

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS
OF THE VINAYA AND THE RULE OF ST BENEDICT

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By

Welgama Lekam Appuhamilage Don Peter

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Buddhist monasticism originated from the Buddha in the sixth century B.C. and was guided by his teachings; Benedictine monasticism was founded by St Benedict of Nursia in the sixth century A.D. and followed the teachings of Christ. In both, a cenobitical way of life evolved from an earlier eremitical form of asceticism. The one great purpose of this cenobitical monastic life was the attainment of an after-life spiritual goal. Although the laity too could attain it, the monk, by the nature of his life, was more fully committed to the pursuit of it (ch.II).

Both Buddhist and Benedictine monasticism retained a certain measure of asceticism, while rejecting the rigorism of other ascetics of the time and of the past. The ascetical practices that were retained—homelessness, celibacy, detachment from the world, seclusion and solitude—were favourable to monasticism from the educational angle, while the elimination of rigorism too was advantageous educationally (ch.III).

Monastic life, both Buddhist and Benedictine, was an educational process for the training of the monk for his spiritual goal. This consisted in the acquisition by the monk of a thorough knowledge of the teachings of the respective faith and the translation of the teachings into concrete life. The training was of the nature of a formation and was pursued in the 'family' atmosphere of the monastery. There was no social or class distinction among the members of the monastic community. The qualifications of the teacher and teacher-pupil relations had to conform to the specific character of monastic education. Great emphasis was laid on the mental aspect of the training: monastic education was essentially a mental and spiritual culture. Meditation was the main exercise of the training process. There were in both monastic systems methods of correction and rehabilitation of errant monks (ch.IV).

Monastic life was not only an educational process for the monk to attain his goal but also made him an educator for the purpose of teaching and guiding the laity. The monk became a means of continuing the educational task of spreading the teachings which the Buddha and Christ entrusted to their respective followers. Moreover, the intellectual culture of monastic education disposed the monk for scholarly and literary pursuits, the purpose of which, too, was educational—the teaching of the faith. Thus we see monks functioning as teachers and guides to the laity, taking the faith to other regions or lands as missionaries, undertaking scholarly and literary work, copying manuscripts and building up libraries. Monastic architecture and art too became visual media for religious instruction (ch.V).

Monastic life and activity were governed by a code of rules—the Vinaya in the case of the bhikkhus and the Rule Benedict wrote for his monks. It was these rules that gave an institutional character, order and harmony, stability and identity to each monastic system. It was the rules that guided the monks in their monastic education as well as in their various activities in the monastery and outside. All the various educational aspects of monastic life therefore followed from the code of rules each monastic system had (ch.VI).