is not accessible to divinity (Brahma)<sup>24</sup>. This is a big difference to the Christian theo-logic and to the Christo-logic of helping and solidarity.

Next to the idea of eternal return of life, the **Karma theory** means that any good or bad deed has consequences and itself is caused. „The circumstances you are born into are consequences of an earlier life and reward for earlier deeds“<sup>25</sup>. You are responsible for current deeds, as for failing to act socially. This causes negative or positive Karma. The Karma idea can cause „passivity and resignation“ and „make people unable to act by themselves“. The Karma idea contributes to passivity in the Indians, „who even bear inhuman situations, because this supposedly is their Karma, that they cannot change“<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Except some groups in Hinduism, as the „Everything in God-Teaching“. This idea is considered to be a lower stage of truth.

<sup>22</sup> The divine is not equal to idols, as idols are still submitted to the casual return.

<sup>23</sup> Ulrich Dehn, Hinduismus und Buddhismus – Informationen und Anregungen zur Begegnung von Christen. – Hrsgb. Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungen, *EZW-Texte 1998*, Nr. 142, 13 – 15.

<sup>24</sup> See chapter 4.2.

<sup>25</sup> Comp. Trutwin, W., 1996, 297.

<sup>26</sup> Comp. Trutwin, W., 1996, 299.

The idea of **rebirth** (reclotching) is connected to the idea of the eternal return of life and Karma. „It depends only on his deeds if a person changes into a godly being or a human being or an animal, if he is talented“<sup>27</sup>. „The miserable are not to be pitied. They have only themselves to blame for their misery and they know this, too, if they are honest to themselves. It is in their own hands to make their next life a better one“<sup>28</sup>. For Hindus and Buddhists this theory of rebirth is the reason **why someone is rich or poor, virtuous or criminal, ill or healthy**. Everything is caused by your former life, not by faith. These religious ideas weaken helping action, especially the form of self-help in case of psychological and physical restrictions.

**Liberation and redemption** from the return of evil and sorrow can only occur in **three ways**. The **first way** is the **path to insight**: through meditation man should disconnect from greed, wealth and power. These are central factors of the injustice in the world. People react spiritually and not politically to this suffering in the world. By detaching, the consciousness of man is changed, so that Atman (the self of soul) becomes identical with Brahman (the all-divine). The Karma creating forces and the individual being, which is always full of grief, are dissolved by inspiration and **Nirvana** (going into nothingness, freedom from suffering) is reached, either in the hinduistic way of becoming one with Nirvana or in the buddhistic way of dying in Nirvana. You distance yourself from the world that is evil and full of grief. The world is not freed by the goodness, which comes from God. What you are looking for is not the unity with goodness but reaching nothingness<sup>29</sup>.

The **second way, the way of good deeds**, says that positive Karma can also be developed by sacrifice, rites and renunciation (ascetisism) so that you reach redemption. This also involves **helping fellow human beings**.

The **third way** is the love of God. Devotion to God will be returned by God. Through the love of God the difference between Atman (self/soul) and Brahman (all-infinite divine) can be overcome. This way can also awaken the forces of charitable

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<sup>27</sup> Comp. Trutwin 1996, 299.

<sup>28</sup> Comp. Trutwin 1996, 199.

<sup>29</sup> Comp. Johannes Paul II. Enzyklika „Schwelle der Hoffnung“, Kap. 14; John Paul II, Encyclical „Threshold of Hope“, Chapter 14.

humanity. In the Bhagavadgita (11,55) Krishna the incarnated God Vishnu (the penetrator) says<sup>30</sup>:

„That who is always thinking of me while working,  
who loves me more than anything, is mine in all;  
who hates nobody and who isn't attached to anythings  
that will, oh Pandu's son, come to me.“

Love of God and love of humanity are emphasised and connected in Krishna's pronouncement. The analogy<sup>31</sup> between Krishna's and Jesus Christ's message is of interest.

To summarize: Changing the world full of grief – macrosystemically – through „fairness charity“ (by optimizing social politics, laws etc.) or – microsystemically – through compassionate charity for suffering individuals is not intended centrally in Hinduism. Hinduism is about non-intentional compassion. Different is the Ramakrishna-Mission, founded in 1887 in India – probably under the influence of the Christian charity services – which maintains charitable institutions and services. Cooperation between Christians and Hindus is restricted to the microsystemical field. Christians in hinduistic countries have to be sensible enough not to provoke Hindus through Caritas and Deacony or to overtax them in cooperation.

## 4.2 Buddhism

Buddhism can be understood as a continuation, a reform or an addition in relation to Hinduism. Buddha the inspired (his secular name was Siddhartha Gautama) himself came from Hinduism. He was born about 450 before Christ in India as a son of a governor, i.e. as a member of the upper class. This was the time of transition from the vedic-arian to the brahmanic period of Indian religious history. He died 370 before Christ<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Vishnu is the third God of the highest trinity: Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu.

<sup>31</sup> To the term and understanding of structural-analogy comp. Pompey, H., Beziehungstheologie – Das Zueinander theologischer und psychologischer „Wirklichkeit und die biblisch-theologische Kontextualisierung von Lebens- und Leidenserfahrung; in: Pompey, H. (Hrsg.), Caritas – Das menschliche Gesicht des Glauben: ökumenische und internationale Anstöße einer Diakonietheologie, Würzburg 1997, 92-128.

He **didn't found a new religion**<sup>33</sup>, but developed **a new doctrine** (Dharma) i.e. a maxim for reaching salvation and redemption. Later, after his death he himself became an object of teaching and later, especially in Mahayana-Buddhism and in Vajrayana-Buddhism – these are the two youngest confessions of Buddhism –, he was given godly qualities<sup>34</sup>.

The three way are:

- the Hinayana-Buddhism = small vehicle (after 370 before Chr.) or Southern school: Theravada (= teaching of the old), especially in India and Thailand, i.e. Southwest Asia;
- the Mahayana-Buddhism = the big vehicle (after 270 before Chr.), in China and other Northeast Asian countries as Korea and Japan;
- the Vajrayana-Buddhism = the diamond vehicle (about 600 A. D.) in Tibet.

Important for the christian understanding is, that the **Dharma** teaching and wisdom is **not a theo-logy** but more like a cosmo-logy in connection with the anthropology. Life and suffering are not seen from God's perspective, and suffering is not overcome by the power and wisdom of God, even though the existence of God is not rejected expressly. Redemption from suffering is an achievement of every single person alone.

Like in Hinduism Buddha assumes in his Dharma that every creature suffers. Though probably the suffering from life is meant, spiritual and social needs are not the only meaning. For Buddha **life is nothing else than suffering**. From this he gets his basic questions: the origin of suffering and overcoming suffering. These are two practical issues, which theologically are also in the center of Christian theory of helping in charitable welfare work<sup>35</sup>.

The so-called **thirst for life** is the origin of suffering. It has the ominous roots: greed, anger/hate/mania, ignorance/delusion. In common human knowledge these are the origins of social injustice and the loveless world. But Buddhism only knows the

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<sup>32</sup> According to Buddhist calendar he lived in 624-544 before Christ, comp. EZW 21.

<sup>33</sup> The word religion comes from the Latin word: re-ligio and means backward relationship to a transcendence. Hinduism and even more Buddhism tend exactly to the contrary, to elimination of all sort of relationship.

<sup>34</sup> Comp. Trutwin 1996, 401.

<sup>35</sup> Comp. Pompey, H., Theologisches Verständnis von Leben und Leiden, von Solidarität und Helfen – Ein caritativ-diakonisches Credo; in: Pompey, H. (Hrsg.), Caritas – Das menschliche Gesicht des Glaubens: ökumenische und internationale Anstöße einer Diakonietheologie, Würzburg 1997, 321-357.

individual ethical fight against these causes and not about the social ethical fight. In the Christian tradition desire, vice and sinn etc. also cause grief and need. In addition Judaism and Christianity also know the unexplainable, fatefull suffering as described in the book of Job. The basic evil causes the suffering of life and, according to Buddhistic belief, generates a bad Karma, which again is reason for the constant rebirthing, the repeated clothing into a new suffering existance. Suffering can only be removed from life if the origins of the thirst for life are distroyed, i.e. passion and ignorace are overcome. Overcoming „Pathé“ through „Gnosis“ in the classical Greek philosophy is at least a structural analogy. Overcoming psychical problems through understanding is also up to today a central element of almost every Western psychotherapy till today.

**The path of eight parts** which Buddha mentions for ending the suffering, has neither cultic-ritual nor social-active elements, but primarily is – in the sense of an individual metanoia – a path of a new understanding to overcome the causes of suffering. This path consists of: the true faith, true decision, true word (i.e. avoiding lies and malicious gossip), right deeds (avoiding indecency), proper living (avoiding jobs, like butchers, hunters, weapon and drug dealers which harm other creatures), proper ambition (avoiding ominous Karma deeds), true thought and right „**sinking-into**“. In the stage of the right „**sinking-into**“ the person disappears into non-existence and is freed from suffering. The specific character of handling suffering by „letting yourself“ and like in Christianity by „willing yourself“ – this is to be found especially in the Catholic and Calvinistic tradition of charity work – becomes clear through a further basic assumption of Buddha.

For Buddha there is **no self**, e.g. the **subject of action**. There is suffering in Buddhism, but no person that suffers. There are only forms of existence that suffer. Man is part of the changing cosmos. Redemption is not – as in Christian understanding – liberation of the self or soul to a conclusive community with God (e.g. through „theopoesis“<sup>36</sup> or Imitatio Christi) but detachment from everything.

As described, the individual removal of ominous roots of Karma and the rebirth are central to **Hinayama and Theravada-Buddhism** (teaching of the old). Humanity has

no ethically or soteriologically releasing qualities. This way – especially by the path of eight parts – is only possible to a small group of very ascetical persons, e.g. the monks. For ordinary human beings this way is not possible.

The **Mahayana-Buddhism**, the so-called **big vehicle**, is much nearer to practical reality, in addition emphasizes the unity of all creatures. The aim of liberation is only reached when the whole world dies together in Nirvana. The greatest number of Buddhists, about 180 million people, belong to the big vehicle, mainly in Vietnam, China, Mongolia, Japan and Korea. Two central ideas are emphasized specially: **wisdom** (training of the spirit) and **compassion** (training of mortality). Wisdom is to be identified with reaching inspiration. Indispensable to the concept of wisdom is compassion/mercy (Karuna). „This is an outstanding“ quality of all Buddhas (i.e. of all already inspired). Compassion is felt on the basis of wisdom or inspiration<sup>37</sup>. It is connected to friendliness of goodness. Inspired mercy is personified in **Bodhisattva** Avolokitesvara, who sees the misery of the world and gives mercy with his innumerable hands<sup>38</sup>. This Bodhisattva has twelve faces to recognize the suffering of humanity. A Bodhisattva is a saint, who has reached inspiration but is dedicated to freeing others from suffering, who is selfless<sup>39</sup>. Bodhisattva can be monks or laymen, men or women.

The ordinary Buddhists are helped in reaching the Nirvana by the so-called Bodhisattva. They are beings, who have reached inspiration and driven by compassion don't go into Nirvana, but stay in pre-death Nirvana, until all people have been released<sup>40</sup>. „Because of pity for the suffering world he gives up his own immediate redemption“<sup>41</sup>. The Bodhisattva goes down into hell to free people who are there. Through them compassionate suffering in Buddhism gets a crucial expression and motivation. In their selfless compassion the Bodhisattva set a good example for other people. There is a distinctive structural analogy to the Christian understanding of Jesus and the saints. The Buddhist can not only reach redemption through his own

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<sup>36</sup> For the term ‚theoposis‘ comp. Mannermaa, T., Der im Glauben gegenwärtige Christus: Rechtfertigung und Vergottung; zum ökumenischen Dialog, Hannover 1989.

<sup>37</sup> Dehn, U., Hinduism und Buddhism – Informationen und Anregungen zur Begegnung von Christen; hrsg. v. Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungen, EZW-Texte 1989, Nr. 142, 34f.

<sup>38</sup> Dehn 1998, 35.

<sup>39</sup> Dehn 1998, 35.

<sup>40</sup> They represent Buddha's characteristics and can even set free from suffering.

<sup>41</sup> Trutwin 1996, 414.

efforts e.g. in meditation or ascetism, but also through his faith into the help of Bodhisattva.

**Compassion becomes the highest virtue**, which realizes itself in three steps: 1. not damaging, i.e. non-violence, 2. good will, 3. giving. To hurt nobody becomes a basic ethical standard. Being active for others makes a big difference to the Hinayana-Buddhism, the small vehicle. Within the Chinese, Korean and Japanese Buddhism it would probably be easier to find starting points to the christian social work.

In addition the Mahayana Buddhism focuses on the **six perfections** (Paramita) – in comparison to Hinayama Buddhism, where the path of 8 parts plays the central role – e.g. 1. *charity* and *generosity* (donations, medical help, making the Buddhistic teaching accessible guaranteed security); 2. *discipline* and *morality* (honesty, avoidance of evil deeds); 3. *patience*; 4. *effort* (energy); 5. *meditation* and *contemplation* and 6. *wisdom*. This perspective of Buddhism is useless in the face of the common aim of Nirvana, if only material help but not spiritual moral training of people takes place. This opinion is similar in Christianity. Jesus always connects helping and healing with this message.

**Everyone is part of the whole.** Conclusion: „harming others“ means „harming yourself“. **„Being useful to others“ means „being useful to yourself“.** Everyone is part of the whole. The consequence of Anatman (not being yourself) is a utilitaristic charity. A distant similarity to the so-called Golden Rule of the Bible and also to Kant's imperative is outstanding.

## Summary

If we want to cooperate with Buddhism within the justice of charity we have to take into consideration the fact that changes within a society come from inside. This cooperation can be realised only by having a moral system which is equal for single persons as well as for groups, i.e. through a relevant moral metanoia. Buddhism doesn't tend to exclusive political changes within social structures.

The charity of Deacony through active removal of sorrow, need and illness is not the main way for Hinduism and Buddhism. They tend towards a passive, meditative spiritual form of the internal relief from pain above all in the Hinayama-Buddhism i.e. a reserved attitude towards the world as a social event. More logical is a justice and charity deacony in the discipleship of Christ.

The human being is given reason for social and individual help within the Mahayana Buddhism. Thus the morally motivated care for people in need does not lead to the initiation of solidarity as e.g. formation of self-help activities, but more to a philanthropic individual foreign help.

Big **institutionalised structures** are foreign to Hinduism and Buddhism. There exists a **Buddhist world society** with a president and various regional centers, e.g. in Hongkong and Macau. In Germany we have the German Buddhist Union seated in Munich. They are not to be compared to religious church organisations. A **big organisation** in the manner of a **charity-diaconial organisation** does not exist within the Hinduistic-Buddistic faith family. Such an organisation contradicts the understanding and practice of help within Buddhism.

Probably due to the influence of the Christian charity and to the arousal of great social and physical problems nowadays, societies have been created for the benefit of ill or needy people. Such an organisation is e.g. in Hinduism the **Ramakrishna Mission** or in Buddhism the **Tsu-Ji**. The last one was founded in 1966 by a Buddhist nun (Cheng-Yeng). She has about 3 million followers. However, this organisation isn't a predominantly Buddhistic organisation.

The **characteristic of Christianity is** determined by its special view regarding the relationship between God and the world, between God and Christ and between Christ and the world, which can be summed up as an exchange of love. Christians have to encounter all people with love. Due to the suffering caused by the world or by people Christians live their faith through charity and social deacony for poor and ill people.

Christianity intends to change or transform the need and the suffering and to witness the dawn of God's kingdom, the final power of God's love and God's justice. Not Nirvana but the new creation, the renewal of creation in Christ's measure provides Christians with options of action. If Nirvana as a condition of overcoming sorrow is just nothingness – what the Buddhists would not say –, then it will be a drastic contradiction to the state of love.

In order to change need and misery by charity and by political deacony God became man and set us free from our sin regarding wrong love and justice. By his becoming man he wanted to invite us to follow him. For **Buddhism and Hinduism the idea of God's embodiment or incarnation into the world, especially into the sorrow of the world, is not imaginable.** The connection of the divine with sorrow is a contradiction. The identification of a divine transcendentality with sorrow is a disintegration of the transcendentality for the Hinduist and Buddhist.

The Hinduistic-Buddhistic understanding of the sorrow of the world and of the act (Karma) and of the self or ego i.e. the soul (Atman), shows especially in Hinduism that touching **another's body** (i.e. his Karma) makes impure. Thus the act of greeting in Buddhist and Hinduist countries is only a bow and no gesture of getting in touch. Getting in touch with persons who do not belong to your family is mostly refused by Hindus and Buddhists. In this way one is detached from foreign sorrow. Thus practical help and care reaction is difficult for Hindus and certain Buddhist movements. Maybe this is a reason why in these two world religions there are few institutionalised forms of help e.g. welfare organisations and welfare services which go up to poor and ill people, which offer their services and care organisations in order to help them – in the way God did in Jesus Christ.

The presented interreligious aspects make clear where we can find points of contact for the relation of social energies and social options for the well-being of needy people and how Christians can take responsibility for a successful life in non-Christian countries regarding solidarity and help in order to give people life (John 10,10), regardless if they are isolated, poor or ill. On the other hand it becomes clear that Christians can very quickly ask too much from the members of other world religions regarding help and solidarity with needy people.

But in the face of the global challenge in the following century regarding helping practice, it should come to an exchange of various resources and options of deacony for needy and searching people. Maybe a social convergence of religions could emerge. It would not mean to lose one's own Christian identity. Christians can discuss and cooperate with other religions with courage – without anxiety and concern about our faith. Ultimately it is about the Kingdom of God, i.e. the supremacy of God's love and justice. The target option „thou kingdom shall come“ through justice and charity is unknown to other world religions doubtless.

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