It began with Tiger Woods’ late-night automobile encounter with a tree and the subsequent exposure of his philandering habits. Just when that story was winding down, Brit Hume gave it new life by injecting religion. In an editorial on Fox News, Hume called on Tiger, who was raised a Buddhist, to convert to Christianity saying, “I don't think that faith [i.e., Buddhism] offers the kind of forgiveness and redemption that is offered by the Christian faith. So my message to Tiger would be, ‘Tiger, turn to the Christian faith and you can make a total recovery.’”

You can imagine how the Buddhists felt at this nationwide denigration of their religion. But that was nothing compared to the commentators’ anger at Brit Hume for airing religious views and advice in such a public manner. Punditry ran the gamut of everything from “how insensitive to Buddhism!” to “what about the separation of church and state?”

Well, the last time I checked, Fox News was not a wing of the government. The notion that religion should not be intertwined in government does not prevent religion from being present in the public sphere or interfere with religious people from expressing their opinions. Like everyone else, they have the right to speak.

In retrospect, few commentators aimed to give Buddhism equal time; they were more interested in bashing Hume for his “religious insensitivity.” So Buddhist responses to Hume’s remarks received little play in the media. The rest of this column aims to help remedy that lack.

One way of expressing the difference between religions is that religions identify a problem faced by humankind and then provide a solution. Christianity defines the human problem as peoples’ sinful nature that separates them from God. It’s proffered solution is the “forgiveness and redemption,” to use Hume’s terminology, that comes from Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Buddhism defines the human problem completely differently. According to the Four Noble Truths, which form the Buddha’s fundamental teaching, life is filled with suffering (not sin). Suffering comes from desire. Since desires cannot be fulfilled, except momentarily, and the ongoing search for permanent fulfillment brings on suffering.

In Tiger’s case, his attempts to fulfill sexual desires have led not only to the inability to hold onto their fulfillment, but to the suffering of himself and his wife in their marriage, of his children, of the “other” women, and of himself on the public stage. Perhaps his golfing ability will suffer, just as the desire for female attention hindered R. Juna in the Hindu-oriented golf film, “The Legend of Bagger Vance” (starring Will Smith).

Having identified the human problem, Buddhism offers its solution, namely, the elimination of desire. It makes sense actually; if desire causes suffering, then humans can stop their suffering by stopping their feelings of desire. This can be accomplished by following the Eight-Fold Path, a prescription of the steps towards Enlightenment.

A look at the eight steps shows that Tiger’s infidelities indicate that he is still near the beginning of the path. Step Two is called “Right Intention,” and a typical explanation of it indicates that the key point is to work against the tug of desire. A person should labor to change his or her motivations to lead away from desires rather than towards them.

The fourth step is known as “Right Action” and its explanation includes explicit warnings against the actions of sexual infidelity. Indeed, the pursuit of sexual desires outside of marriage is explicitly forbidden by Buddhism’s five “commandments.”

In Buddhist terms, then, the prescription for Tiger is not “redemption,” but a commitment to follow the Eight-Fold Path away from the suffering caused by the tyranny of desire.

Both the Christian and the Buddhist definitions of and the solutions to the human problem are framed in terms of the individual; the individual sins or suffers. In both religions, however, it should be recognized that successful pursuit of the solutions usually take place in a religious community, like a church, a monastery or a temple, not by oneself.