




## Self-Surrendering Love: Initial Musings on Karuna and Caritas

Wesley Kim D. Soguilon   
Santo Niño Seminary and Wadeford School  
[soguilonwesleykim@gmail.com](mailto:soguilonwesleykim@gmail.com)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70922/10tzrp33>

Copy Editor: RONEL DE LOYOLA

[Submit to this journal](#) 

[Other related articles](#) 

Announcements

[Other PUP Journals](#) 

Other citation formats:

### Article History:


Received: August 2, 2025  
Accepted: December 10, 2025  
Revised: January 03, 2026

### How to Cite this paper:

Soguilon, Wesley Kim D. "Self-Surrendering Love: Initial Musings on Karuna and Caritas." *Mabini Review* 16, no. 1 (2026): 239–256. <https://doi.org/10.70922/10tzrp33>.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at [mabinireview@pup.edu.ph](mailto:mabinireview@pup.edu.ph).

# Self-Surrendering Love: Initial Musings on Karuna and Caritas

Wesley Kim D. Soguilon 

Santo Niño Seminary and Wadeford School

[soguilonwesleykim@gmail.com](mailto:soguilonwesleykim@gmail.com)

## Abstract

The paper explores and exposes the connections between the Buddhist virtue Karuna and the Christian virtue Caritas. Employing a text-based analysis approach, the paper argues that both Karuna and Caritas have intersections, though their origins and inherent development in each religious tradition differ. After the exploration and exposition, it is found out that both virtues may be considered expressions of self-surrendering love whereby a faithful person sets aside oneself for the greater or common good, much more the good of the other. This is exemplified by the Bodhisattvas and the Saints, two interesting religious figures in Buddhism and Christianity, respectively.

*Keywords: Aquinas, caritas, common good, karuna, virtue*

## INTRODUCTION

As globalization advances, the need to connect and fully understand other cultures through comparative analyses is imperative. One example often cited is the similarity between Christianity and Buddhism, particularly the way of life and teachings of the Bodhisattvas and Saints. This work on the Buddhist virtue of compassion (or Karuna) in Buddhist ethics and the Christian (in this instance, Catholic) theological virtue of Caritas is a contribution to the building of the corpus of knowledge in this regard.

In this work, which employs expository philosophy as its methodology, the author shall explore the concepts of Karuna and Caritas as they relate, though not limited to, the origins, nature, and goals of Bodhisattvas and Saints. The author will do this by comparing the general Buddhist understanding of Bodhisattvas and Karuna with that of the layman Catholic understanding of Saints and Caritas. The author argues that, while Karuna and Caritas have differences, they are both aptly considered expressions of self-surrendering love. To do this, the author will discuss how Karuna and Caritas are generally defined and understood in their respective religious contexts and who the Bodhisattvas and Saints are. After establishing those things, the author shall highlight the points of divergence between the Bodhisattvas and Saints by discussing the differences

between Karuna and Caritas in their origins, goals, and demands. Then, the author will underline the point of convergence between Karuna and Caritas as a self-surrendering love from each religious tradition's understanding of love as an act of service and a gift of self. This contributes to the ongoing conversation on the convergences and divergences of religious traditions without overlapping their inherent uniqueness.

The sources used for this expository study are English translations; thus, the intended meaning of the terms may have been lost in the translation. Furthermore, the approach to the concepts of Karuna and Caritas is general: this paper will not delve deeply into a particular concept of Karuna as defined by a Buddhist tradition, nor into Caritas in the Christian tradition.

The term Karuna in current literature chiefly means compassion. It is that kind of compassion that moves the person to alleviate and remove the suffering of a person reduced to misery and makes a person feel compassion and mercy to a happy, yet evil-doing, person, in view of the punishment that is to come to him or her.<sup>1</sup> Essentially, Karuna is a force that moves the person to act for the welfare of the one who is suffering. It indicates a sense of sadness over the suffering person who would become the object of the Buddhist's Karuna.<sup>2</sup> This Buddhist value is sometimes prioritized over one's self-realization (some traditions, like Mahayana Buddhism, believe that the welfare of others should be prioritized over their own) and is a part of the Buddhist's renunciation to achieve liberation.<sup>3</sup> A key point has to be appended here: Buddhist compassion should be detached compassion. For true compassion to happen, one should lose all self-estimation that would hold back the self from being truly compassionate.<sup>4</sup> It has to result from a process of spiritual refinement and nurturing, and it is only after this demanding, yet rewarding, process that the Buddhist helps others through Karuna.<sup>5</sup> This very noble way of life is best exemplified by the Bodhisattvas. They are those who have already achieved liberation yet chose to withhold it

---

1 Bhadantacariya Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, trans. Bhikkhu Nanamoli (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2010), 308.

2 John Ross Carter, "Love and Compassion as Given," *The Eastern Buddhist* 22, no. 1 (1989): pp. 37-53, <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/44361845>, 43.

3 Luis O Gomez, "Karuṇabhavana: Notes on the Meaning of Buddhist Compassion," *The Tibet Journal* 3, no. 2 (1978): pp. 33-59, <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/43299900>, 36.

4 Carter, "Love and Compassion as Given," 51.

5 Taigen Daniel Leighton, *Faces of Compassion: Classic Bodhisattva Archetypes and Their Modern Expression: An Introduction to Mahayana Buddhism* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 2012), 15.

for the meantime until they can guide all beings toward liberation.<sup>6</sup> They actively go out of the confines of their circumstances and help others achieve Nirvana. They also serve as guides to beings and provide them with assistance in their suffering.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the Bodhisattvas exemplify how one has to act with compassion and care toward others. The Buddhist can achieve this by having a caring mind.<sup>8</sup> A Bodhisattva who is known for this is Avalokiteśvara. He is very empathetic to the needs of beings, and he actively listens to their pleas as a primary practice of compassion.<sup>9</sup> Another Bodhisattva is Jizo. He guards children and travelers and is often called to protect unborn children. The figures that were mentioned became Bodhisattvas because of their compassion: a value that compels them to alleviate the sufferings of others. The Buddhist is called to be compassionate and imitate their example as much as they can.

The term *Caritas*, meanwhile, is a Latin term that means charity. It is intricately connected to love, but it is deeper than that in the sense that *Caritas* is a Christian virtue found in the Bible and modeled after Christ. In the New Testament, particularly in 1 Corinthians 13, *Caritas* has an eminent position, and is foremost, among other virtues.<sup>10</sup>

Strictly speaking, *Caritas* is one's love for God, but since Christian doctrine teaches that one's love for God is the foundation for one's love for neighbor, it encompasses both love for God and neighbor.<sup>11</sup> *Caritas*, then, as a root for the Christian's love for neighbor, would urge the Christian to serve others. It will serve as a force that would compel the Christian to do his or her function of loving God and serving others, living a holy life in this way.<sup>12</sup> People who successfully lived this way of life and inspired others to do the same are called Saints. They are "persons in heaven (officially canonized or not), who lived heroically virtuous lives, offered their lives for others, or were martyred for the faith, and who are worthy of imitation."<sup>13</sup> All Christians are invited to be Saints

---

6 Ibid.

7 Acharya Shantideva, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, trans. Stephen Batchelor (Dharamsala, India: Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, 1992), 77.

8 Leighton, "Faces of Compassion," 21.

9 Ibid., 22.

10 R. Freyhan, "The Evolution of the *Caritas* Figure in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 11, no. 1 (1948): pp. 68-86, <https://doi.org/10.2307/750462>, 68.

11 Ibid., 69.

12 Ibid.

13 Robert Sarno, "Saints," USCCB, accessed April 20, 2023, <https://www.usccb.org/offices/public-affairs/saints>.

through their own ways of showing their love for God and their neighbor. The beauty of Sainthood rests on the notion that, regardless of one's circumstances, one can be a Saint in one's own little and holy way, and all Christians are called to this way of life.

## Distinctions Between Karuna and Caritas

At the outset, it seems that both values or virtues are equivalent. This is true since both are virtues and pertain to love. However, a better look at these two would provide one with the rich intricacies of each virtue, making one understand these wholly, and this is my humble aim in this brief chapter. In this part, we shall traverse the path where the two virtues diverge: we shall explore the key differences between the two in terms of their origin, goal, and demands. Understanding these, in the light of their manifestations in each religious heroic figure, shall enrich our discussion and give a good grasp of how, in the end, both are still a kind of self-surrendering love.

The root of the origin of each virtue is in the scriptures of both Buddhism and Christianity. While one may not encounter problems in terms of scriptural sources in the latter since it only has one authoritative source (i.e., the Bible), the former presents a plethora of sources (all dependable) that would hinder one from understanding the entire Buddhist teachings on Karuna. Generally, Buddhism has Sutras (i.e., texts that come from the Buddha) and Shastras (i.e., explanatory treatises) as their canonical texts.<sup>14</sup> These canonical texts are scattered throughout the three main divisions of Buddhism: Theravada, Mahayana, and Tibetan. Since the texts are scattered, a full understanding of Karuna is nearly impossible, unlike Caritas, which has a single authoritative source. Despite that limitation, one can still have a grasp of what Karuna is by consulting some primary texts of the Buddhist tradition.

Karuna's origin lies in the pronouncement of the Buddha as that virtue which is good, since it is cultivated for the service of others. In the Dhammapada, one of the sacred Indian scriptures, Karuna is a virtue that "is good until life's end, faith that is steadfast, the acquisition of wisdom, and the avoidance of evil."<sup>15</sup> The goodness of Karuna lies in its compelling call for the Buddhist to serve others since he or she shall be utilizing his or her faith and wisdom in his or her quest to liberate all beings from suffering or samsara, the cycle of rebirth. Hence, the cultivation of Karuna is through service: "good it is to serve one's

---

14 John Morris, *The Essence of Buddhism* (New York, United States of America: Larsen and Keller, 2018), 199.

15 Acharya Buddharakkhita, tran., *The Dhammapada* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1985), 73.

mother, good it is to serve one's father."<sup>16</sup> Additionally, Karuna is also cultivated by asserting the primacy of goodness over evil. Buddhists are instructed by the Buddha to "overcome the angry by non-anger; overcome the wicked by goodness; overcome the miser by generosity; and overcome the liar by truth."<sup>17</sup> By cultivating Karuna, Buddhists heed the call of Buddha to be the agents of good in the world

As Buddhists cultivate Karuna, they become like the Buddha himself, the exemplar of the compassionate Buddhist. Buddhists are called "to generate compassion for this declining world, uphold at least the basic code of ethics, and study the Buddhadharma."<sup>18</sup> By engendering compassion, they become like Buddha as they transform into Bodhisattvas. As such, they aid beings in attaining liberation because of their Karuna, and their noble act, fueled by Karuna, is a direct heeding of the Buddha's call. As they aid beings to liberation, Bodhisattvas are promised by the Buddha that they shall have their reward "in palaces exquisitely illuminated by hanging pearls and gems that adorn the infinities of space."<sup>19</sup> However, since Bodhisattvas have a reward when they do what they are supposed to do, they do not focus much on the reward that shall be given to them but on the help that they extend. This is because they see all beings as themselves, and by seeing all things as alike, they see the Buddha nature in each being.<sup>20</sup> Seeing the Buddha nature in each thing, Bodhisattvas cannot help but be compassionate to all.

With all those things considered, the origin of Karuna, therefore, is the call of Buddha to be kind to all beings and aid their liberation. This is exemplified by the Bodhisattvas following the example of the Buddha to liberate sentient beings from suffering and being compassionate to all. Now, the origin of Karuna is a call, which is nearly like the origin of Christianity's Caritas. The virtue Caritas originated from the Bible, which has a framework for explicating and expanding God's salvific work through Jesus Christ. As Christ is the Christian God's only Son sent out to liberate the world from the original sin committed by Adam and Eve, it is to be understood that He is also the exemplar of all the Christian virtues, Caritas included. This means that Christ is the perfect model for Caritas: how

---

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 58.

18 Shih K'un Li and Frank G. French, eds., *The Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra*, trans. Hsuan Tsang and Lok To (Bronx, New York: Sutra Translation Committee of the United States and Canada, 1995), 52-53.

19 Acharya Shantideva, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, trans. Stephen Batchelor (Dharamsala, India: Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, 1992), 12.

20 Ibid., 70.

Christ loved people shows the correct way of loving others to the Christian.<sup>21</sup> As its source comes from the authoritative Scripture of Christianity that details the love story between God and man, it would be helpful for our purpose to cite a classical passage that reveals to us what Caritas is. In Mark 12:30-31 (Douay-Rheims Bible Edition), Jesus taught His followers to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself.” The Biblical passage conveys a simple message: that Christians must give themselves in service and love for others. How this may be done is based on the teachings of Christianity on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, which shall be highlighted in a later part of this work.

Interestingly, Caritas is enabled by God, who is love, through grace. 1 John 4:16 states that “God is love.” As love Himself, God seeks to share His love with others through grace, allowing them to partake in His nature as a loving being by using men as instruments of His love to the world. Those who do act as instruments of God’s love to the world become saints. Saints are those who answered the mandate of God to love Him and people through service. As was mentioned, because of their virtuous lives (love included, since it is a Christian virtue), saints become models of love and attain their reward in the afterlife: the vision of God. While my explication on this important premise shall be given in a later part of this work, it is sufficient for now to state that the origin of Caritas is God Himself who is love, and that God, through His grace, facilitates the love-acts of His faithful people. We now move to the goals of each virtue. By goal, I mean here the aim of the virtue. It answers the question: What is this virtue for? To respond to this, we have to look at what the Bodhisattvas and Saints aim for since it has been established in the preceding parts that these figures inculcated Karuna and Caritas in themselves respectively. To begin, the Bodhisattva has liberation for sentient beings from the cycle of rebirth and their suffering for his or her goal. Bodhisattvas are those who have already achieved liberation yet chose to withhold it for the meantime until they are able to guide all beings towards liberation.<sup>22</sup> They actively go out of the confines of their circumstances and help others achieve Nirvana. They serve as guides to beings and provide them with assistance in their suffering.<sup>23</sup> Now, the lives of the Bodhisattvas give a framework to ascertain how compassion will be applied in one’s life. This is because “by following teachings about generosity, patience, ethical conduct,

---

21 Carter, “Love and Compassion as Given,” 39.

22 Taigen Daniel Leighton, *Faces of Compassion: Classic Bodhisattva Archetypes and Their Modern Expression: An Introduction to Mahayana Buddhism* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 2012), 15.

23 Ibid.

meditative balance, and insight into what is essential, [one] can come to live so as to benefit others.<sup>24</sup> The teachings and examples of the Bodhisattvas animate the Buddhist to be compassionate towards himself or herself and his or her neighbors since they provide inspiration. They make the Buddhist realize that he or she is not estranged from others, and that to heal a broken world, one has to be with one's neighbors, much more if they are suffering.<sup>25</sup>

In a nearly similar vein, the Christian Saint is called to liberate men. However, the things that Saints help men to be liberated from, through their intercession, are sins.<sup>26</sup> Notably, compared to Bodhisattvas as direct liberators, Saints act as intercessors of men before God. Liberating others is only possible for the Bodhisattva if he or she must hold off first his or her own liberation, while beatific vision is a necessary requirement for the Saint to be able to intercede for people. They aid the needs of men and help them in their moments of weakness, due to their concern driven by Caritas, through their prayers and the merits that they earned here on Earth; God is still the one to aid men to be fully liberated from sin by giving them His grace.<sup>27</sup> Because of their concern, the goal of saints is to help the faithful in any way that he or she can through their intercession. They act as man's intercessors to God and serve as models of Christian life to the faithful.<sup>28</sup> With this, the Christian always has a source of support and inspiration in His life. For instance, when the faithful do commit a sin, he or she can look up to St. Peter the Apostle who denied Jesus three times and ask for his intercession; similarly, when a Christian mother has difficulty rearing her children, she can ask the help of St. Monica, the mother of St. Augustine.<sup>29</sup> These are the reasons why the Catholic Church promotes the devotion to the saints. She encourages her followers to humbly seek the prayers of the saints since they are dependable figures who do not stop caring for their fellow Christians due to their concern. In all, Caritas is found in the concern of Saints for their fellow Christians. It drives them to intercede for people and succor them in any way they can. For the final distinction we shall make between the two, we shall briefly tackle the demands of each virtue to the follower possessing or wishing to possess them. This part answers the question: what does virtue induce its possessor to do?

---

24 Ibid., 16.

25 Ibid.

26 *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), 1475, [https://openlibrary.org/books/OL22858147M/Catechism\\_of\\_the\\_Catholic\\_Church](https://openlibrary.org/books/OL22858147M/Catechism_of_the_Catholic_Church).

27 Ibid., 956.

28 Merridith Frediani, "Mary and the Saints, Our Powerful Intercessors," Ascension Press Media, May 28, 2019, <https://media.ascensionpress.com/2019/05/28/mary-and-the-saints-our-powerful-intercessors/>.

29 Ibid.

Moving forward, it has long been regarded among Buddhist scholars and monks that Karuna has ultimatums. Specifically, it is a factor, value, or attitude that has to be considered when a Buddhist is to do an act and treat another being. The Buddhist is called to compassionately serve, for he or she should “overcome the wicked by goodness and overcome the miser by generosity.”<sup>30</sup> This comes from the Buddhist’s belief that “in the world, good it is to serve one’s mother, good it is to serve one’s father... good is virtue until life’s end, good is the acquisition of wisdom, and good is the avoidance of evil.”<sup>31</sup> Considering that, the Buddhist, then, is called to a vocation to treat and serve all beings with compassion, for it is regarded that the virtuous Buddhist is compassionate. Karuna, here, becomes a compelling force and influence in the life of service of the Buddhist. Aside from that, the Buddhist is mandated to always preserve life and not to destroy it in whatever way one can. In the Vasala Sutta of the Uragavagga in the Sutta Nipata, the Buddhist is urged to be compassionate to all creatures to avoid being a spiritual outcast (an outcast of Buddhism), since “whoever destroys life, whether bird or animal, insect or fish, has no compassion for life.”<sup>32</sup> In Mahayana Buddhism, being compassionate is important as it enables one to be a benefactor or to open oneself and help others. It is by cultivating and practicing compassion that one may be like Buddha, “for the heirs of the Buddhas... who always cultivate compassion within themselves, and know definitely without a doubt, that they will become Buddhas.”<sup>33</sup> Compassion, then, encourages the Buddhist to follow Buddha’s example and be like him. Third, Karuna demands that Buddhists be beneficial to, and concerned with, others. How does this come about? The Buddhist, when he or she feels compassion, is compelled to help other beings who are suffering. They are called to alleviate their suffering and direct them towards what is right and good. The Buddhist “feels compassion for the world and causes all sentient beings, in the ten directions, to be universally benefited.”<sup>34</sup> Karuna, here, becomes instrumental in the concern of Buddhists for others. He or she becomes warmhearted towards those in need and sensitive to their pleas. Furthermore, he or she becomes conscientious of his societal obligations (though not totally enmeshed with worldliness), as he or she believes that it is essential in the achievement of Nirvana. This is a very sacred and urgent call, for the Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra teaches that “worldlings need to generate compassion for this declining world, resolve to uphold to

---

30 Buddharakkhita, *The Dhammapada*, 58.

31 Ibid., 73.

32 Ibid., 119.

33 H. Saddhatissa, tran., *The Sutta-Nipāta* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), 23.

34 Kumārajīva, *The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Tsugunari Kubo and Akira Yuyama (Berkeley, California: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2007), 100.

at least the basic code of ethics and, perhaps, to study the Buddhadharma; furthermore, they should refrain from taking the life of any living being and be mindful of their actions... if that is accomplished, there may still be time to save this world.”<sup>35</sup> The Buddhist, heeding this very critical and crucial call, becomes socially participative and concerned. He or she, with Karuna in tow, becomes an agent of change in society.

There are three demands of Karuna: first, it demands the Buddhist to serve others. Second, it prompts the Buddhist to follow the Buddha’s example of being compassionate. Third, it incites the Buddhist to be an agent of change in society through his or her participation. We now turn our attention to the Christian Caritas. The Church, through her eminent theologians, would discuss charity in the broader context of the virtues. Primarily, the Church, through St. Thomas Aquinas, her foremost thinker, would understand charity as an infused virtue in the soul, since it makes the person possessing it, and his or her works, good.<sup>36</sup> It is a virtue precisely because it makes the person love and act for the good since the person loves the good for which he aspires. He or she longs to possess that highest good which is pursued for its own sake and then shares it with others: beatific vision. Since it makes the person aspire for the highest good (i.e., beatific vision), charity is a virtue and the highest among them. St. Thomas Aquinas says that charity makes man love [sic] “God for His own sake, and loves fellow-men who are capable of attaining beatitude as it loves itself; charity resists every hindrance both in itself and in others.”<sup>37</sup> One can see here that Caritas makes man also overcome obstacles to loving: he or she becomes courageous enough to love others and share his or her goodness despite the challenges that he or she might face.

Since love involves some sort of communication or outpouring of one’s goodness, it is intimately linked to friendship. Caritas is the friendship between man and God since there is mutual love (which is a requirement for friendship) between them. Man loves God and his creation and does everything he can to have a good relationship with him, in the same way as God loves man and provides for his good.<sup>38</sup> Notice here how one can love God by loving His creation. This means that everyone is mandated to love one’s neighbor since they are

---

35 Li and French, *The Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra*, 52.

36 Thomas Aquinas, “Whether Charity Is a Virtue?,” trans. Lottie H. Kendzierski, *Quaestiones Disputatae: De Virtutibus*, accessed April 29, 2023, <https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/QDdeVirtutibus2.htm#2>.

37 Ibid.

38 Thomas Aquinas, “Is Charity Friendship?,” ed. Kevin Knight, *Summa Theologiae: Charity, Considered in Itself (Secunda Secundae Partis, Q. 23)*, 2017, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3023.htm#article1>.

bearers of God's image and dignity.<sup>60</sup> Loving God and others, St. Thomas Aquinas stipulated, has effects on the soul, and one of those effects is mercy. Mercy is "sorrow [that] arises from love, either through the absence of the thing loved, or because the loved object to which we wish well, is deprived of its good or afflicted with some evil."<sup>39</sup> I would like to point out that there are two ideas here that we have to focus on: first, we also suffer because of our neighbor's suffering. This is because of our love for them, which makes us suffer their sufferings as if they were our own.<sup>40</sup> Going back to mercy and Caritas, one has to love one's neighbor by practicing charity: that is, by caring for them as how their situation demands. St. Thomas Aquinas is not convinced that wishing and praying for the well-being of one's neighbor is already love.<sup>41</sup> It has to go beyond that. That is why for him, real charity is manifested through actions, and "Aquinas divides these acts into three categories: (1) acts of beneficence, (2) almsgiving, and (3) fraternal correction."<sup>42</sup> Particularly, mercy belongs to the second category. Thus, to sum up, we can say that compassion and mercy are connected, since mercy compels the person to have compassion for those who are suffering and be compassionate to them by alleviating their sorrow.<sup>43</sup> Caritas demands the Christian to have a friendship with God and to love their neighbors.

## Karuna and Caritas as Self-Surrendering Love

After examining the key distinctions between Karuna and Caritas, aided by the example of the Bodhisattvas and Saints, we now turn our focus to the apex of this work: the point of convergence between the two virtues or values in each religious tradition. This point of convergence is the fact that both virtues or values, despite their intrinsic and essential idiosyncrasies, involve a surrender or setting aside of the self (again, as defined nuancedly in each tradition, which is a topic for another work). In this part, I will show that they are both aptly

---

39 Thomas Aquinas, "Whether There Should Have Been Given Two Precepts of Charity?," ed. Kevin Knight, *Summa Theologiae: The Precepts of Charity (Secunda Secundae Partis, Q. 44)*, 2017, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3044.htm#article2>.

40 Thomas Aquinas, "Whether Almsgiving Is a Matter of Precept?," ed. Kevin Knight, *Summa Theologiae: Almsdeeds (Secunda Secundae Partis, Q. 32)*, 2017, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3032.htm#article5>.

41 Thomas Aquinas, "Is Joy an Effect of Charity?," ed. Kevin Knight, *Summa Theologiae: Joy (Secunda Secundae Partis, Q. 28)*, 2017, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3028.htm>.

42 Thomas Aquinas, "Whether Evil Is Properly the Motive of Mercy?," ed. Kevin Knight, *Summa Theologiae: Mercy (Secunda Secundae Partis, Q. 30)*, 2017, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3030.htm>.

43 Shawn Floyd, "Aquinas and the Obligations of Mercy," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37, no. 3 (2009): pp. 449-471, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9795.2009.00394.x>, 458.

considered expressions of self-surrendering love by revolving around the example of the Bodhisattvas and the Saints.

As a review, we have observed in the previous chapter that the origin of Karuna is Buddhist scriptures that have a framework for universal salvation from the cycle of rebirth, while Caritas came from the Bible, which has a framework for explicating and expanding God's salvific work through Jesus Christ. Additionally, Karuna is a value that is related to the liberation of sentient beings, while Caritas is a value that is related to the service to God and neighbor. Proceeding from that, their goals would also be different: the Buddhist has Karuna for liberation from suffering brought by the cycle of rebirth, while the Christian has Caritas as a way of helping others and alleviating their sorrows because of the mandate of God to love Him and their neighbors. Furthermore, the origin of the Bodhisattva is from following the example of the Buddha to liberate sentient beings from the suffering brought by the cycle of rebirth, while the Saint answers the mandate of God to love Him and his neighbors through service. Also, Bodhisattvas must first hold off their liberation to help others, while for the Saint, this is not needed since they can help people by interceding for them in heaven. Liberating others is only possible for the Bodhisattva if he or she must hold off on his or her liberation, while beatific vision is a requirement for the Saint to be able to intercede for people.

Now, the examples shown by the great Christians and Buddhists exemplify that both Karuna and Caritas are virtues that compel them to act for the sake of others. Here, love is an act of service wherein the self is set aside to give way to the needs of others. The entire life of the Bodhisattvas is centered on this dynamic of aiding those in need: as was mentioned, their compassion moves them to succor beings on their path to liberation. They emphasized the concerns and needs of others before theirs, all because of the immense compassion they have cultivated and the call of the Buddha to be kind to all.<sup>44</sup> Because of this, their entire lives are deemed selfless. Their selflessness stems from the fact that they do not seek happiness, but engage themselves in this tragic world because of their boundless and selfless compassion.<sup>45</sup> Buddhist selflessness, or the selflessness that is found in the lives of Bodhisattvas, is rooted in the requirement of detachment for Karuna: pure love for others is only possible if there is no self-attachment and discrimination between the self and others.<sup>46</sup> This means that true Buddhist compassion or love is done for its own sake: the

---

44 Gomez, "Karunabhavana: Notes on the Meaning of Buddhist Compassion," 36.

45 Hee-Sung Keel, "Jesus the Bodhisattva: Christology from a Buddhist Perspective," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 16 (1996): 172, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1390164>.

46 Ibid., 177.

Bodhisattvas do not liberate people due to any ulterior motive but for their own sake. Furthermore, it also entails that compassion is possible when one sees oneself in others: as was mentioned, compassion arises because the Buddhist feels sadness over the inhumane plight of others. This sadness, then, moves the Buddhist to act. It is in caring action, or care carried out for others, where the Buddhist manifests true compassion.

There are some notable Bodhisattvas who exemplified the Karuna ideal of aiding those in need. For instance, we have Guanyin, whose task is to bring people from their deathbed to liberation.<sup>47</sup> We also have Jizo, the protector of children and guide of travellers.<sup>70</sup> All these inspiring tales of Bodhisattvas can be found in the Jataka stories. These stories detail the lives of the historical Buddha and how he aimed to help others achieve liberation through Upaya or skillful means.<sup>48</sup> For Caritas, it is a virtue that makes the person act for the welfare of others and will their good. It is also an infused virtue, meaning that it has effects on the soul. The more that a person obeys God's commands and cultivates the virtue of Caritas through acts of charity that were mentioned, the more that he or she becomes like God in such a way that grace enters the scene.<sup>49</sup> Now, grace assists the soul in attaining beatific vision or the direct vision of God.<sup>50</sup> In simple terms, grace assists the soul in attaining eternal life in heaven by elevating the intellect to achieve beatific vision, and this is done based on the degree of love that a person possesses, since we are all judged by the way we have loved.<sup>51</sup> This means that the more a person loves God and others, the more that he or she would know and see God. Beatific vision is, then, attained by the one who has loved God and his or her neighbors well. The models that we have for this are the Saints, since they are known for their charity.<sup>52</sup> A life offered for the love and service of God and neighbor is a prerequisite for Sainthood, apart from the

---

47 Maria Reis-Habito, "The Bodhisattva Guanyin and the Virgin Mary," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 13 (1993): 62, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1389874>.

48 Elizabeth M. Tyler and Mark Ty Unno, "Compassion (Karuna)," Oxford Bibliographies, August 21, 2021, accessed December 1, 2023, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780195393521/obo-9780195393521-0150.xml>.

49 Ibid.

50 Thomas Aquinas, "Whether Grace Is the Principle of Merit Through Charity Rather than the Other Virtues?," ed. Kevin Knight, *Summa Theologiae: Merit (Prima Secundae Partis, Q. 114)*, 2017, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/2114.htm#article4>.

51 Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering, *Knowing the Love of Christ: An Introduction to the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 127.

52 Ibid.

usual canonical requirement of miracles attributed to their intercession. That is why one can observe that the Saints, while they do have various charisms and ways in which they offered their life, humbled their life, and went out of their selfish selves because of charity.

One can think of the many saints who offered their lives for God and their faith out of their charity for Him. For instance, one can recall the numerous Christian missionaries like St. Francis Xavier and St. Peter Chanel who spread the Gospel and worked among the people out of charity. There are also Saints like Mother Teresa and Elizabeth Ann Seton who assisted people in their misery because of the call of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. One can also think of the Catholic intellectual Saints like St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure, who worked tirelessly in explicating the truths of the faith and offered the fruits of their labor to God and their neighbors out of charity. All of these prove that Caritas or love is an act of service that compels Christians to act for the sake of others. Caritas makes the Christian answer the duty to care for the poor and vulnerable, and the Saints are exemplars of this kind of life. Both Karuna and Caritas are considered as self-surrendering love due to them being both virtues or values that involve an act of service and setting aside the self in their respective traditions that involve gifting the self to the other. Love is a gift of self, and this is demonstrated again by the lives of the Saints and Bodhisattvas, of the Christians and Buddhists. Their existence shows that sacrifice is compulsory for the realization of love, and one has to set aside oneself to give way for the prioritization of the other. By showing that love is a gift of self to the other, both Bodhisattvas and Saints affirm that Karuna and Caritas may be considered as self-surrendering love since oneself, which one owns, is given or surrendered to the other. The examples of the life of the Bodhisattvas show that Karuna requires the gifting of self and sacrifice. This is because, to be a Bodhisattva, one has to be dedicated to living a life of mercy for everyone and have mercy and compassion for all, regardless of who or what they may be.<sup>53</sup> Aside from these, the very characteristic that tops them all is their willingness to hold off their liberation so that they may help others to be liberated. This is a sacrifice on their part since they cannot yet own the fruits of their merits. In a similar way, the Saints also surrendered themselves while they were here on Earth. Their self-surrender has no ulterior motive: a divine gift that enables them to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others.<sup>54</sup> This comes as unsurprising, considering the impressive feats and acts of faith of the Saints before us. It was only God's gift and grace that the Christian martyrs, St. Andrew Kim Taegon

---

53 Ibid.

54 Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Mother Teresa and the Bodhisattva Ideal: A Buddhist View," *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture* 1, no. 1 (March 2012): 99.

and St. Lorenzo Ruiz, for instance, were able to be committed to the faith, give up their lives, and persevere until the end. The willingness of St. Oscar Romero to die for and defend his oppressed fellows and the zeal of St. Martin de Porres in having unconditional care for all people, regardless of race or wealth, would have only been possible because of God's grace. All these show that Karuna and Caritas require sacrifice wherein oneself is surrendered to give way to a greater cause and good. The self is offered for the betterment of all, and this is the greatest gift that one may provide.

In all, both Karuna and Caritas may be considered as self-surrendering love. This was demonstrated to us by the manifestations of these virtues in the respective heroic figures of each religious tradition. While the nuanced definition of the self is not considered in my work, it is sufficient for now to state that the self that I refer to here is the Buddhist or Christian himself. To truly ascertain if one has Karuna or Caritas, one must look at the life of the faithful. For it is there that the virtues are manifested and truly heeded, since a life that is dedicated to benevolence and the good of others is a life propelled by Karuna or Caritas.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We now conclude our exciting yet taxing journey. We have tried to tread a path that dealt with two distinct, yet significantly manifested, values or virtues: Karuna and Caritas. My work is an exposition of these two concepts that has for its noble goal the reflection of them, generating initial musings and prospects for further conversation.

While I am not asserting the influence of one over the other in my work, nor am I stating that they are equivalent or may be regarded at the same level, I aimed to show that they have points of divergence and convergence. By demonstrating these, I aim to spark further discussions on this essential topic as the world undergoes a paradigm shift towards globalization, making the world closer and one. It is also my intention to work on this topic since it will be helpful in religious dialogue, an essential endeavor that we ought to undertake as people become nearer and dearer with each other. I recommend that further work on this should be done, with emphasis on particular religious traditions that would have the same two virtues or values in their doctrines (e.g., a comparison between the Russian Christian Orthodox teachings on Caritas and Saints and the Zen ideas on Karuna and Bodhisattvas) since, as the author stated, his work deals with a very general notion of the two. The author has not included all the nuances necessary for a more integral view of the topic, yet further study may be done with this, along with the vantage points and methodological rigor of philosophers such as Ricouer, Levinas, and Heidegger.

Proceeding from the discussions, we can initially conclude that both Karuna and Caritas may be considered as self-surrendering love. This is the point where they converge. We have observed how Caritas is a value that is manifested through acts of mercy or charity, while Karuna compels the Buddhist and Bodhisattva to help sentient beings achieve liberation. Both virtues or values regard love as an act of service: the examples shown by the great Christians and Buddhists exemplify that both Karuna and Caritas are virtues that compel them to act for the sake of others. The two also regard love as a gift of oneself: the lives of the Saints and Bodhisattvas, of the Christians and Buddhists, show that sacrifice is compulsory for the realization of love. One must set aside oneself to give way for the prioritization of the other. However, the fact that they still come from different religious traditions with unique contexts proves that they still have differences. We have observed that they have three points of divergence: first, they are distinct in their origins since the origin of Karuna is the call of Buddha to be kind to all beings and aid their liberation, while that of Caritas is God Himself and His call for people to love Him and others through good deeds. Additionally, the two differ in their goals: the Bodhisattva, propelled by Karuna, has liberation for sentient beings from the cycle of rebirth and their suffering for his or her goal while the Saint, inspired by Caritas, has the goal of helping the faithful in any way that he or she can, much more in the avoidance of sin, through their intercession. Finally, the two have a distinction in demands: Karuna calls the Buddhist to serve others, prompts the Buddhist to follow the Buddha's example of being compassionate, and incites the Buddhist to be an agent of change in society through his or her participation. Caritas, meanwhile, demands the Christian to have a friendship with God and to love his or her neighbors.

To conclude, the author encourages the reader to cultivate and practice compassion and love in any way. Religious traditions may serve as guideposts in his or her practice, and it would not be harmful to explore these. The call to be compassionate and loving is increasingly being ignored. Compassionate and loving people are becoming a rare gem that is difficult to find, and becoming one would need audacity and determination, since abusive people would not find it hard to exploit the kindness of these people. Despite that, all are called to ensure that compassion, love, and care are given to everyone, but much more to those in need, in a world where such things are sparse. We are called to be martyrs: willing to sacrifice and set aside ourselves to be gifts to others. This is the challenge: are we up for it?

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Books

- Buddhaghosa, Bhadantacariya. *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2010.
- Buddharakkhita, Acharya, trans. *The Dhammapada*. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1985.
- Dauphinais, Michael, and Matthew Levering. *Knowing the Love of Christ: An Introduction to the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002.
- Kumārajīva. *The Lotus Sutra*. Translated by Tsugunari Kubo and Akira Yuyama. Berkeley, CA: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2007.
- Leighton, Taigen Daniel. *Faces of Compassion: Classic Bodhisattva Archetypes and Their Modern Expression: An Introduction to Mahayana Buddhism*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2012.
- Li, Shih K'un, and Frank G. French, eds. *The Prajñā Pāramitā Heart Sūtra*. Translated by Hsuan Tsang and Lok To. Bronx, NY: Sutra Translation Committee of the United States and Canada, 1995.
- Morris, John. *The Essence of Buddhism*. New York: Larsen and Keller, 2018.
- Saddhatissa, H., trans. *The Sutta-Nipāta*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2003.
- Shantideva, Acharya. *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. Translated by Stephen Batchelor. Dharamsala, India: Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, 1992.

### Journal Articles

- Carter, John Ross. "Love and Compassion as Given." *The Eastern Buddhist* 22, no. 1 (1989): 37–53. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44361845>.
- Floyd, Shawn. "Aquinas and the Obligations of Mercy." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37, no. 3 (2009): 449–71. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9795.2009.00394.x>.

- Freyhan, R. "The Evolution of the *Caritas* Figure in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 11, no. 1 (1948): 68–86. <https://doi.org/10.2307/750462>.
- Gomez, Luis O. "Karunabhavana: Notes on the Meaning of Buddhist Compassion." *The Tibet Journal* 3, no. 2 (1978): 33–59. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43299900>.
- Keel, Hee-Sung. "Jesus the Bodhisattva: Christology from a Buddhist Perspective." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 16 (1996): 169–85. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1390164>.
- Reis-Habito, Maria. "The Bodhisattva Guanyin and the Virgin Mary." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 13 (1993): 61–69. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1389874>.
- Tsomo, Karma Lekshe. "Mother Teresa and the Bodhisattva Ideal: A Buddhist View." *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2012): 96–105.

### Websites and Online Sources

- Aquinas, Thomas. "Is Charity Friendship?" Edited by Kevin Knight. *Summa Theologiae: Charity, Considered in Itself (Secunda Secundae Partis, Q. 23)*. 2017. <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3023.htm#article1>.
- . "Is Joy an Effect of Charity?" Edited by Kevin Knight. *Summa Theologiae: Joy (Secunda Secundae Partis, Q. 28)*. 2017. <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3028.htm>.
- . "Whether Almsgiving Is a Matter of Precept?" Edited by Kevin Knight. *Summa Theologiae: Almsdeeds (Secunda Secundae Partis, Q. 32)*. 2017. <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3032.htm#article5>.
- . "Whether Charity Is a Virtue?" Translated by Lottie H. Kendzierski. *Quaestiones Disputatae: De Virtutibus*. Accessed April 29, 2023. <https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/QDdeVirtutibus2.htm#2>.
- . "Whether Evil Is Properly the Motive of Mercy?" Edited by Kevin Knight. *Summa Theologiae: Mercy (Secunda Secundae Partis, Q. 30)*. 2017. <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3030.htm>.
- . "Whether Grace Is the Principle of Merit through Charity Rather than the Other Virtues?" Edited by Kevin Knight. *Summa Theologiae: Merit (Prima Secundae Partis, Q. 114)*. 2017. <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/2114.htm#article4>.

———. “Whether There Should Have Been Given Two Precepts of Charity?” Edited by Kevin Knight. *Summa Theologiae: The Precepts of Charity (Secunda Secundae Partis, Q. 44)*. 2017. <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3044.htm#article2>.

*The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994. [https://openlibrary.org/books/OL22858147M/Catechism\\_of\\_the\\_Catholic\\_Church](https://openlibrary.org/books/OL22858147M/Catechism_of_the_Catholic_Church).

Frediani, Merridith. “Mary and the Saints, Our Powerful Intercessors.” *Ascension Press Media*. May 28, 2019. <https://media.ascensionpress.com/2019/05/28/mary-and-the-saints-our-powerful-intercessors/>.

Sarno, Robert. “Saints.” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Accessed April 20, 2023. <https://www.usccb.org/offices/public-affairs/saints>.

Tyler, Elizabeth M., and Mark Ty Unno. “Compassion (Karunā).” *Oxford Bibliographies*. August 21, 2021. Accessed December 1, 2023. <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780195393521/obo-9780195393521-0150.xml>.

## BIONOTE

Wesley Kim D. Soguilon is a visiting lecturer at the College of Philosophy of Santo Niño Seminary and a teacher at the Formation and Social Sciences Departments of Wadeford School. He obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree from the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Santo Tomas. His research interests, among others, are the following: applied ethics, Thomism, and existentialism, particularly Camus.