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IS EMPTYING REALLY EMPTINESS?
A PLURALIST PERSPECTIVE ON CHRISTIANITY AND ZEN BUDDHISM

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Since the turn of the century, with the increase of global communications, public awareness of the major world religions has increased. Two perspectives on the problem of religious plurality have arisen in Christianity: those who believe all world religions bear the same basic truth disguised in many traditions, and those who want to profess faith in Jesus Christ as the only true and saving religion. We might call the former position that of the inclusivist, and the latter position that of the exclusivist. For the inclusivist, as it were, there are many paths on the same mountain all leading to the summit of enlightenment or salvation. The exclusivist professes that only one true path exists, but all who follow it will find liberation. One question that arises when considering these two perspectives is whether Christianity is unique or whether it shares the same teachings with other world faiths? The goal of this paper is to consider this question by examining the relationship between Christianity and Zen Buddhism. Through comparison of the theological concept of emptying/emptiness and of the practical issue of the life of the religious aspirant, I will seek to determine if Christianity proves itself to be unique. After close examination of these two issues, I will suggest that what appeared to be similar on the surface was actually quite different. I will argue that Christianity is indeed unique and different from other world religions including Zen Buddhism. However, although my research calls into question the inclusivist belief that all faiths profess the same truth, it is not my aim to return to the exclusivist belief that only those who follow Christianity will find salvation. The solution to me appears to lie in a third position: pluralism. All religions do not need to profess the same truth in order to be true. Salvation and/or enlightenment may be found along a variety of paths. Thus, while each path emphasizes unique truths, these truths need not be mutually exclusive. My paper will conclude by considering the ramifications of this third, pluralist perspective.