



Serene Compassion: A Christian Appreciation of Buddhist Holiness

Denise Lardner Carmody, John Tully Carmody

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Buddhism is deeply attractive to many in the West. Its ideals of serenity and compassion seem to supply a dimension of personal spirituality that they don't find in their own traditions. For those raised in the Christian Church, Buddhism can appear to exemplify the best in their own religion--qualities such as peacefulness, simplicity, and reverence for life--while dispensing with rigid doctrines and legalistic morality. Indeed, the number of Christian converts to Buddhism--especially in the United States--has grown exponentially over the years. At the same time, Buddhists and Christians, recognizing the affinities of the two faiths, have increasingly sought to advance an inter-religious dialogue.

In *Serene Compassion*, John and Denise Carmody provide an accessible overview and evaluation of Buddhist thought and practice from a Christian point of view. They find that Buddhism is, in many ways, an ideal complement and companion to Christianity. To show why, the Carmodys focus on Buddhist ideas about holiness--comprising such virtues as purity, devotion, orderliness, compassion, and wholeheartedness--and reveal how they compare to similar values in traditional Christianity. They emphasize the kinship between seekers of holiness in both traditions, and offer a nuanced and sympathetic portrait of meditative practices that bring attention and imagination into the service of spiritual life. At the same time, however, they are frank about matters of doctrinal disagreement, making it clear that some aspects of Buddhist thought are not compatible with a Christian world view.

Moving well beyond a simple exposition of Buddhist notions, or a comparison of Christian with Buddhist practice, *Serene Compassion* concludes that Buddhists and Christians share a basic humanity, and that Buddhism's success at the task of nourishing this humanity has much to teach all Christians. Informative and insightful, it will appeal to readers approaching the dialogue from either side, and to all engaged in the spiritual quest.

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