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A COMPARISON AND CRITICAL ESTIMATE  
OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF CONFUCIANISM AND BUDDHISM  
IN RELATION TO CHRISTIANITY

BY

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To

MRS. CARRIE STEWART BESSERER

through whose life and influence the writer  
found the Christ

and to

MRS. GRACE SMALLEY MURRAY

whose life and missionary zeal first kindled  
in the writer a desire to give her  
life to carrying the Gospel to  
all men everywhere,

this thesis

is affectionately dedicated.

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### CHAPTER III

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#### ABBREVIATIONS

- SBE ... Sacred Books of the East, translated by  
James Legge, and edited by F. Max Muller.
- BT .... Buddhism In Translations, passages selected  
from the Buddhist Sacred Books and translated  
by Henry Clarke Warren.

## INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

### A. The Problem of the Present Study

Robert Ernest Hume in his historical sketch, The World's Living Religions, makes the following statements concerning Confucianism and Buddhism:

"Confucianism has been the chief religion of the oldest self-governing nation now living in the world. Some authorities claim that Confucianism can hardly be classified as a religion, but rather as an ethic, because the founder discouraged belief in a personal God and the practice of prayer, and common worship of the Supreme Being."<sup>1</sup>.

"Buddhism was the first religion in the world to become international. Yet theoretically Buddhism has often been denied the designation of being a religion."<sup>2</sup>.

"Buddhism, at least in its earliest and truest form, is no religion at all, but a mere system of morality and philosophy founded on a pessimistic theory of life."<sup>3</sup>.

In these statements Hume has expressed what is undoubtedly true, the fact that in both Confucianism and Buddhism in their original state we find no well-formulated religion as such, but in each case we have an ethical and philosophical system. It will be the purpose of this thesis to make a comparative study of these two philosophies, as found in the original sources (in translation), in relation

. . . . .

1. Cf. Hume, Robert Ernest: The World's Living Religions, p. 108.
2. Ibid, p. 59.
3. Ibid.

to Christianity, noting particularly wherein Christianity differs and may thus be considered to be unique.

Although Ethics is ordinarily included in the field of philosophy, we shall for the most part eliminate from our study a presentation of the system of Ethics as set forth in these two religions. This is done because of the obvious necessity of limiting our field of study.

#### B. The Importance of the Problem

In the Preface to his collection of essays called Heretics, Mr. Chesterton writes:

"There are some people - and I am one of them - who think that the most practical and important thing about a man is still his view of the universe. We think that for a landlady considering a lodger it is important to know his income, but still more important to know his philosophy. We think that for a general about to fight an enemy it is important to know the enemy's numbers, but still more important to know the enemy's philosophy. We think the question is not whether the theory of the cosmos affects matters, but whether in the long run anything else affects them."<sup>1</sup>.

My personal interest in China from the missionary point of view naturally leads me to a consideration of the basic life philosophies as set forth in the two great religions chosen for this study, both of which are common to China. I am interested in their life philosophy from a purely intellectual point of view, but I am more specifically interested in this study because I am convinced that we can

. . . . .

1. Chesterton, Gilbert K: Heretics, p. 15.



make a vital contact with these peoples only as we understand what they consider to be Ultimate Reality and their personal relation to such Reality, involving naturally a consideration of their beliefs concerning God, the cosmos, and man's relations to each.

Confucianism is recognized as the religion of social propriety, and Buddhism as the religion of peaceful, ethical self-culture. As we come to understand the basic philosophies underlying each of these two religions we will then understand what life honestly and deeply means to the Confucianist and to the Buddhist. Once we understand what life now means to such persons, we are better able to determine what relationship the Christian philosophy of life, as expounded by Jesus Christ, bears to the Confucianist and to the Buddhist.

#### C. The Method of Procedure

The procedure to be followed in this thesis will be a logical one and will, I trust, be scientific, based on an investigation of primary sources, and including both sympathetic appreciation and critical evaluation.

The procedure is as follows:

First: To investigate the Confucianist Sacred Books to see what is actually in these original sources from a philosophical point of view.

Second: To follow the same procedure relative to

the Buddhist sacred literature.

Third: On the basis of the discoveries in these first two initial steps, to make a comparative study and critical estimate of the philosophies of Confucianism and Buddhism in relation to Christianity.

Fourth: To briefly summarize the findings as contained in these three chapters.

#### D. The Sources of Data

##### 1. Confucianism

The basic material for the study of the philosophy of Confucianism will be an investigation of The Sacred Scriptures of this religion, including the five canonical "Classics" and The Four "Books" as follows:

##### The Five Canonical "Classics"

"Canon of History", Shu King: China's history reviewed.  
"Canon of Poetry", Shi King: a secular and religious anthology.  
"Canon of Changes", Yi King: a system of divination.  
"Book of Rites", Li Ki: a compendium of proprieties.  
"Spring and Autumn (Annals)", Chun Chiu: a local history.

##### The Four "Books"

"Great Learning", Ta Hsio: teaching concerning virtue.  
"Doctrine of the Mean", Chung Yung: perfect moderation.  
"Analects", Lun Yu: collected sayings of Confucius.  
"Mencius", Meng-tze: Works of the great expositor of Confucius.

In the first group of Confucianist Scriptures the Five "Classics", although attributed to Confucius, are

all compilations made by him, or edited by him, only one of them being a strictly original work. That one, the Chun Chiu, or "Spring and Autumn Annals", is a chronicle of his local State of Lu, and will be but briefly considered.

The second group, the "Four Books", were written either about Confucius personally, or about his doctrines<sup>1.</sup> by various followers, immediate or subsequent.

## 2. Buddhism

The Christian Bible is divided into two Testaments, whereas the Buddhist canon has three main divisions called "Baskets" or "Pitakas", and the Buddhist Bible consequently is called "The Three Baskets" or "The Tripitaka". The source material for our study of the philosophy of Buddhism will therefore consist of portions of The Tripitaka, meaning "Three Baskets" of Wisdom, consisting of the Vinaya Pitaka (Discipline Basket), containing rules for the initiates in the order, or higher class of Buddhists, the Sutta Pitaka (Teaching Basket), containing the discourses of Buddha, and the Abhidhamma Pitaka (Higher Doctrine or Metaphysical Basket) containing expositions of the intricate points of Buddhist psychology and doctrine.<sup>2.</sup>

. . . . .

1. Cf. Hume, Robert Ernest: The World's Living Religions, p. 117.
2. Ibid, p. 73.

A very careful investigation will be made of the contents of the Buddhist Suttas included in Henry Clarke Warren's Buddhism In Translations. The Sutta of "The Foundation of the Kingdom of Righteousness", which treats of the Noble Eight-fold Path will be noted particularly. This Sutta is considered by the translator, T. W. Rhys Davids, to be "the most essential, the most original, and the most attractive part of Gotama's teaching."<sup>1.</sup>

The translations used in this study of the Confucianist and the Buddhist Classics are those contained in the Sacred Books of the East, translated by the Oriental scholar, James Legge, from Oxford University; Four Books of Chinese Classics, translated by Jeu Mon Houn; Buddhism In Translations, translated by Henry Clarke Warren; and the Buddhist Suttas, translated from Pali under the leadership of the late Professor Rhys Davids of Manchester University and with the cooperation of various European scholars, working through the Pali Text Society of London.

### 3. Christianity

The basis for the writer's critical estimate of the philosophy of Confucianism and Buddhism from the Christian point of view will be found in the New Testament religious and philosophical teachings as set forth by Jesus Christ.

. . . . .

1. SBE, Vol. XI, p. x.

CHAPTER I  
THE PHILOSOPHY OF CONFUCIANISM

## CHAPTER I

### THE PHILOSOPHY OF CONFUCIANISM

#### A. Definition of Philosophy

Philosophy, as someone has aptly expressed it, is one's more or less dumb sense of what life honestly and deeply means. It is a vision of the meaning of life as a whole, and of its place in the total order of reality. The word "philosophy" is derived from the Greek words philein, meaning "to love", and sophia, meaning "wisdom". Hence the true philosopher is a lover of wisdom. Each one if he would order his life aright, or participate usefully in the ordering of social effort, must have a well-thought out scheme of values, interests, and ends. He must, furthermore, have some intelligent conviction as to the place of human values and human purposes, in the total scheme of things. This is what is meant when one says that philosophy seeks to comprehend the fundamental values of life as a whole; that it seeks a total and consistent view of life and its place in reality. Philosophy is the criticism of life; it is the application of ideas to life. Philosophy is the individual mind animated by the spirit of open-minded and persistent endeavor to discover the whole truth in regard to life and reality. It is man thinking out the ultimate, perplexing, and interesting

problems of existence. The personal quest for a rich and consistent doctrine of human values and purposes and for an understanding of the meaning of human life as a whole<sup>1</sup> is the essence of philosophizing.

#### B. Confucius as a Philosopher

Confucius (551-479) was undoubtedly the greatest sage and philosopher China has ever known. His favorite pupil, Mencius, gives this simple yet noble tribute concerning his teacher:

"What I wish to do is to learn to be like Confucius. Since there are living men until now, there never was another Confucius . . . from the birth of mankind till now, there never has been another like our master. . . .

So the sages among mankind are also the same in kind. But they stand out from their fellows, and rise above the level, and from the birth of mankind till now, there never has been one so complete as Confucius."<sup>2</sup>

This attachment to his person has lingered on through the centuries. It is a great tribute not only to the character of Confucius, but also to the glory of the Chinese nation that they have unswervingly revered as the greatest of their race a man of the high character of Confucius -- one who was a great statesman, a great educator, a great musician, but above all the founder of

. . . . .

1. Cf. Leighton, Joseph A. : The Field of Philosophy, pp. 20-21
2. Works of Mencius, Chapter 2, Paragraphs 27-28.

a great religion and the greatest of Chinese philosophers.

As a philosopher Confucius was a pragmatist. The burden upon his soul because of current disorders forced him to think primarily of practical questions. For this reason he avoided metaphysical and speculative subjects. None the less, I believe we shall find that Confucius was profoundly, if unavoidably, religious.

### C. Sacred Scriptures of Confucianism

All of the Sacred Classics referred to in our study are associated in one way or another with the name of Confucius. He is commonly regarded as the compiler of the first four Canonical books, (Shu-king, Shi-king, Yih-king, Li-king) and the author of the fifth, (Spring and Autumn); the Analects are a collection of his sayings chiefly in discourse with his disciples; the Doctrines of the Mean and the Teachings of Mencius are attributed to disciples of the sage.

These books have for centuries been accepted as regulative in religion, morals, and government. They are not regarded as inspired. Their authority is due solely to the prescription of antiquity or to the wisdom and virtue of their reputed authors; but no professed revelation has exerted a more absolute supremacy over the minds of men or more completely dominated a whole civilization.<sup>1</sup>

. . . . .

1. Cf. Moore, George Foote: History of Religions, Vol. 1, p. 5



The most ancient of these classical books is the Shu-King or Book of Historical documents, relating to the period from about 2357-622 B. C. Historians, poets, and others wrote these and the other classics as they were moved to do so, and while these do not lay claim to divine inspiration, they do have numerous references in them to philosophical and religious views and practices.

#### D. Philosophy of Confucianism

It will be our purpose in this chapter on the Philosophy of Confucianism to attempt to bring to bear such selections from the Classics as will enable us to determine what to Confucius and his followers was the nature of Ultimate Reality and what was their relation to such Reality, involving questions concerning God, the universe, and man's relation to each.

##### 1. Cosmology - Problem of the Ultimate Principle

The old Chinese religion has neither a doctrine of creation nor a cosmogonic myth. Confucius starts out with an impersonal cosmic energy and principle which produced the yin and yan, the negative and positive principles.<sup>1</sup> These by their interaction produced Heaven and Earth. These two, the great gods

"produce all things by the interaction of the opposites, heat and cold, light and dark, male

. . . . .

1. Cf. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th Edition, Vol. 6, article by Hodous, Lewis, "Confucianism".

and female. The processes of nature which men see every day went on through all the past; that they had a beginning -- and when and how -- was as little in men's minds as that they were eternal; they were and are simply accepted. Equally little did it occur to them that if Heaven and Earth accounted for all the rest, they themselves remained to be accounted for. Chinese philosophy early raised the metaphysical problem of the ultimate principle, but it did not find an anticipation of the problem in religion."<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Animism and Confucianism

The religion of Confucianism may be summarily defined as a union of nature worship and ancestor worship. At the most remote time of which any record is preserved it appears fully systematized and regulated, and its character has remained substantially unchanged. Animism has been defined in terms of "the regarding of inanimate objects as possessing personal life or soul." With this definition before us we might conceivably think of Confucianism as an animistic religion, or as a system of ethics permeated with animism. There were three classes of sacrifices under the last dynasty . . . . the great sacrifices, namely, <sup>to</sup> Heaven, Earth, the imperial ancestors and the gods of the grain and of the ground; the middle sacrifices, to the sun, moon, certain cultural heroes, including Confucius and the nature

. . . . .

1. Moore, George Foote: History of Religions, Vol. 1, p. 27
2. Cf. Moore, George Foote: Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 6

gods; the general sacrifices, performed entirely by the officials, including cultural heroes, nature gods and departmental deities.<sup>1</sup>

"All of these powers are conceived as spirits. They are classified as celestial, terrestrial, or human, but this distinction of sphere does not imply a difference of kind. The relative rank of the spirits is defined in a kind of table of precedence patterned after the organization of the feudal monarch. At the head stands Heaven, the Supreme Emperor, followed by Earth, with the titles of a great feudatory prince. The deceased emperors of the reigning dynasty come next outranking the sun and moon."<sup>2</sup>

Worship was performed for the people, not by them. Only at the sacrifices at the village altar to the local spirit of the soil is the presence of representatives of each family presumed, and at the clan sacrifices to the spirit of their own fields. The worship of the family ancestors constitutes the private religion of all classes. The emperor, the Son of Heaven, is the religious head of the nation, and the worship of powers on which the welfare of the whole empire depends is his exclusive prerogative.

According to the Li-Ki, the emperor sacrifices to Heaven and Earth, to all the famous mountains and great rivers, and to the spirits of the soil and the crops of the whole empire. References to this animistic worship of

. . . . .

1. Cf. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th Edition, Vol. 6, article by Hodous, Lewis, "Confucian Ethics".
2. Op. cit., p. 6

numerous spirits or deities may be found throughout the Classics:

"He sacrifices especially, but with the ordinary forms, to God; sacrifices with reverent purity to the Six Honoured Ones; offered their appropriate sacrifices to the hills and rivers; and extended his worship to the host of spirits."  
(SBE 3:39)

### 3. Philosophical Assumptions Underlying Confucianism

#### a. The Way of Nature, or Tao - (Doctrine of the Mean)

The basic philosophy underlying Confucianism is Tao; it is the road or the way in which the universe moves; it is the order of the world, or natural order. It is the way that ought to be pursued by all men; it is the moral course for every man.<sup>1</sup> All Chinese thinkers agree that man and nature are not mere accidents, that their existence cannot be a haphazard affair, but that there is a Tao - that is, a way or norm - which is the regulator of human conduct and the guide of natural events.<sup>2</sup>

This Doctrine of the Mean, or the principle of moderation, dominates all utterances in the Classics. It is the ideal of non-deviation and of harmony, of equilibrium and sober self-control.

"The superior man embodies the course of the

. . . . .

1. Cf. R. Y. Lo, "The Chinese Recorder", January 1923

2. Cf. Lyon, D. Willard: Religious Values in Confucianism, p. 12

Mean; the mean man acts contrary to the course of the Mean."

(Doctrine of the Mean, Chap. II)

"Common men and women, however ignorant, may intermeddle with the knowledge of it; yet in its utmost reaches, there is that which even the sage does not know."

(Doctrine of the Mean, Chap. XII)

"What Heaven has conferred is called the Nature. An accordance with this nature is called the Path of Duty; the regulation of this path is called the system of Instruction. The path should not be left for an instant; if it could be left it would not be the path. On this account the superior man does not wait till he sees things to be cautious, nor till he hears things to be apprehensive. There is nothing more visible than what is secret, and nothing more manifest than what is minute. Therefore the superior man is watchful over himself when he is alone. When there are no stirrings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, or joy, we call it the State of Equilibrium. When those feelings have been stirred, and all in their due measure and degree, we call it the State of Harmony. This Equilibrium is the great root (from which grow all the human actings) in the world; and this Harmony is the universal path (in which they should all proceed). Let the State of Equilibrium and Harmony exist in perfection, and heaven and earth would have their (right) places, (and do their proper work), and all things would be nourished (and flourish).

"The Master said, 'The path is not far from man. When men try to pursue a path which is far from what their nature suggests, it should not be considered the Path.'"

(Li-Ki, Book XXVIII, Section 1, Paragraphs 1-6, 29.)

This Doctrine of the Mean practically results in an unperturbed acquiescence and submission to the inevitable, in a calmness and lack of aggressiveness which it is difficult for us to fully appreciate;

"The superior man has no dissatisfactions. He does not murmur against heaven, nor grumble against men. Thus it is that the superior man is quiet and calm, waiting for the appointments of Heaven, while the mean man walks in dangerous paths, looking for lucky occurrences."

(Doctrine of the Mean, Chap. XIV)

The attainment of this state of perfect equilibrium and moderation is largely dependent on two factors, ceremony and music, and these two things therefore figure largely in all practices of worship. The relation which these two bear to the attainment of this desirable state is set forth in the Li-Ki:

"A superior man says: 'Ceremonies and music should not for a moment be neglected by anyone. When one has mastered completely the principles of music and regulates his heart and mind accordingly, the natural, correct, gentle, and honest heart is easily developed, and with this development of the heart comes joy. This joy goes on to a feeling of repose. This repose is long-continued. The man in this constant repose becomes (a sort of) Heaven. Heaven-like, (his action) is spirit-like. Heaven-like, he is believed without the use of words. Spirit-like, he is regarded with awe, without any display of rage. So it is, when one by his mastering of music regulates his mind and heart.'

Section 24. "When one has mastered completely the principles of ceremonies so as to regulate his person accordingly, he becomes grave and reverential. Grave and reverential, he comes to be regarded with awe. If the heart be for a moment without the feeling of harmony and joy, meanness and deceitfulness enter it. If the outward demeanor be for a moment without gravity and respectfulness, indifference and rudeness show themselves."

Section 25: "Therefore the sphere in which music acts is the interior of man, and that of ceremonies is his exterior. The result of

music is a perfect harmony, and that of ceremonies a perfect observance of propriety."

Section 26: "Music springs from the inward movements of the soul; ceremonies appear in the outward movements of the body. Hence it is the rule to make ceremonies as few and brief as possible, and to give to music its fullest development."

(Li-ki, Book XVII, Sections 23-25)

James Legge in commenting upon the attainment of this Golden Mean calls this

"The Sum of the Whole Work and gives his interpretation of the meaning of this principle and of its practical application. The path of duty is to be traced to its origin in Heaven, and is unchangeable, while the substance of it is provided in ourselves, and may not be departed from. There follows, therefore, the supreme importance of preserving and nourishing this and of exercising a watchful self-scrutiny with reference to it. The learner should direct his thoughts inwards, and by searching in himself, there find these truths, so that he might put aside all outward temptations appealing to his selfishness, and fill up the measure of the goodness which is natural to him."

(SBE:3:89)

From this concluding statement we are thus led to a consideration of our second philosophical assumption, i. e., the principle of man's inherent goodness, which is the ground for the attainment of any degree of equilibrium and harmony and for the successful following in "The Way".

#### b. Man's Inherent Goodness

Along with this basic view of the Doctrine of the Mean, there is in Confucianism the equally basic view that human nature is good. Men at their birth are

by nature radically good and very early in life the mind of the Chinese child is indoctrinated with this basic point of view. It is at this point that we find one of the greatest divergences from that of Christian philosophy. This comparison will, however, be set forth in Chapter III. For the present we shall confine ourselves to the presentation of specific references to this principle which have been discovered in a study of the Classics.

"The king said, 'the great God has conferred even on the inferior people a moral sense, compliance with which would show their nature invariably right.'"

(Shu-king, p. 89)

"The Master said, 'My doctrine is that of an all-pervading unity'. The doctrine of our master is to be true to the principles of our nature and the benevolent exercise of them to others, - this and nothing more."

(Analects, Book III)

"Man's activity shows itself as he is acted upon by external things, and develops the desire incident to his nature. Things come to him more and more, and his knowledge is increased. Then arise the manifestations of liking and disliking. When these are not regulated by anything within, and growing knowledge leads man astray without, he cannot come back to himself, and his Heavenly principle is extinguished.

"When man's likings and dislikings are not subject to regulation (from within), he is changed into the nature of things as they come before him; that is, he stifles the voice of Heavenly principle within, and gives the utmost indulgence to the desires by which men may be possessed."

(Li-ki, Book XVII, Sections 11-12)

This fundamental principle of the inherent nature of man is graphically set forth in one of the



Classics in a conversation between a philosopher and Mencius, in which the discussion hinges on the question as to whether or not man is indifferent to good and evil.

"The philosopher Kaou said, 'Man's nature is like water whirling round in a corner. Open a passage for it to the east, and it will flow to the east; open a passage for it to the west, and it will flow to the west. Man's nature is indifferent to good and evil, just as the water is indifferent to the east and west.'"

"Mencius replied, 'Water indeed will flow indifferently to the east or west, but will it flow indifferently up or down? The tendency of man's nature to good is like the tendency of water to flow downwards. There are none but have this tendency to good, just as all water flows downwards. Now by striking water and causing it to leap up, you may make it go over your forehead, and, by damming and leading it, you may force it up a hill; - but are such movements according to the nature of water? It is the force applied which causes them. When men are made to do what is not good, their nature is dealt with in this way.'"

(Mencius, Book VI, Part I,  
Chap. II.)

From the Classics themselves we may clearly draw the inference that, according to their life philosophy, the inherent goodness of human nature is that which has been divinely implanted in man.

"The great God has conferred even on the inferior people a moral sense, compliance with which would show their nature invariably right."  
(SBE 3:89)

"Man is born for uprightness." (SBE 6:17)

"What Heaven has conferred is called the nature." (Doctrine of the Mean 1:1)

"The tendency of man's nature is good. There are none but have this tendency to good."  
(Mencius 6:1, 2:2)

The whole of the system of Confucian ethics and philosophy rests upon this fundamental religious postulate of man as inherently good, pursuing The Way of the Mean, in a perfect state of peace, and undisturbed, harmonious relationship with man and Heaven.

c. The Moral Constancy of Nature

The obvious corollary to such a philosophy would be the belief in the existence of a Divine purpose or moral law in the Universe. In Confucianism we find such a principle of moral constancy in nature. The Universe, according to Confucianism, is a system and not chaos.

"There is in Confucianism, as there is in the tradition that is older than Confucius, and which he transmitted in a systematized form, the basic conception that nature herself is good, and prescribes principles and rules for the right conduct of humans. The course of nature is mysterious enough, to be sure; its ways are literally past finding out. There is, therefore, in the practice of man a fatalistic submission to its decrees. Human fortune and misfortune, happiness and disaster are 'ordained'; but these inevitable appointments of nature, however harsh or severe they may seem, are felt to depend upon the behavior of humans. Nature is not at bottom bad. She is simply just and requites good with good and evil with evil . . . nature is moral and acts in a moral way."<sup>1</sup>

"The way of Heaven is to bless the good, and make the bad miserable."

(Shu-king, p. 90)

"The way

. . . . .

1. Pott, William S. A. : Chinese Political Philosophy, taken from Lyon, D. W.: Religious Values in Confucianism, p. 13

"The ways of God are not invariable - on the good-doer He sends down all blessings, and on the evil-doer he sends down all miseries."

(Shu-king, p. 95)

"It was not that Heaven had any private partiality for the lord of Shang; it simply gave its favor to pure virtue . . . good and evil do not wrongly befall men, but Heaven sends down misery or happiness according to their conduct."

(Shu-king, p. 101)

"For the many crimes of the sovereign, Haia, Heaven has given the charge to destroy Him . . . the sovereign of Haia is guilty, and as I fear God, I dare not <sup>but</sup> punish him . . . Assist, I pray you, me, the One man, to carry out the punishment appointed by Heaven."

(Shu-king, p. 85)

"It is not Heaven that cuts short men's lives; they bring them to an end themselves. Some men who have so complied with virtue will yet not acknowledge their offences, and when Heaven has by evident tokens charged them to correct their conduct, they will say, 'What are these things to us?'"

(Shu-king, p. 119)

"By your dissoluteness and sport you are bringing on the end yourself. On this account Heaven has cast us off, and there are no good harvests to supply us with food. Men have no regard to their heavenly nature, and pay no obedience to the statutes of the kingdom."

(Shu-king, p. 120)

Occasionally, as we read the Classics, we are reminded of the prophets Habakkuk and Jeremiah in their cry to God for the answer to the problem of the apparent indifference of Jehovah to the problem of the suffering of the righteous.

"Great and wide Heaven, how is it you have contracted your kindness, sending down death

and famine, destroying all through the kingdom? Compassionate Heaven, arrayed in terrors, how is it you exercise no forethought, no care? Let alone the criminals . . . but those who have no crime are indiscriminately involved in ruin. . . our tortoise-shells are wearied out, and will not tell us anything. The counsellors are very many, but on that account nothing is accomplished. The speakers fill the court, but who dares to take any responsibility on himself? We are as if we consulted about a journey without taking a step in advance, and therefore did not get on the road."

(Shih-king pp. 357-358)

Surely in this one instance we find the writer crying out against apparent injustice and a situation he cannot reconcile with a moral law in the Universe, which he has personalized, and which we call God. In a period of misgovernment and disorder another exclaims: "Great Heaven, unjust, is sending down these exhausting disorders; great Heaven unkind, is sending down these great miseries." "O unpitying great Heaven, there is no end of the disorder." "From great Heaven is the injustice." Heaven is sending down calamities; Heaven is exercising oppression; Heaven is displaying its anger; revere the anger of Heaven. Heaven in anger plagues the people with famine and bad rulers - ignorant, oppressive, negligent. The outcries against the injustice of Heaven, like those of Habakkuk, Jeremiah or Job, however, derive all their force from the belief that Heaven is not unjust nor capricious; and the constant teaching, the fundamental assumption of the Chinese books, is that the rule of Heaven is moral.

d. Destiny or Predestination

As has been intimated, this basic conception that Nature or Heaven is good, and that she prescribes principles and rules for the right conduct of humans, carries with it a certain fatalistic submission to its decrees. We also find in the Classics grounds for their belief in the divine right of Rulers:

"Heaven, for the help of the inferior people, made for them rulers, and made for them instructors, that they might be able to be aiding to God."  
(Shu-king p. 126)

"The King says, 'No! I declare to you, ye numerous officers. . . it was not that I considered it a part of my virtue to interfere with your tranquility. The thing was from Heaven; do not offer resistance. . your present non-employment is no fault of mine; it is by the decree of Heaven.'  
(Shu-king p. 198)

"When the Master heard it, he said, 'Things that are done, it is needless to speak about; things that have had their course, it is needless to remonstrate about; things that are past, it is needless to blame.'  
(Analects, Book III, Chap. XXI)

The appointment, or decree, of Heaven is recognized also in the life of the individual; it is destiny. It determines his allotted span of life and his fortunes in life. In this decree there is no partiality, no hatred, and no mistake. It is a mark of the "superior man" that he stands in awe of the ordinances of Heaven, while the "common man" does not know them, and therefore does not stand in awe of them. The superior man is quiet

and calm, waiting for the appointment of Heaven, while the common man walks in dangerous paths, looking for lucky occurrences. For the individual, as for the state, the decrees of Heaven are not arbitrary, they are congruous with man's character. Good and evil do not wrongly befall men, but Heaven sends down misery or happiness according to their conduct. The way of Heaven is to bless the good and make the bad miserable. Of the beliefs of the common man about the ordering of his life we have no indication in the Classics.<sup>1</sup> So far as Confucius himself is concerned, we know that he maintained the belief that the destiny of individuals is ordained by Heaven. Faith in his own mission sustained him in critical moments of his life. Yet one of the subjects on which he seldom spoke was the appointments of Heaven. There were, we are told in the Analects, four things of which Confucius seldom spoke --extraordinary things, feats of strength, rebellious disorder and spiritual beings. When one of the ministers of Lu asked him what constituted wisdom he replied that it was to give one's self earnestly to the duties due to men, and while respecting spiritual beings, to keep aloof from them, -- that, according to the sage, may be called wisdom. On one occasion he stated,

"While you cannot serve men, how can you

. . . . .

1. Cf. Moore, George Foote; op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 25 ff.

serve spirits?"

"While you do not know life, what can you know about death?"

(Analects, Book XI, Chap. XI.)

Confucius scarcely ever uses the name Supreme Lord, and it has been surmised that he consciously avoided it because it more distinctly implied the personality of God, preferring the impersonal, or at least ambiguous, T'ien, Heaven. The distinction between these two terms involves a study of the whole idea of God as it exists in the Classics. Everyone of the Confucian scriptures makes direct allusion to the supreme power of the world.

#### 4. Ideas of the Supreme Being

We find two terms used to designate the Supreme Being, the first, T'ien, or Heaven, the second, Shang Ti, or Ruler Above.

##### a. The Term T'ien or Heaven

The term Heaven is used everywhere in the Chinese Classics for the Supreme Power, ruling and governing all the affairs of men with an omnipotent and omniscient righteousness and goodness. T'ien, or Heaven, refers to the supreme moral rule or order of the world in impersonal terms. This is the most generally used word in the Classics for the God-Idea. It is ambiguous, and stands for a Personal Being at one time, and an Impersonal Object at another, and no attempt has been made to define its nature. It might be identified with natural law, or just

nature. Again it has personality, and is appealed to as the highest of spirits.

"Heaven is the Emperor, the Supreme Emperor, the Ruler of the world and of men. Heaven is not merely the cause mediate or immediate (the natural phenomena) but the source of the order of nature (the Tao, or Way). It is, however, particularly as Ruler of Men that the idea of Heaven becomes more definitely personal."<sup>1</sup>

"It is Heaven which is all-intelligent and observing; let the king take it as his pattern."  
(Shu-king p.115)

"Revere the anger of Heaven. And presume not to make sport or be idle. Revere the changing moods of Heaven. Great Heaven is intelligent, and is with you in all your goings. Great Heaven is clear-seeing and is with you in your wanderings and indulgences."  
(Shih-king p. 410)

#### b. The Term Shang Ti, or Ruler Above

" 'Ti' is the honorable designation of lordship and rule; therefore, Heaven is called Shang (what is above) Ti. The five elementary Powers are called the five Ti, and the Son of Heaven - that is, the Sovereign - is called Ti. Here then is the name Heaven, by which the idea of Supreme Power in the absolute is vaguely expressed; and when the Chinese would speak of it by a personal name, they use the terms Ti and Shang Ti -- saying, I believe what our early fathers did, when they began to use the word God. Ti is the name which has been employed in China for this concept for fully five thousand years. Our word God fits naturally into every passage where the character occurs in the Old Chinese Classics."<sup>2</sup>

James Legge in his translations of the Classics therefore retains the term God for Ti and Shang Ti in all the

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1. Op.cit. pp. 23ff.
2. SBE Vol. III, Preface xxiv.



Sacred Books of the East. D. T. Suzuki, in his "A Brief History of Early Chinese Philosophy," does not make the terms Shang Ti and God synonymous. He states:

"It may not be altogether proper to consider Shang Ti (Lord on High), as a being residing in Heaven (T'ien). Though it is certain that he was not merely a moral power nor the personification of Heaven, as some Christian missionary scholars of Chinese religion are inclined to believe, he was not a person in the fullest sense of the word. But he had something of personality in him and could properly be called 'he' instead of 'it'. . . When the Chinese spoke of Shang Ti, they had in their minds something of an august supreme being in Heaven above, who was the arbiter of human destiny, though not their creator. He did not, exactly speaking, reside in Heaven, but Heaven was his material or objective expression."<sup>1</sup>

Whether or not the term Shang Ti is synonymous with our God-idea, it is absolutely certain that in contrast to the vague, impersonal Heaven, it is a personal name for a Supreme Being or Supreme Ruler. The two terms are often used interchangeably in the Classics, but the impersonal term is definitely used about three times as frequently as is the more personal term.

"Confucius used the personal name for the Supreme Being only once (SBE 20:1,3), and that only in the course of a poetical quotation. The evidence is ample and explicit that the ethico-religious system which Confucius organized included belief in and worship of a Supreme Deity, but that his own influence was to deperson-

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1. Lyon, D. Willard: Religious Values in Confucianism, p. 24

alize that faith and to secularize its ethics."<sup>1</sup>

In the King the references to the Supreme Being are abundant. With Confucius, the vague, impersonal term Heaven took the place of the Divine name.

c. Meaning of the Terms T'ien and Shang Ti  
to the Ancients

W. E. Suthill, in "The Three Religions of China", summarizes the belief of the Ancients, as contained in the Classics, as follows:

"We find in the History and the Odes that to God, whether considered as the personal Shang Ti, or the impersonal T'ien, the following qualities are attributed: He hears and sees; He enjoys offerings; He has a heart or mind; He is aided by men, and deposes His work, especially to kings; He can be honored and served; He is awe-inspiring, of dread majesty, and to be feared; He confers on men their moral sense, and makes retention of His favor dependent on moral character; His will is glorious, may be known, and must be complied with; a virtuous king is after His own heart, but He will have no regard to the ill-doer; with such a one He is angry; the virtuous king He will reward with ease and dignity; the appointment is contingent and He cannot be relied upon not to reverse it, for His favor may be lost; He protects, but may withdraw His protection; He warns, corrects, and punishes the evil king, even afflicts, ruins, and destroys him. . . . Such are the principal qualities attributed equally to Shang Ti and T'ien. In addition, other qualities are ascribed both by the History and the Odes to T'ien. T'ien gives birth to the people; It gives valor and wisdom to princes; It gives blessings to the good and woes to the evil; It ordains the social order, the religious and social ceremonies, and human virtues; It sends down rain; It is gracious to men and helps them; Its will is

1. Hume, Robert Ernest: The World's Living Religions, p. 120

unerring; It does not shorten men's lives, they do that themselves; It is not bound to individuals by ties of biased human affections; It commands men to rectify their character. It gives man his nature, compassionates him, and grants his desires; it is only moved by virtue, but men may cry and pray to it, for it will hear. . . "1

We may conclude, therefore, that the ancients did have some knowledge of God. His worship, however, was one of the prerogatives of the reigning house or family; and as "son of Heaven" the king alone could offer sacrifices to the Highest Divinity on behalf of his nation. The conception of God or Supreme Ruler as presented in the Classics will be further discussed in Chapter III, but it may be noted here that one of the chief elements of weakness in Confucianism is its lack of a supreme personal deity accessible for all the people, instead of to the emperor alone.

#### d. Meaning to the Educated Classes of Today

"What does T'ien or Shang Ti mean, according to the Confucian standard?" This question was put to a number of Chinese scholars. The following replies are typical of the present attitude of the educated people of the country outside of the Christian Church. A scholar, a man of both Chinese and Western learning, and editor of an important educational magazine, says:

. . . . .

1. Lyon, D. Willard: op. cit., p. 25

"T'ien or Shang Ti in Chinese means exactly the same as God in English. But the God-idea is now discredited by the educated people. We do not believe in a personal God any more."<sup>1</sup>

This man has spoken for a very large number of people.

In matters of religion they have done no independent and deep thinking for themselves. Their Confucian education has predisposed them to agnosticism and unbelief. They accept certain views of well-known men, like Huxley and Spencer, as their own, and consider the questions therein involved thus closed and settled. They have thrown overboard the idea of a personal God, as being incompatible with the teachings of modern science. These people consider all religion as superstition, and so cannot see any good in the Christian religion.

Another scholar, an educationalist widely known in Chinese and missionary educational circles, replied:

"Let us exclude for the present the beliefs of the ignorant classes and consider the religious attitude of the educated classes only. To us, the term T'ien or Shang Ti is a collective one and stands for all that is mysterious and unexplained. The ancients were surrounded by mysteries and they had no means of understanding them and so invented the belief in the existence of a mysterious being which they called T'ien or Shang Ti. The idea has persisted to this day because it has been found a useful means of social control. The ignorant classes have no self control. The

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1. Op.cit.p. 26
2. Cf. Ibid., p. 26

'personal God' idea excited fear and so acts as a restraint upon their conduct. As to the references in the Classics about the justice of Heaven, of rewards and punishments, that is only a way of writing and speaking. There is in nature the law of cause and effect, which works positively, and so there is no necessity for postulating a Personal Being in the universe dispensing rewards and punishments."<sup>1</sup>

That religion is useful as a police force in dealing with the ignorant classes that are weak in self-control is an idea that one meets with all the time. The idea is generally entertained by the educated classes with a good deal of self-complacency, for the other side of the statement is that the educated person who knows his duties and rights has no need of religion. To him religion is something that will be outlived. When science gets at the mysteries that still remain and throws on them the light of knowledge, then religion will disappear.<sup>2</sup>

The third scholar, likewise a professor of Chinese History and Philosophy in a university in the country, replied:

"I have thought a great deal on the subject. It seems to me, Christians and Confucianists do not differ very much on the belief in the existence of spiritual and divine being, but in one thing we differ fundamentally. CHRISTIANS SAY: 'WE KNOW THAT GOD IS PERSONAL; WHEREAS WE CONFUCIANISTS SAY: 'WE DO NOT KNOW, FOR WE HAVE NO WAY OF FINDING OUT WHAT GOD IS LIKE."<sup>3</sup>

. . . . .

1. Op.cit. pp. 26-27
2. Cf. Ibid., p. 27
3. Ibid., p. 27

This agnosticism is characteristic. God exists, but He remains the Unknowable. This is the Creed of Confucianism. The first part makes you glow with pleasant anticipation of the wonderful vistas of spiritual insight that may be opened to you, but the second part slams the door right to and you are face to face with a solid stone wall. This stone wall of agnosticism is more difficult to surmount than open hostility, because the agnostic is always self-satisfied. Doubt is the prerequisite of inquiry and knowledge, but the agnostic excludes doubt, for he is positive of his own ignorance. He says, "Human intellect is finite; it is vain for it to strive to know<sup>1</sup> the Unknowable. Honor the Gods, but let them alone."

From this study of the significance of the two terms T'ien and Shang Ti we have found that while in the Classics the two are often used interchangeably, the one, T'ien, is the impersonal, the other, Shang Ti, is the personal term, and so far as the translator, James Legge, is concerned the latter may be thought of as synonymous with our God-idea.

The ancients endowed their Supreme Ruler with all the traits of personality and as one worthy of sacrifice

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1. Op.cit. p. 27

and worship. This act of worship, however, was the prerogative only of the reigning house or family, and the common people themselves had no God who was accessible and to whom they might bow in worship and obeisance.

The Chinese scholars of today hold widely divergent views as regards these two terms. To one the terms are synonymous with the God of the Christian, except that the God-idea is no longer tenable by educated people. To another the terms stand for an impersonal idea of all that is mysterious and unexplained. The educated person who knows his duties and rights has no need for religion or God. The God-idea will be explained away when science has done her perfect work.

To a third outstanding scholar the terms are couched in a veil of mystery and uncertainty and thus issues the cry of the agnostic, "We cannot know". These terms in Confucianism may stand for God but He remains the Unknowable. Human intellect must therefore acknowledge its inability to grasp the infinite and must finally "honor the Gods, but let them alone."

##### 5. Man's Relation to God and the Universe

We have just completed our study of the God-idea as it is contained in the Classics. It is now our purpose to briefly consider man's relation to this

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Supreme Ruler, or God, involving in this relationship a consideration of the problem of prayer, sin and salvation, the future life or belief in immortality, and the question of values or of the highest good, or the summum bonum.

a. Prayer

Prayer if defined in its highest terms, as communion with God, may not rightly be said to appear in the Classics. However, if defined in terms of sacrifices and divination there are innumerable references in the Classics to such a relation to the Supreme Ruler. Much of the advice contained in these classics might be classed as superstition. A specific example of this might be quoted from the Shu-king:

"When you have doubts about any matter consult with your own mind; consult with your high ministers and officers; consult with the common people; consult the tortoise-shell and divining stalks. If you, the shell, the stalks, the ministers and officers, and the common people, all agree about a course, this is what is called a great concord, and the result will be the welfare of your person."

(Shu-king p. 146)

Occasionally, some reference is found to the love or compassion of Heaven, and even to what might approximate a belief in definite answers to petitions:

"Now Shau, the king of Shang, with strength pursues his lawless way. . . . The innocent cry



to Heaven. Heaven loves the people, and the sovereign should reverently carry out this mind of Heaven."

(Shu King p. 154)

"The Duke then divined with the three tortoise-shells and all were favourable. He opened with a key the place where the oracular responses were kept. . . and they also were favourable. He said, 'According to the form of the prognostic the king will take no injury. I . . have got the renewal of his appointment from the three kings, by whom a long futurity has been consulted for.

"When the duke returned, he placed the tablets of the prayer in a metal-bound coffer, and the next day the king got better."

(Shu King p. 154)

"Awful though heaven be, it yet helps the sincere."

(Shu King p. 157)

For the most part, however, we find evidence on the part of the people of their lack of power, of their grievous trouble, of their crying out to Heaven as they are confronted by difficulties and find no power and guidance to sustain them as they pass through deep waters.

"Yen K'ew said, 'It is not that I do not delight in your doctrines, but my strength is insufficient.'"

"The Master said, 'Those whose strength is insufficient give over in the middle of the way, but now you limit yourself.'"

(Analects, Book VI, Chap. X)

"We are unpitied and Heaven sends down calamities on our House, without the least intermission . . . I cannot display wisdom and lead the people to prosperity; and how much less should I be able to reach the knowledge of the decree of Heaven! Yes, I who am but a little child am in the position of one who has to go through a deep water; - I must go and seek where I can cross over."

(Shu King p. 157)

The unvarying moral order and the destiny of man seems to be so determined in strict accordance with their conduct that it would seem futile to importune Heaven to change it.

"He who offends against Heaven has none to whom he can pray."

From the Classics it would appear that while Confucius believed in offering sacrifices he held no belief in the efficacy of personal prayer; once when Confucius was ill, his disciple asked leave to pray for him. He said, "Is that proper?" "Yes", answered the disciple, "In the prayers it is said, 'Prayer has been made to the spirits of the upper and lower worlds.' " The Master replied, "My praying has been long."

Interpreters agree that Confucius declined his disciple's proposal to have prayers made for him. Most of them understand him to say that he had long been praying for himself. However, prayer is the expression of repentance and promise of amendment, to supplicate the help of the spirits. If there is no room for repentance and amendment, then there is no need for praying. The sage's wise and blameless life was his only prayer. The

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1. Moore, George Foote: op. cit., Vol. I, p. 35

silence of Heaven, whether in answer to petition or in matters of guidance is shown in a conversation between Confucius and one of his disciples:

"Tsze - king said, 'If you, master, do not speak, what shall we, your disciples have to record?'

"The Master said, 'Does Heaven speak? The four seasons pursue their courses and all things are continually being produced, but does Heaven say anything?'

(Analects, Book XVII, Chap. XIX)

Prayer, as conscious communion with God, is wholly lacking in the Classics. Reverence in all things is the great ideal, but there is no positive teaching or admonition to ask, in faith believing, that the Supreme Ruler will lend His guidance and protection, His comfort and sustaining presence to man in his needs.

#### b. Sin and Salvation

In the Confucian Classics one finds the highest requirements for a moral life. A splendid ethical case is held up as the ideal. Man is proclaimed to be inherently good, but no provision is made for the inevitable failures and sin incident to human nature as we know it. Sin to the Confucianist is failure to follow the Doctrine of the Mean and to measure up to the principle of reciprocal propriety known as the Silver Rule:

"What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others."

(Li Ki 28:1)

This principle is to be applied especially in the Five Relationships, i.e., between ruler and subject,

father and son, husband and wife, elder brother and younger, friend and friend. The "Superior Man" is the specific formulation of the Confucian ethical ideal for the individual. This is described one hundred and five times in the Analects alone, often by contrast with the behavior of the "mean man". Various virtues are exhorted, e.g., propriety, sincerity, faithfulness, studiousness, justice, benevolence, reverence, moderation, calmness, truth-seeking.

"Wisdom, benevolence, and fortitude, -  
these are the universal virtues."  
(Doctrine of the Mean, 20:8)

Man is born in uprightness and the tendency of his nature is to be good and to follow these universal virtues. In the many references in the Classics relating to sacrifices to Heaven, and to the sun and moon, we find no single instance of the idea of personal expiation or atonement. Sin and salvation as we know it and the concept of a future judgment or any method of finally vindicating its own ideals of human morality are entirely lacking in the Classics.

#### c. Future Life or Immortality

Although we find little that satisfies us in the Classics as regards prayer and atonement for sin, I believe we do find abundant evidence for a belief in some sort of spiritual continuity though we may not be willing to call it personal immortality.

"In the thirtieth year of his age, Shun was called to employment. Thirty years he was on the throne. Fifty years afterwards he went on high and died.

(Note: Chinese text difficult. Probable that the term "went on high" is appropriate to the death of the Son of Heaven; and that the meaning is that Shun went to heaven.)"

(Shu King, p. 45)

In the Shu King we find recorded a prayer which involves belief in spiritual beings and of life after death.

"The grand historiographer had written on tablets his prayer, which was to this effect: A.B., your great descendant, is suffering from a severe and violent disease; - if you three kings have in heaven the charge of watching over him, Heaven's great son, let me Tan be a substitute for his person. (He offers to die in stead of his brother; thinks his offer might somehow be accepted through the intervention of the great kings. Then proceeds to give his reasons for making such an offer.) I was lovingly obedient to my father; I am possessed of many abilities and arts, which fit me to serve spiritual beings. Your great descendant, on the other hand, has not so many abilities and arts as I, and is not so capable of serving spiritual beings."

(Shu King, p. 153)

It is difficult to determine from the Classics just what Confucius' view on immortality was. In one instance, Ke Lao, a disciple asked about serving the spirits of the dead, and the master replied:

"While you are not able to serve men, how can you serve their spirits?"

Ke Lao added,

"I venture to ask about death? He was answered, 'While you do not know about life, how can you know about death?'"

While this statement is difficult to interpret it is

probable that rather than connoting scepticism or unbelief, it is more like a case of mild agnosticism. Spirits and death are obscure and involve unanswerable problems. Therefore, there is no solution and such problems are not to be considered.

In another passage, however, we find a conception of spiritual immortality so much higher and more spiritual it is difficult to think of the sage as having uttered these words. A disciple asks Confucius the meaning of the names kwei and shan. The master said:

"The intelligent spirit is of the shan nature, and shows that in fullest measure; the animal soul is of the kwei nature, and shows that in fullest measure. It is the union of kwei and shan that forms the highest exhibition of doctrine. All the living must die, and dying, return to the ground; that is what is called kwei. The bones and flesh moulder below, and, hidden away, become the earth of the fields. But the spirit issues forth, and is displayed on high in a condition of glorious brightness."

(Li Ki, Book XXI, Section II)

This one utterance possibly draws as near to our Christian doctrine of immortality as any which may be found in the Classics. This, however, is an isolated instance, and not a common feature of the Classics. Ancestor worship and belief in departed spirits is prevalent, but for the most part there is no reference to a belief in personal immortality. Confucianism, as found in the Classics, is preeminently a religion for this life.

#### d. The Highest Good or the Summum Bonum

The Summum Bonum, or the highest value, to the

Confucianist is the cultivation of the person.

"From the emperor down to the mass of the people, all must consider the cultivation of the person the root of everything."

(The Great Learning, p. 6)

The fundamental practical principle in Confucianism is social propriety, or reciprocity. This principle, applied to the Five Relationships as stated previously, is the ideal for the "Superior Man" and for one who would follow the "Way" or "The Golden Mean". This then is the highest value or the greatest good.

#### 6. The Religion of the Masses

The philosophy of Confucianism as presented thus far in this chapter is based upon the Ancient Classics and refers chiefly to the official religion. The state religion is instituted for no other purpose but to influence the good working of the Tao, or universal order. Thus the exercise of that religion is reasonably the highest duty of rulers, whom nature has assigned to secure the good working of the Tao among men. The people are not allowed to take part in it, except by erecting the state temples and altars, and keeping them in good repair at their own cost, and by their own labor. The only religion allowed to them by the state is the worship of their own ancestors. This practice of ancestor worship is a continuation, after the parents' death, of the absolutely devoted filial piety which Confucianism requires all its

adherents to show to parents, even while they are still alive. Yet, as everywhere on this globe, religious instincts in China, or wherever Confucianism holds sway, go their own way in spite of official rules and regulations. It will now be our purpose to consider briefly the religion of the masses, which presents in many ways a more primitive aspect than the official religion of the Classics. Not content with the worship of their ancestors, the people freely indulge in the worship of Confucian deities.

In the official religion worship of the spirits of the soil and grain fills a large place. To the common people are left only the offering to the local spirit of the soil and grain at the village shrine, and the offering of the clan to the spirit of their own fields. To these local spirits temples or shrines are erected everywhere. Multitudes of gods not acknowledged in the state religion are worshipped among the people. Popular temples in the strict view of the law are illegitimate and always liable to be closed by the authorities, but there continually exist thousands of temples and idols to whom offerings and sacrifices are made, and to these temples individuals resort with their private needs. The Gods of this popular religion are worshipped not only in the temples, but in the homes of the people, where they are represented by pictures on the wall or by small images set on the



shelf with the tablets of the ancestors, sometimes enclosed in a shrine. The patron deities of the various callings are also frequently found in shops and houses, and offerings of food and wine are set up before these gods. In villages and other localities they have temples for the worship of mountains, streams, rocks, stones, and the like, and everywhere do the people resort to the temples and worship the idols after their own fashion.<sup>1</sup> This popular religion is exercised all through the empire. The images of gods exist by tens of thousands, the temples by thousands. The temples are the centers of the religious life of the people. To these numerous men and women, young and old, daily resort in order to pray, offering incense sticks, food, and dainties, bowing and prostrating themselves before the images.

It may thus be clearly observed that the official worship as set forth in the Classics has among the common people degenerated into a system of idolatry and animism.

#### E. Summary

It has been found from a study of the Chinese Classics :

First, that the cosmos or universe is to be explained in terms of an impersonal cosmic energy and

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1. Moore, George Feote: op. cit., Vol. I, p. 65 ff.

principle which produced Heaven and Earth. These two gods in turn produced all things.

Second, that the religion of Confucianism is permeated with animistic conceptions and is a union of nature worship and ancestor worship, sacrifices being offered by the Emperor on behalf of the people to Heaven and to Earth, ancestors, gods of the grain and of the ground, to the sun and moon, to the hills and rivers, and to a host of spirits.

Third, that the basic philosophic assumption underlying the whole system of Confucian religion and ethics is the Way of Nature (the Tao), or the Doctrine of the Mean. This path or norm is to be faithfully pursued by all men, who by their inherent nature are good. Man's nature is subject to influence from without, and so may be diverted from the path, but this is not in accord with his inward nature, which is inherently good and which has been divinely implanted in him.

"The tendency of man's nature is good. There<sup>1</sup> are none but have this tendency to good." Since man is thus to perfectly follow the path prescribed for him, one would naturally presuppose the existence of a moral law in Nature which would enable him to attain to such an ideal. Such a conviction was found to exist in the

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1. Mencius, 6:1

Classics in their belief in the moral constancy of nature. "Nature is just and requites good with good and evil with evil. . . . Nature is moral and acts in a moral way."<sup>1</sup> It was found th<sup>at</sup> Nature or Heaven prescribes certain principles or rules for the right conduct of man, and there follows from this supposition a fatalistic submission to the inevitable,,which the Superior Man meets with fortitude.

From the Classics it is not to be concluded that a personal God or Divine Being exists who helps men stand with fortitude and meet the inevitable. The term T'ien or Heaven, is found connoting an impersonal Supreme Power or moral rule in the universe.

Shang Ti, or Ruler Above is the personalized term and more nearly approaches our God-idea. No basis, however, was found in the Chinese Sacred Books for a belief in the efficacy of prayer to such a Being, if prayer be thought of in its highest form, as communion with God. Innumerable sacrifices are offered up to Shang Ti and to local deities, but Heaven's decrees are inevitable and predetermined and it would, therefore, seem futile to attempt to intervene or to enter into personal relationship with such a Being.

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1. Pott, William S. A.: Chinese Political Philosophy, taken from Lyon, D. W.: Religious Values in Confucianism, p. 13

After studying the Classics one is convinced that the problems of sin, salvation, and the future life are not an inherent part of the thinking of the writers of these Sacred Books, and so far such concepts have little influence on the Confucian philosophy of life. Man is inherently good; his present duty is to follow the way, the golden Mean; and to maintain harmonious relationships with his neighbors. This ideal or principle of reciprocal propriety is summed up in the Silver Rule, "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others,"<sup>1</sup> and in the Five Relationships of man in society. Faithful adherence to such standards will produce the "Superior Man" which is the summum bonum in Confucian Philosophy. It was found that the Classics do give evidence of belief in immortality but neither the Ancients, nor Confucius, nor his disciples were primarily concerned with metaphysical speculation or religious contemplation. Their interest, and hence their philosophy was this-worldly, and lay in the field of political reform and ethical cultivation of the person here and now until he attain to the character of the Superior Man.

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1. Li-Ki, 28:1

CHAPTER II  
THE PHILOSOPHY OF BUDDHISM

## CHAPTER II

### THE PHILOSOPHY OF BUDDHISM

Buddhism was the first religion in the world to become international. It has exhibited a powerful propagandist element, and so has converted to its creed the majority of the Mongol nations. Buddhism is the popular religion of China today. Estimates as to the number of its adherents throughout the world range from Hume's<sup>1</sup> conservative estimate of 137,000,000 to Clarke's<sup>2</sup> estimate of some 300,000,000 of human beings. The most excessive claim is 500,000,000 made by T. W. Rhys Davids.<sup>3</sup> But we find this claim qualified considerably on the next page of his book:

"Not one of the 500,000,000 who offer flowers now and then on the Buddhist shrines, who are more or less moulded by Buddhist teachings, is only or altogether a Buddhist."<sup>4</sup>

#### A. Rise of Buddhism

The religion of the followers of Gautama Buddha arose in the sixth century B. C. as an off-shoot of the prevailing Hindu religion of north India, though the founder doubtless did not set out to found a new religion.

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1. Cf. Hume, Robert Ernest: The World's Living Religions, p. 60
2. Cf. Clarke, James Freeman: Ten Great Religions, Vol. I, p. 146
3. Rhys Davids, T. W.: Buddhism, A Sketch, p. 6
4. Hume, Robert Ernest: op. cit., p. 60

It was a protest against the prevailing Hindu formalism. Ethically, it sought to reform by rejecting the authority of the Hindu Sacred Books, the Vedas, and in teaching an independent morality, and philosophically in denying any permanent substratum in the world or in any of the gods of the Vedic pantheon. Independently of all Vedic theories and philosophy it offered a way for the attainment of salvation which was set forth as being the discovery of<sup>1</sup> the founder.

#### B. The Life of the Founder, Buddha

Since the creed of Buddhism is so inextricably bound up with the life of its founder, it is important that we seek to discover just what the experience was which led to the formation of what has become one of<sup>2</sup> the world's three universal religions.

Siddhartha, afterward known as the Buddha,<sup>3</sup>

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1. Cf. Thomas, Edward John: "Buddha and Buddhism", article, Encyclopedia Britannica, 14th edition, Vol. 4.
2. "Only two other religions in the world today claim to be universal. The world-wide outlook of Christianity started more than 500 years later, and that of Islam more than 1100 years later than Buddhism" - Hume, Robert Ernest: op. cit., p. 60
3. Buddha is not a proper name, but an official title. Just as we ought not to say Jesus Christ, but always Jesus the Christ, so we should say Siddhartha the Buddha, or Sakya-muni the Buddha, or Gautama the Buddha. The first of these names Siddhartha, was the baptismal name given by his father, and means "The fulfillment of every wish". Saka-muni means "The hermit of the race of Sakya," -- Sakya being the ancestral name of his father's race. See Clarke, James F.: Ten Great Religions, Vol. I, p. 148

lived in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. He was a young prince and in the Buddhist canonical scriptures we find many stories and poems containing wonderful accounts concerning his life; for example, his mother's dream of a non-human conception, and his supernatural birth from a queen mother.<sup>1.</sup> Many marvels accompanied his advent, and a Hindu saint prophesied the future greatness of the infant. One prophecy at his conception was that he would renounce the world on seeing a sick man, an old man, and a corpse.

As a young prince, Siddartha seems to have gone through that deep experience out of which the great prophets of mankind have always been born. While out driving one day the young prince was deeply impressed by four passing sights, viz., a decrepit old man, a loathesomely sick man, a corpse, and a calm religious ascetic unperturbed by any suffering. These evils of the world pressed on his heart and brain; the very air seemed full of mortality; all things were passing away. Was anything permanent? Anything stable? Nothing but truth; only the absolute, eternal law of things. "Let me see that", said he, "and I can give lasting peace to mankind. Then shall I become their deliverer".<sup>2.</sup> So amid great opposition, he left the palace one night, and at twenty-nine years of age exchanged the position of a prince for that of a mendicant. "I will never return to the palace", said he, "till I have attained

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1. Cf. Warren, BT, pp. 42-48.

2. Hume, Robert Ernest: The World's Living Religions, p.62.



to the sight of the divine law, and so become Buddha." <sup>1.</sup>

For six years he practiced the strictest sort of asceticism among the Brahmans, but to no satisfaction. They were unable to help him find true peace and that profound inward rest called Nirvana. During these six years he practiced Brahmanic austerities in order to subdue the senses. Then he became satisfied that the path to perfection did not lie that way. He thereupon renounced this path of asceticism and alone in quiet meditation one night, while sitting cross-legged under a bo-tree, he worked out by analysis what seemed to him to be a simple psychological solution of the cause and cure of evil. The word which seems most completely to have characterized this critical experience was "Buddha" the past participle of the Sanskrit verb "to become enlightened", or "wise" and that word <sup>2.</sup> has been his special title, "Buddha", ever since.

Gautama, the Buddha, spent the remainder of his time as a wanderer preaching and teaching his newly discovered doctrine not only to the order of monks which he founded, but especially to the poor doubters uncertain of their way. He met with opposition, insult, neglect, scorn, and fierce opposition from the Hindu Scribes and Pharisees, the leading Brahmans, and died at the age of eighty, beloved, venerated and all but worshipped by his

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1. Clarke, James Freeman: Ten Great Religions, Vol. I, p. 148.
2. Cf. Hume, Robert Ernest: The World's Living Religions, pp. 62-63.

disciples. One of the striking facts is the way in which Buddha, who taught no divine object of worship, but who labored self-sacrificingly for the saving of the world, has himself been loved and worshipped as emotional admiration grew into formal adoration of him as superior<sup>1.</sup> even to the gods of Hinduism.

The legend of his early life has been explained as mythology, but all admit the historical existence of the Buddha. At his death a general council of his most eminent disciples was called to fix the doctrine and discipline of the church. This body sat for seven months and the three-fold division of the Sacred Scriptures of Buddhism was the result of their work, for Gautama himself wrote nothing, but as was also the case with Confucius and with Jesus Christ, he taught by conversation only.

### C. The Sacred Scriptures of Buddhism

The Buddhist canon exists in a three-fold division, the Tripitaka, meaning "Three Baskets" of Wisdom. The first of these, the Vinaya Pitaka, consists of the two hundred twenty seven rules of discipline (vinaya) binding on the monks. The four most fundamental of these rules are those which forbid unchastity, theft, taking of life or inciting to suicide, and making a false claim to supernormal powers. The third Pitaka, Abhidhamma, (higher doctrine) deals chiefly with the intricate points

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1. Ibid, pp. 65-66.

of Buddhist psychology and doctrine. It is to the second division, the Sutta Pitaka, (teaching basket) to which we shall for the most part turn our attention, as this is the most important section for doctrine and philosophy. It is arranged in five collections of Suttas or discourses called nikayas. The first four consist chiefly of discourses attributed to the Buddha, but among them are included poems, legends, dialogues, and commentaries, and a number of them are ascribed to disciples. These are not classified according to any doctrinal principle.

Included among the Suttas is one which is traditionally believed to be the first exposition of the doctrine, preached by the Buddha when he began his mission at Benares, "The Foundation of the Kingdom of Righteousness Sutta", (the Dhamma-Kakka-Ppavattana-Sutta) or sometimes called "The Sutta of Turning the Wheel of the Doctrine".

T. W. Rhys Davids in his Introduction to this Sutta states:

"It would be difficult to estimate too highly the historical value of this Sutta. There can be no reasonable doubt that the very ancient tradition accepted by all Buddhists as to the substance of the discourse is correct, and that we really have in it a summary of the words in which the great Indian thinker and reformer for the first time successfully promulgated his new ideas. And it presents to us in a few short and pithy sentences the very essence of that remarkable system which has had so profound an influence on the religious history of so large a portion of the human race.

"The name given to it by the early Buddhists - the setting in motion onwards of the royal chariot-

wheel of the supreme dominion of the Dhamma - means not 'the turning of the wheel of the law', as it has been usually rendered; but 'the inauguration, or foundation, of the Kingdom of Righteousness.'

"There is a legend of the Treasure of the Wheel which attempts to describe this most important event. Like the day of Pentecost by the early Christians, this Inauguration of the Kingdom of Righteousness was rightly regarded by them as a turning-point in the history of their faith." (SBE, 11:140)

In later times the poets of every Buddhist clime have vied with one another in endeavoring to express their sense of the importance of the occasion:

"The evening was like a lovely maiden; the stars were the pearls upon her neck; the dark clouds her braided hair; the deepening space her flowing robe. As a crown she had the heavens where the angels dwell; these three worlds were as her body; her eyes were the white lotus flowers which open to the rising moon; and her voice was as it were the humming of the bees. To do homage to the Buddha, and to hear the first preaching of his word, this lovely maiden came. The angels throng to hear the discourse until the heavens are empty; and the sound of their approach is like the rain of a storm; all the worlds in which there are sentient beings are made void of life, so that the congregation assembled was in number infinite, but at the sound of the blast of the glorious trumpet of Sakka, the king of the gods, they became still as a waveless sea. And then each of the countless listeners thought that the sage was looking towards himself, and was speaking to him in his own tongue, though the language was Magadhi!"

(SBE, 11:142)

It cannot be denied that there is a real beauty of an oriental kind in the various expressions which the Buddhists use; and that there was real ground for the enthusiasm which gave them birth. Never in the history of the world had a scheme of salvation been put forth so

simple in its nature, so free from any superhuman agency, so independent of, so even antagonistic to the belief in a soul, the belief in God, and the hope for a future life. It was a turning point in the religious history of man when a reformer, full of the most earnest moral purpose, and trained in all the intellectual culture of his time, put forth deliberately, and with a knowledge of the opposing views, the doctrine of a salvation to be found here, in this life, in an inward change of heart, to be brought about by perseverance in a mere system of self-culture and self-control.<sup>1.</sup>

The original Buddhism of Buddha is by many authorities denied the designation of being a religion, as may be noted from the following statement:

"Buddhism, at least in its earliest and truest form, is no religion at all, but a mere system of morality and philosophy founded on a pessimistic theory of life."<sup>2.</sup>

Whether or not this statement is true we shall be better able to judge after we have concluded our study. It is now our purpose to seek to discover the fundamental life philosophy and so-called pessimistic theory of life held by the Buddha and his disciples. For this study we shall refer to the Buddhist Scriptures and particularly to the Sutta known as the "Foundation of the Kingdom of Righteousness Sutta".

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1. Cf. SBE 11:143.

2. Monier-Williams, Monier, Buddhism, p. 537.

We have previously stated that the essence of philosophy is man thinking out the ultimate, perplexing and interesting problems of existence; it is the personal quest for a rich and consistent doctrine of human values and purposes and for an understanding of the meaning of human life as a whole.<sup>1.</sup> What then did life mean to the Buddha? What were the perplexing problems he was facing? And what was his solution to the problem of the universe and man's relation to such?

#### D. Philosophy of Buddhism

The Buddha's philosophy was an applied philosophy, and in the sermons and sayings attributed to him there is but little metaphysics that does not have a direct and practical bearing.<sup>2.</sup> There is no consistent system of philosophy but there are several dominant doctrines which are central to Buddhistic philosophy. The principles contained in the "Foundation of the Kingdom of Righteousness Sutta" are the very pith of Buddhistic belief and practice. We shall first, however, consider several other philosophic doctrines, knowledge of which is essential to a true understanding and agreement of the "Wheel of the Doctrine".

##### 1. The Law of Karma and Transmigration

"The supreme power which is actually in operation in the universe is the 'law of

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1. Leighton, Joseph A.: The Field of Philosophy, pp. 20-21.
2. Cf. Warren, BT, p. 112.

the deed', an inescapable, inexorable, impersonal principle of justice and moral retribution."1.

"Not in the sky, not in the midst of the sea, not if we enter into the clefts of the mountains, is there known a spot where a man might be freed from an evil deed."2.

The Karma is the law of consequences, by which every act committed in one life entails results in another. This law operates until one reaches Nirvana.

"Karma", said Buddha, "is the most essential property of all beings; it is inherited from previous births; it is the cause of all good and evil, and the reason why some are mean and some are exalted when they come into the world. It is like the shadow which always accompanies the body."3.

The particular manner in which the law of Karma operates is to produce reincarnation in this same miserable world according to a person's deeds. Every moral or immoral action which a man performs produces its result. When a man dies the whole results of his life are summed up in a new being, who takes his place by the law of Karma. He does not pass into another body, but another being appears as the consequence of his conduct.<sup>4</sup>.

Beneath the earth are said to be four great hells, besides many inferior ones, destined for the purifi-

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1. Hume, Robert Ernest: The World's Living Religions, p. 70.
2. Dhamma-pada, p. 127, quoted from Hume, Ibid., p. 70.
3. Clarke, James Freeman: Ten Great Religions, Vol. I, p.161.
4. Cf. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 170.

cation of the wicked, and the destruction of Karma; of these hells the lowest one is the most horrible. One single sin can be enough to bring on a person an entire Kalpa (at least 10,000 years) of suffering in one of these hells. What then must many sins bring? There was no forgiveness of sins, and as it was possible for a person to keep on sinning during the time he suffered punishment we see that he had very little chance of ever reaching Nirvana. Karma then is the ground work of all evil and endless births and rebirths is the resultant.

"On ignorance depends Karma;  
On Karma depends consciousness;  
On consciousness depends name and form;  
On name and form depend the six organs of sense;  
On the six organs of sense depend contact;  
On contact depends sensation;  
On sensation depends desire;  
On desire depends attachment;  
On attachment depends existence;  
On existence depends birth;  
On birth depends old age, and death, sorrow,  
lamentation, misery, grief, and despair."  
(Warren, BT, p. 84)

"Thus the entire aggregation of misery arises but on complete fading out and cessation of ignorance ceases karma; on the cessation of karma ceases consciousness and so on until on the cessation of existence ceases birth, and old age, death, sorrow, etc. disappear and thus does the entire aggregation of misery cease."  
(Warren, BT, p. 84)

When Gautama attained Buddhahood he breathed forth the solemn yet victorious utterance which has never been omitted by any of the Buddhas:



"Through birth and rebirth's endless round,  
Seeking in vain, I hastened on,  
To find who framed this edifice.  
That misery! - birth incessantly!

"O builder! I've discovered thee!  
This fabric thou shalt ne'er rebuild!  
Thy rafters all are broken now  
And pointed roof demolished lies!  
This mind has demolition reached,  
And seen the last of all desire!  
(Warren, BT, 83)

## 2. The Delusion of Self

According to Buddhistic philosophy this person upon whom the law of karma and transmigration is operative is not a real self. The so-called "Ego" is not a genuine personality, but only a temporary worthless conglomeration of desires and psychic tendencies, just as "the word 'chariot' is but a convenient designation and a name for pole, axle, wheels, chariot-body and banner staff".<sup>1.</sup>

There is no self, no "Ego". He grasps the four-fold emptiness disclosed in the words:

"I am nowhere a somewhatness for anyone, and nowhere for me is there a somewhatness of anyone."<sup>2.</sup>

That is, I have no "Ego" anywhere, nor have I a somewhatness for anyone - that is, a somethingness, the opposite of nothingness. There is no "Ego" anywhere. Therefore has it been said:

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1. Warren, BT, p. 133.
2. Ibid, p. 146.

"Misery only doth exist, none miserable.  
No doer is there; naught save the deed is found.  
Nirvana is, but not the man who seeks it  
The Path exists, but not the traveler on it."  
(Warren, BT, p. 146)

This denial of a real self carries with it the postulate of the impermanence of all things. There is no being, there is only a becoming. This is to be accepted as literally true of all things; gods as well as the tiniest atom are equally included. Nothing is excluded from the sweep of this philosophy. This is the explanation of the atheism with which the Buddha has been charged. He was not an atheist; he took the gods of India for granted, but it made no difference to him whether they were real beings or not. They also were subject to the same law of impermanence and change. There being no essential difference between the most exalted of them and men, why should anyone look to them? They could give no assistance which man could not render himself. They were in the possession of no powers man did not have at his disposal. The result was that the Buddha constructed a system in which no god was needed. So then, worship was useless, and prayer an empty form.

### 3. Does Buddhism deny the existence of the soul?

If anyone accepts this theory of the non-existence of a genuine personality or self, the question might well be asked, does Buddhism then deny the existence of the soul? And, if this be true, how may one account

for the belief in the transmigration of souls?

Seemingly the original Buddhism does deny the existence of the soul. Rhys Davids, one of the most recent and most learned writers, says that it teaches that man is a flux of emotions, thoughts, acts, with no abiding principle behind them. The unlearned and sensual man regards the soul as residing in sensation and matter, and so gets the idea "I am". But the wise man who has escaped both from ignorance and from acquired knowledge does not have this idea, "I am".<sup>1.</sup>

"How blest the happy solitude  
Of him who hears and knows the truth!  
How blest is harmlessness towards all,  
And self-restraint towards living things!  
How blest from passion to be free,  
All sensuous joys to leave behind!  
Yet far the highest bliss of all  
To quit th' illusion false - 'I am'".  
(Warren, BT, 87)

The whole purpose of original Buddhism was to teach men how to escape the miseries of life by the destruction of desire. Among these is the wish for continued existence, so this must be destroyed. The object being to produce perfect peace by the destruction of all desire - even the desire for continued existence - the remedy must be found in knowledge, which is the Buddhistic way of salvation. Buddha had tried the method of extinguishing all desire by ascetic mortifications and found them insufficient. His great discovery was that salvation came through knowledge, knowledge of the laws of being.

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Cf.  
1. Clarke, James Freeman: Ten Great Religions, Vol. I, p. 168.

He reached that state not by reasoning or philosophy, which he declared can never produce knowledge, but only fluctuating opinion. To him knowledge came by an intuitive insight of spiritual, moral, and physical laws. To destroy all desire, the desire for future existence must be destroyed. This is destroyed by seeing that there is no soul, no personal identity, no "Ego" to continue.<sup>1.</sup> Thus Buddhism seems to deny the existence of the soul.

But, as has been noted, Buddhism teaches transmigration. How then can there be a migration of souls from one body to another unless there are souls to migrate? It would seem that the Buddha should have dropped this doctrine altogether but it offered him a moral explanation of the cruel inequalities of life. He could not find sufficient reasons in men's conduct in this life to justify the measure of blessing and suffering which was the lot of his fellow human beings. It must be because of good deeds or wickedness done in previous life. But how could this be if there were no soul?

And here is one of the most difficult and subtle points in the whole theory of Buddhism, so important that it is repeated many times over in the Pali Literature. There is no soul, but something does or may pass over into another existence. It is the sum total or the net result of all the actions which have been performed by the individuals who have followed one after another in the series.

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1. Cf. Clarke, James Freeman: Ten Great Religions, Vol. II, p. 170.

What causes him to be born at all if he is not the same individual who had lived before? So long as anyone dies and still has desire or craving (in the Buddhist sense) left in his heart another set of skandhas (the parts or "aggregates" which make up a human being) is bound to assemble and form another individual who must take up the task where his predecessor left it. And so it goes on from one individual to another until in the end the series to which they have all belonged comes to an end forever when one arises who succeeds in crushing out desire, becomes an Arahāt, and enters Nirvana. His body may keep on living for years, but when it dies the skandhas fall apart and there is nothing to require another set of skandhas to gather again, for there is nothing left around which they may assemble. Karma simply ceases to<sup>1.</sup> function in this case.

This, therefore, would of necessity eliminate the continuance of personality as such. This absolute dissolution of individuality is essential to the attainment of Arahātship. Gautama held that freedom from pain, absolute ease, happiness, was incompatible with existence as a distinct individual (whether animal, god, or man).

According to his teachings one was not to trouble and confuse oneself by the discussion of speculative

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1. Cf. Soper, Edmund: The Religions of Mankind, p. 194.

questions as to past or future existence, or even as to the presence within the body of a soul. Buddhism is not only independent of the theory of soul, but regards the consideration of that theory as worse than profitless, as the source of manifold delusions and superstitions. Practically, this comes to much the same thing as the denial of<sup>1.</sup> the existence of the soul.

#### 4. Nirvana

The technical term in Buddhism which has become most familiar in English is probably the word Nirvana, which has already been referred to a number of times.

As has been noted, an utter extinction of personality and consciousness would seem to be implied by the fundamental principles of Buddhism and also by explicit statements of the Buddha, such as:

"Those whose minds are disgusted with a future existence, and whose desires do not increase, go out like this lamp."<sup>2.</sup>

Because of such statements scholars disagree as to the meaning of the term Nirvana. The term literally means blowing out, thus extinction of wind, calm. Some claim Nirvana involves complete annihilation which is thought to be the highest object of desire to the Buddhist.

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1. SBE, 11:243.
2. SBE, 10:239, quoted from Hume, Robert Ernest, World's Living Religions, p. 72.

1.  
Clarke, however, emphatically denies this, as do many others, chiefly on the ground that such a belief is not in accordance with human nature. He quotes Tennyson in this respect:

"Whatever crazy sorrow saith,  
No life that breathes with human breath  
Hath ever truly longed for death.

'Tis life of which our nerves are scant,  
O life, not death, for which we pant,  
More life, and fuller that we want."

He absolutely opposes this opinion that a third of the human race longed to be annihilated, on the ground that the word Nirvana means a peace and bliss which the Buddhists declare can be attained in this life, and that Buddha himself entered Nirvana long before his death. Clarke believes that Nirvana means immovable rest; that it probably means what Christianity means by the rest of the soul hereafter in God; what Jesus meant when He said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you."<sup>2.</sup>

The Buddhist asserts Nirvana as the object of all his hope, yet, if you ask him what it is, he may reply, "Nothing". But this cannot, according to Clarke, mean that the highest good of man is annihilation. He means simply that it is no thing; that it is the opposite of all we know, the contradiction of what we call life now, a state so sublime, so wholly different from anything we

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1. Clarke, James Freeman: Ten Great Religions, Vol. II, p. 332.
2. Cf. Ibid, p. 332.

know or can know now, that it is the same thing as nothing to us. All present life is change; that is permanence; all present life is going up and down; that is stability; all present life is the life of sense; that is spirit.<sup>1.</sup>

To Warren, Nirvana is a state of nothingness. If you think of nothing you do not think. This nothingness when temporary is a trance; when permanent, Nirvana. Hume, I believe, aptly defines the term when he states:

"Nirvana does mean the highest conceivable freedom from all disturbances. It is chiefly a negative condition, - passionless peace."<sup>2.</sup>

This is the incomparable peaceful state, the summum bonum of all true seekers.

In one of his discourses the Buddha states:

"And being, O priests, myself subject to birth, I perceived the wretchedness of what is subject to birth, and craving the incomparable security of a Nirvana free from birth, I attained the incomparable security of a Nirvana free from birth; And the knowledge and the insight sprang up within me, 'my deliverance is unshakable; this is my last existence; no more shall I be born again'".<sup>3.</sup>

Nirvana then to the Buddha and to his disciples was the cessation of all desire, freedom from Karma and consequently from rebirths; in short, the attainment of

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1. Cf. Clarke, James Freeman: Ten Great Religions, Vol. II, p. 162.
2. Warren, BT, p. 281.
3. Hume, Robert Ernest: The World's Living Religions, p. 72.



passionless peace. To the Buddha such a state meant emancipation and ultimate triumph, both now and hereafter. At the moment of his passing away from existence, one of his disciples uttered these stanzas:

"When he who from all craving want was free,  
Who to Nibbana's tranquil state had reached,  
When the great sage finished his span of life,  
No grasping struggle vexed that steadfast heart.

"All resolute, and with unshaken mind,  
He calmly triumphed o'er the pain of death,  
E'en as a bright flame dies away, so was  
The last emancipation of his heart."  
(SBE 11:118)

Nirvana to the Buddha was a state of bliss which might be attained ~~to~~ here and now in this world. As to existence after death, and as to whether the term for him ever connoted final annihilation, he does not deign to state.<sup>1</sup> This is forcefully set forth in one of his discourses concerning such unanswerable questions as the existence of the soul after death:

"Malunkyaputta, bear always in mind what it is that I have not elucidated, and what it is that I have elucidated. And what ... have I not elucidated? I have not elucidated ... that the world is not eternal. I have not elucidated that the world is finite. I have not elucidated that the world is infinite; I have not elucidated that the soul and the body are identical; I have not elucidated that the soul is one thing and the body another; I have not elucidated that the saint exists after death; I have not elucidated that the saint does not exist after death; I have not elucidated that the saint both exists and does not exist after death; I have not elucidated that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death. And why? Because this profits

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1. Warren, BT, p. 338.

not, nor has to do with the fundamentals of religion, nor tends to aversion, absence of passion, cessation, quiescence, the supernatural faculties, supreme wisdom, and Nirvana; therefore have I not elucidated it."

"And what have I elucidated? Misery ... the origin of misery have I elucidated; the cessation of misery have I elucidated; and the path leading to the cessation of misery have I elucidated."

(Warren, BT, p. 122)

"Vaccha, the theory that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death, is a jungle, a wilderness, a puppet-show a writhing and a fetter, and is coupled with misery, ruin, despair, and agony, and does not tend to aversion, absence of passion, cessation, quiescence, knowledge, supreme wisdom, and Nirvana."

(Warren, BT, p. 125)

It is due to this belief in Nirvana as the summum bonum that the Buddha and his followers have ever practiced mystic meditation. Concentration holds a prominent place in the Suttas. It consists in fixing attention on one chosen point or subject, so that the mind passes through different stages until final absorption or cessation of all being and desire is reached as one enters the state of Nirvana.

##### 5. The Three Characteristics of Being

Before proceeding to our study of the Doctrines of the Wheel, we shall first consider what it is in Buddhist philosophy which has so universally branded it with the term "pessimistic". This concept in Buddhism

is that there is no such thing as mere existence. "According to Buddha's pessimistic analysis of the universe, to be means to be evanescent, miserable, and impersonal."<sup>1.</sup> Buddha was convinced that there are Three Characteristics which inhere in all things, and since this is true it is self-evident that in the very nature and constitution of things that no good is anywhere possible. These characteristics are as follows:

"Whether Buddhas arise, O priests, or whether Buddhas do not arise, it remains a fact and the fixed and necessary constitution of being, that all its constituents are transitory. This fact a Buddha discovers and masters, and when he has discovered and mastered it, he announces, teaches, publishes, proclaims, minutely explains, and makes it clear, that all the constituents of being are transitory.

"Whether Buddhas arise, O priests, or whether Buddhas do not arise, it remains a fact and fixed and necessary constitution of being, that all its constituents are misery. This fact a Buddha discovers and masters, and when he has discovered and mastered it, he announces, teaches, publishes, proclaims, discloses, minutely explains, and makes it clear, that all the constituents of being are misery.

"Whether Buddhas arise, O priests, or whether Buddhas do not arise, it remains a fact and the fixed and necessary constitution of being, that all its elements are lacking in an Ego. This fact a Buddha discovers and masters, and when he has discovered and mastered it, he announces, teaches, publishes, proclaims, discloses, minutely explains, and makes it clear, that all the elements of being are lacking in an Ego."

(Warren, BT, Introduction, xx)

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1. Hume, Robert Ernest: The World's Living Religions, p. 71.

Since to the young prince all things were transitory, all existence was full of misery, and since there is no real personality or "Ego", it is not to be wondered at that he most assiduously sought release and escape and attempted to discover something permanent and satisfying.

It was from two profound convictions that Gautama took his departure - the evil of perpetual change, which is one of the Three Characteristics, and the possibility of something permanent. He might have used the language of the Book of Ecclesiastes, and cried, "Vanity of vanities! all is vanity!" The profound gloom of that wonderful book is based on the same course of thought as that of the Buddha, namely, that everything goes round and round in a circle; that nothing moves forward; that there is no new thing under the sun; that the sun rises and sets, and rises again; that the wind blows north and south, and east and west, and then returns according to its circuits. Where can rest be found? Where peace? Where any certainty? Siddhartha was young; but he saw age approaching. He was in health; but he knew that sickness and death were lying in wait for him. He could not escape from the sight of this perpetual round of growth and decay, life and death, joy and woe. He cried out, from the depths of his soul for something stable, permanent, real. He was assured that this emancipation from change

and decay was to be found in knowledge, not learning, nor speculative knowledge, nor the power of reasoning, but INTUITIVE KNOWLEDGE, the sight of eternal truth, the perception of the unchanging laws of the universe. At last he saw the truth, he became wide awake. Illusions disappeared; the reality was before him. He was the<sup>1.</sup> Buddha, - THE MAN WHO KNEW.

The solution to the problem of existence, change, impermanence, and misery is set forth in the Four Great Truths which the Buddha claimed to have discovered as the result of his long abstract meditation under the Bo-tree (tree of wisdom). These constitute what is commonly called "The Law of the Wheel" and are the very core of the Buddha's doctrines and philosophy.

#### 6. The Law of the Wheel

Concerning his discovery of the Four Great Truths the Buddha states:

"So long, O Bhikkhus, as my knowledge and insight were not quite clear, regarding each of these four noble truths ... so long was I uncertain whether I had attained to the full insight of that wisdom which is unsurpassed in the heavens or on earth, among the whole race of Samanas and Brahmans, or of gods or men. But as soon, O Bhikkhus, as my knowledge and insight were quite clear regarding each of these

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1. Cf. Clarke, James Freeman: Ten Great Religions, Vol. I, p. 153.

four noble truths ... then did I become certain that I had attained to the full insight of that wisdom which is unsurpassed in the heavens or on earth, among the whole race of Samanas and Brahmans or of gods or men. 'And not this knowledge and this insight has arisen within me. Immovable is the emancipation of my heart. This is my last existence. There will now be no rebirth for me!'"  
(SBE 11:152-53)

At the discovery of these so-called fundamental truths even the gods took up the shout and joined in proclaiming the great things:

"And when the royal chariot wheel of the truth had thus been set rolling onwards by the Blessed One, the gods of the earth gave forth a shout, saying: 'In Benares, at the hermitage of the Migadaya, the supreme wheel of the empire of Truth has been set rolling by the Blessed One - that wheel which not by any Samana or Brahman, not by any god, not by any Brahma, or Mara, not by any one in the universe, can ever be turned back!'"  
(SBE 11:154)

"And thus, in an instant, a second, a moment, the sound went up even to the world of Brahma; and this great ten-thousand-world-system quaked and trembled and was shaken violently, and an immeasurable bright light appeared in the universe, beyond even the power of the gods!"  
(SBE 11:155)

"The Sutta of the Foundation of The Kingdom of Righteousness" (The Sutta of The Turning The Wheel of the Doctrine) has always been received as an exposition of the fundamental teaching regarding the goal of the disciples and the conditions for attaining it. The Sutta is addressed to "him who has gone forth from the world" in the conviction that worldly life cannot give real happiness, and it repudiates two extremes which he ought not to

follow - the profitless life of indulgence in sensual pleasure, and the equally profitless way of self-torture. The Middle Way, which conduces to enlightenment and Nirvana, has been won by the Buddha, and enlightenment consists in the knowledge of the Four Truths and of the Noble Eight-fold Path.

It is due to a lack of knowledge of the way set forth in these Truths that the Buddha attributed the long weary round of ceaseless rebirths and transmigrations through which he and others have been forced to pass:

"And at that place the Blessed One addressed the brethren, and said: 'It is through not understanding and grasping four Noble Truths, O brethren, that we have had to run so long, to wander so long in this weary path of transmigration, both you and I!'

"And what are these four?'

"The noble truth about sorrow, the noble truth about the cause of sorrow; the noble truth about the cessation of sorrow; and the noble truth about the path that leads to that cessation. But when these noble truths are grasped and known the craving for existence is rooted out, that which leads to renewed existence is destroyed, and then there is no more birth!'

"Then again the Teacher said:

"By not seeing the four Noble Truths as they really are,

Long is the path that is traversed  
through many a birth;

When these are grasped, the cause of  
birth is then removed,

The root of sorrow rooted out, and there  
is no more birth.'"

(SBE 11:23-24)

As Buddha did not believe in the existence of a personal self-existent Creator, but affirmed instead of this, that self-existing, eternal, moral as well as

physical laws govern the Universe, he could not, nor did he say that God had revealed these truths to him, but claimed that he had arrived at these convictions by<sup>1.</sup> the light of reason only.

These four Truths constitute the fundamental doctrine of Buddhism. They were taught by its founder and are received by all Buddhists without exception. These sublime truths constituting the "Doctrine of the Wheel" are as follows:

First: "All existence is evil, because all existence is subject to change and decay", or this may be stated, Suffering exists wherever there is life. Birth is sorrowful, growth, decay, illness, death, separation from friends we love, disappointments are sorrowful; "Birth is pain, death is pain."<sup>2.</sup> Briefly, such states of mind as co-exist with the consciousness of individuality, with the sense of separate existence, are all states of suffering and sorrow. This continues until the perfect state of Nirvana is reached where the sense of separate existence has ceased. The first truth, therefore, sets forth the truth of pain and evil as resultants of existence.

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1. Cf. Franson, F.: The Religion of Tibet and the True Religion, p. 4.
2. Cf. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th edition, Vol. 4, article by Thomas, Edward John, "Buddha and Buddhism".



Second: "The Source of this evil is the desire for things which are to change and pass away", or this may be stated, Suffering is caused by desire and thirst for existence. The cause of evil is the craving that leads to rebirth, "the craving for non-existence". He did not say suffering was caused by evil desire or sin, but that all desire is evil. The second truth, therefore, sets forth the cause of evil, which is desire.

Third: This desire, and the evil which follows it, are not inevitable; for if we choose we can arrive at Nirvana, when both shall wholly cease. Release from suffering therefore depends on the suppression of desire and this thirst for life, and in the extinction of conscious existence on entering into Nirvana. This third truth sets forth the end of all evil which is reached when one enters into Nirvana.

These are the three truths, knowledge of which constitutes the state of the Arahant, the perfected disciple who has reached the goal of the cessation of all desire, hence Nirvana.

Fourth: The fourth truth states that there is a fixed and certain method to adopt, by pursuing which we attain the end we are seeking, without the possibility of failure. Nirvana, the end sought, can be attained only by adhering to what he called the Noble Eight-fold Path.

The Buddha in addressing a group of mendicants

spoke of two extremes which the men who have given up the world ought not to follow:

"There are two extremes, O Bhikkhus, which the man who has given up the world ought not to follow - the habitual practice on the one hand of those things whose attraction depends upon the passions, and especially of sensuality - a low and pagan way (of seeking satisfaction) unworthy, unprofitable, and fit only for the worldly-minded - and the habitual practice, on the other hand, of asceticism (or self-mortification), which is painful, unworthy, and profitable." (SBE 11:143)

The Buddha then claims to have discovered a middle Path avoiding these two extremes - a path which opens the eyes, and bestows understanding, which leads to peace of mind, to the higher wisdom, to full enlightenment, to Nirvana! This "Golden Mean" is the Noble Eight-fold Path; that is to say:

1. Right views
2. Right aspirations
3. Right speech
4. Right conduct
5. Right livelihood
6. Right effort
7. Right mindfulness
8. Right contemplation

The first four, "right belief", "right thoughts", "right speech" and "right actions" are applicable to all men, and the other four, "right living", as a recluse, "right application to the study of the law", "right memory" and "right meditation" being reserved for the monks only.

This description of the Path covers the whole training of the disciple. It includes a theoretical part

(right views), a system of ethical practice, and a method of mental training expressed in right effort, mindfulness and concentration.

Positively the only right views required according to the Tripitaka are these Four Truths, i.e., the Noble truth about sorrow, the noble truth about the cause of sorrow, the noble truth about the cessation of sorrow, and finally the noble truth about the path that leads to that cessation, which involves the pursuance of the Eight-fold Path. Doctrines of karma, transmigration, the delusion of self, a skeptical view as to the characteristics of the Universe - all of these are essential in Buddhist philosophy, but the Four Noble Truths are central to all other teachings.

All of this could not be expected to find lodgment in the minds of the common people and it never did. Attainment was possible only to those who separated themselves from ordinary life and became monks, living a life apart in communities to attain the end they sought. The Eight-fold Path was essentially a course of training, and in order to carry it out fully and extinguish craving the abandonment of a household life was essential. The gods were of no use, and man must secure his attainment by his own process. It is the attainment of salvation through self-discipline.

"Then the Blessed One addressed the brethren, and said: 'Behold now, brethren, I exhort you,

saying: 'Decay is inherent in all component things! Work out your own salvation with diligence!' This was the last word of the Tathagata."

(SBE 11:114)

The essential philosophy back of all this doctrine is that man is everything and God is nothing; it is a humanistic philosophy of life. It does not deny God, but it makes so much of man as to forget God. It accepts the doctrine of the three worlds - the eternal world of absolute being, the celestial world of the gods, and the finite world, consisting of individual souls and the laws of nature. Only it says, of the world of absolute being, we know nothing. The celestial world, that of the gods, is even of less moment to us. What we know are the everlasting laws of nature, by obedience to which we rise, fall, by perfect obedience to which we shall at last obtain Nirvana, and rest forever. Buddhism may then be rightfully termed a "religion of peaceful, ethical self-culture."<sup>1.</sup>

#### 7. Relation of Buddhism to the Gods and Spirits

In one of the Suttas there is recorded a conversation between two young Brahmans and the Buddha. They inquire as to the true path to a state of union (in the next birth) with God. After arguing with them Gautama shows them they could have no real knowledge of

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1. Hume, Robert Ernest: The World's Living Religions, p. 59.

their God, and maintains that union with a God whom they admitted to be pure and holy must be unattainable by men impure and sinful and self-righteous, however great their knowledge of the Vedas. And he then lays down that system of Right Conduct, which must be the only direct way to a real union with God.<sup>1.</sup> God is the unknowable. He is the one of whom to be convinced is impossible.

"Who shall name Him  
And dare to say,  
'I believe in Him'?  
Who shall deny Him  
And venture to affirm 2.  
'I believe in Him not?'"

The Buddhistic system was constructed without any use of the previous idea of a separate soul, or self, or ghost, or spirit, supposed to exist inside the human body, but Buddhism fell into the unpardonable sin very early of contriving to express a belief in the external spirits big and little, of the then Hindu pantheon. They were not feared any more, they were patronized as a kind of fairies, usually beneficent, though always more or less foolish and ignorant. They were of course not worshipped anymore, for they were much less worthy of reverence than any wise and good man. And they were not eternal - all of them, like all things and all other

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1. SBE 11:163.

2. Goethe, Faust, quoted from Clarke, James Freeman: Ten Great Religions, Vol. I, p. 140.

creatures, being liable to dissolution. If they had behaved well they were then reborn under happy outward conditions, and might even look forward to being some day born as men, so that they could attain to the supreme goal of the Buddhist faith, to that bliss which passeth not away - the Nirvana of a perfect life in Arahatsip.

The duty of a Buddhist who had entered the Noble Path towards those light and airy shapes - for to such vain things had the great gods fallen - was the same as his duty toward every fellow creature; pity for his ignorance, sympathy with his weakness, equanimity, and the constant feeling of a deep and lasting love, all pervading, grown great, and beyond measure.

No exception was made in the case of Brahma. He, like every other creature that had life, was evanescent, was bound by the chain of existence, the result of ignorance, and could only find salvation by walking along<sup>1.</sup> the Noble Eight-fold Path.

#### 8. Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism

Since about 100 A.D. there have been two main branches or separate schools of thought in Buddhism. The followers of the "Lesser Vehicle", Hinayana Buddhism, in southern Asia, have sought to remain true to Buddha's

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1. Cf. SBE 11:163.

own teaching, viz., that he was only a teacher of a way of escape from misery and that speculative questions are profitless for religion:

"Misery have I elucidated. The origin of misery have I elucidated. The cessation of misery have I elucidated. And the path leading to the cessation of misery have I elucidated .. because this has to do with the fundamentals of religion, and tends to aversion, absence of passion, cessation, quiescence, knowledge, supreme wisdom, Nirvana."

(Warren, BT 122)

The northern branch, which has carried Buddhism so extensively to China and Japan, has developed certain theological doctrines which constitute the Mahayana, "Greater Vehicle". It is a means of salvation sufficient to accommodate all who would come, and sees in Buddha not simply a teacher who passed into Nirvana at his death, but a veritable divine Saviour, as the following phrases indicate:

"Pre-existent, planfully incarnate, supernaturally conceived, miraculously born."

(Warren, BT 42-46)

"Sinless, yet suffering inexplicably."

(SBE 35:178)

"Entered the world with a redemptive purpose."

(SBE 21:40, 46)

"All-knowing and all-seeing"

(SBE 21:44, 118, 121)

"Savior of gods and men."

(SBE 21:120)

"He is everlasting"

(SBE 21:302)

It is ironical indeed that he whose main message and very last words before dying were a call to a self-reliant, ethical life, as over against dependence

upon any kind of a Divine Being, should himself be subsequently worshipped with larger and more numerous images than exist of any other person in the history of the world.<sup>1.</sup>

#### 9. Modern Buddhism in China

Buddhism probably reached China in the first century A.D. but did not spread rapidly until the fourth century. According to Soper,

"Buddhism has never been well suited to China. The idle life of the monks was utterly irrational to practical Chinese, and the idea of celibacy repugnant to a people who believed in family life."<sup>2.</sup>

The form of Buddhism which became established in China was not, to be sure, like the Buddhism preached by Gautama and his disciples. It is rather of the progressive Mahayana ("Great Vehicle" of salvation) school. This school is progressive and has come to regard Gautama himself as a god and salvation as life in a heavenly world of pure souls. Buddhism exists in China today only because it meets a felt need. The Chinese are practical and Confucius ministered to that bent with such insight and wisdom that the whole life of the people has been built up around his ideals. He did not feel the need of more than the meagerest amount of spiritual influence and believed that could be supplied out of the religious life

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1. Cf. Warren, BT, 109.

2. Soper, Edmund D.: The Religions of Mankind, p. 199.



which already existed. But he was mistaken. There was an unreachd depth to the Chinese heart which nothing in China had been able to touch. This was the opportunity of Buddhism. Coming in its Mahayana form with the assurance of being able to bring men into vital contact with the spiritual world, the hearts of many Chinese were touched. There is no other explanation of the career of Buddhism in China, where it has persisted despite the bitterest kind of persecution.<sup>1.</sup>

Before the advent of Buddhism the Chinese had only a vague idea regarding life after death. Buddhism brought into the life of the people a spiritual world, gods who were human, the mediation of the monks who stand between the gods and men, and a complete purgatory and heaven.

Buddhism is also represented among the people in that they come to the temples and have recourse to the monks. They are taught that there are gods, loving Amida and the merciful Kwan-yin, who will hear their prayers and receive their sacrifices. They are also told that there is a heaven of bliss which they may attain and dreadful hells which they may escape by throwing themselves on the mercy of these benevolent beings. This is suf-

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1. Cf. Ibid., p. 230.

ficient. There is no message like that in the other religions; it answers the craving and the fear in their hearts. They do not throw over their other religious practices in thus coming to a Buddhist temple. It has been said that the several religions of China answer to moods in the Chinese soul. Confucianism makes plain their duty, Taoism ministers to their superstitious fears, and Buddhism opens up the spiritual world and gives them the promise of future blessedness. Buddhism has also accommodated itself to ancestor worship. It offers prayers for the dead and adds its comfort to the friends and relatives who are concerned about the welfare of their departed in the next world.<sup>1.</sup>

As has been previously stated, originally Gautama had turned his back on the gods of India and constructed a system without worship, sacrifice, prayer, or any sense of dependence on a higher power. But to the common people even during his lifetime he was almost their god while he journeyed with them intent on teaching them that there was no need of gods. It is little wonder then that in the centuries after he had passed away the Buddha himself should have been raised to the position in the spiritual world where men could look for his assistance and raise hands to him in prayer. Buddhism thus became

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1. Cf. Soper, Edmund D.: The Religions of Mankind, p. 230.

through the ages a kind of theistic faith, placing the  
Buddha above all the gods of the land.<sup>1.</sup>

#### E. Summary

It has been found from a study of selections from the Buddhist canon that their system of morality and philosophy posits Three Characteristics of Being at the heart and center of the universe, viz. that all things are transitory, all the constituents of being are full of misery or pain, and that there is no such thing as a real "Ego" or personality. There is, therefore, no such thing as mere existence. This analysis of the very nature of things has been universally pronounced pessimistic; "to be" means "to be evanescent, miserable and impersonal". Since these Three Characteristics inhere in all existence there is no possibility of any inherent good in the universe. This being true, the highest good, or the summum bonum of all Buddhistic philosophy is the cessation of all desire.

So long as desire exists ignorance and misery are multiplied, karma is increased and endless births and rebirths are the result. The Buddha through intuitive knowledge discovered the way to the attainment to a state of being called Nirvana, or passionless peace, and the consequent elimination of all desire, hence all ignorance, all misery and the endless chain of rebirths

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1. Ibid., p. 199.

consequent upon the existence of karma. This eternal truth was the solution to the problem of existence, change, impermanence and misery and it was set forth in the Four Great Truths of the Noble Eight-fold Path, called "The Law of the Wheel". These consist of the truth about sorrow, the truth about the cause of sorrow, the truth about the cessation of sorrow, and the truth concerning the Path or Way, the pursuance of which assures ultimate attainment of Nirvana. All existence is evil, the source of this evil is the desire for existence and things which change and pass away; therefore, the elimination of all desire will bring the seeker to Nirvana, a state in which desire and all consequent evils shall wholly cease.

The philosophy of Buddhism as contained in their Sacred Writings is this-worldly, and the responsibility for ultimate salvation and satisfaction rests with the individual. It is a philosophy of independent morality, taking no cognizance of the possible existence of gods or spirits.

Modern Buddhism, as it exists in its Mahayana form, is diametrically opposed to the original teachings of its founder. It is a means of salvation to all who would come, and it sees in Buddha not simply a teacher who passed into Nirvana at his death, but a veritable divine Saviour, to whom adoration, prayer, and sacrifices are offered.

CHAPTER III  
A COMPARISON AND CRITICAL ESTIMATE  
OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF CONFUCIANISM AND BUDDHISM  
IN RELATION TO CHRISTIANITY

A CONSPECTUS OF CONFUCIANISM, BUDDHISM AND  
CHRISTIANITY

	<u>Confucianism</u>	<u>Buddhism</u>	<u>Christianity</u>
Date or birth of founder	551 B. C.	560 B. C.	4 ? B. C.
Founder	Confucius	Gautama, Buddha	Jesus Christ
Deity	Heaven, or founder	Originally none; now founder	Father-God
Present Location	China	The East	World
Scriptures	Classics	Tripitaka	Bible
Number in Millions of Adherents <sup>1</sup> .	250	137	557

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1. This estimate is taken from Hume, Robert Ernest:  
The World's Living Religions, x.

CHAPTER III  
A COMPARISON AND CRITICAL ESTIMATE OF THE  
PHILOSOPHY OF CONFUCIANISM AND BUD-  
DHISM IN RELATION TO CHRISTIANITY

At the beginning of this study it was our purpose to attempt to formulate some conceptions as to the fundamental philosophies of life as revealed in the canons of the Sacred Scriptures of Confucianism and Buddhism. The first two chapters of this study have set forth the writer's findings as to just what these Books reveal regarding certain fundamental concepts, such as their beliefs concerning the nature of Ultimate Reality and their relation to such Reality. From this study it was intended that we should then be able to proceed to a brief comparison of the philosophies of Confucianism and Buddhism, as revealed in their Sacred Books, and especially that these findings be related to certain fundamental and universally accepted convictions with regard to Christianity. It has been found that both of these religions have some features in common, as well as some distinctively antagonistic beliefs. After a brief comparative study of the outstanding features of Confucianism and Buddhism to note possible likenesses, as well as essential differences, we shall then endeavor to set forth what, on the basis of our findings with regards to the life

philosophies of Confucianism and Buddhism, may be conceded to be unique characteristics of the Christian philosophy of life in relation to these two.

#### A. Some General Points of Similarity

##### 1. Belief in One Supreme Being

The concept which we have concerning God is all important, the name given to Him is relatively unimportant. It is the character of our God, and the idea which we have that is essential.

Confucianism, it was found, teaches the belief in one Supreme Being, designated impersonally as "T'ien", "Heaven" or occasionally in the more personal form of "Shang Ti" "Ruler Above" or God. Confucianism has, however, limited the worship of this Being to only one person in China, the emperor.

Original Buddhism it was found constructed a system without worship, without sacrifices, without prayer, and without God.

Although in Confucianism it has been stated that the God-idea does exist, this idea as revealed in the Classics was found to be confused and ambiguous. Neither Confucius nor his disciples had any clear-cut conception of a personal God. He sought to educate his pupils to the highest moral pitch and hold them there without attaching them to the highest Person. There has been in Confucianism no Christ



to reveal God unmistakably and distinctly.

To the rank and file of the Chinese both Confucius and Buddha have become as deities and are accorded adoration, prayer and sacrifices. In neither of these religions was there found to exist what might be called genuine monotheism. The one for the most part worships a rather vague, impersonal Heaven, together with innumerable spirits, both of nature and of deceased ancestors. The other counts no Being worthy of worship, except as the founder himself has become deified. Some contend that every race believes in a Creator and Governor of the world, in whom devout souls recognize a Father also. But Buddhism explicitly denies creation, and absolutely ignores any Ruler or Governor in the world. The Buddha neither made the world nor preserves it, and yet the Buddha has become the great object of Buddhist worship.

We have then these two beliefs concerning God - the one, the worship on the part of the emperor of a vague, impersonal force or power, the people themselves worshipping innumerable spirits - the other, an atheistic or at least agnostic conception of the non-existence of any Being worthy of man's homage.

Contrast these conceptions with that of the Christian philosophy concerning the Originator and Sustainer of the universe and of man. I believe that it is just here in the concept of God that we strike at the uniqueness of the Christian philosophy as contrasted with that of

Confucianism and Buddhism. The Christian conception of God as Creator, God as Father, God as Son, and God as Holy Spirit will therefore be discussed at greater length a bit later.

## 2. Cosmology

In neither Confucianism nor in Buddhism was there found to exist a doctrine of creation. Buddha denies creation; Confucius starts out with an impersonal cosmic energy and principle which produced the yin and the yan, the negative and positive principles. Through the interaction of these Heaven and Earth were produced. Neither Confucius nor Buddha attempted to explain the beginnings or source of all things. They were not interested in metaphysical speculation, but rather in solving the problems relating to present existence.

The Christian philosophy posits God the Creator at the very foundation of the universe:

"In the beginning God created the Heavens and the earth". (Gen.1:1)

"And God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good . . . . and the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. . . and God finished his work which he had made." (Gen. 1:31-2; 1-2)

God is the Creator and the Ruler of the Universe. He is eternal, everlasting.

### 3. Eschatology

Every view of the world has its eschatology. It cannot help raising the question of the whither, as well as of the what and whence? "O my Lord", said Daniel to the angel, "what shall be the end of these things?" (Daniel 12:8) What is the end, the final destiny of the individual? What is the end, the final aim, of the whole; - that far-off Divine event toward which the whole Creation moves?

In both Confucianism and Buddhism we found an excessively self-saving scheme of salvation. However, the two are diametrically opposed as regards not so much their method of salvation, as their attitude toward the meaning of salvation as such. To the Confucianist, man is inherently good. His salvation therefore rests with himself and consists in the pursuance of the Way of the Golden Mean, exercising the principles of social reciprocity and attaining the perfect life here and now. As to the possibility of future immortality such references as were found were indefinite and unsatisfactory. There is, I believe, no basis for a confident belief in Immortality, such as we conceive. Confucianism is a system of ethics and philosophy, and not primarily a system of religion. It is concerned with man in all of his social relationships and not with the problem of his ultimate goal. Salvation to the Confucianist consists

in the pursuance of the Way, in the exercising of the principles of social propriety, and in the attainment of perfection in character and conduct. It regards religion as consisting chiefly of proper ethical conduct, yet offers for the future only a ghostly kind of existence, without hope of heaven, without fear of hell, without consequences of any kind resulting from a person's present manner of living.

To the Buddhist there is in this world nothing permanent or having the possibility of good. All is transient, all is evil. Sorrow and misery are the inevitable lot of man. The present life is so sadly marred by illusion and suffering that it is really not worth continuing. Because of desire, deeds are committed. Karma is the result of one's deeds, and in order to work out the accumulated Karma endless rebirths are inevitable. Thus, for most people, the future life is a dread necessity, yet by recognizing and following the Four Truths and the Noble Eight-fold Path a person's evanescent, miserable individuality may finally be extirpated altogether, and one may gain Nirvana, a state of passionless peace and non-existence.

To the one, therefore, life here and now is all important; to the other, it is evil and the escape from such existence is the one desired event toward which all effort is directed. One is salvation in the world, the

other is salvation from the world and in spite of the world.

As we pass from these systems of salvation by works to that of Grace and of the Cross, as found in Christianity, we find some similarities, but how vast a difference. Christianity has taught uniformly that there will be a sure and just judgment for all mankind, when the saved shall enter into the increasing joy of closer and everlasting fellowship with God, and the unsaved shall suffer the terrible consequences of all that eternal separation from God may imply. "God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap". (Gal.6:7) We also have the assurance that "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life." (Rom. 6:23)

According to the Christian philosophy of life, life here and now is desirable, but it is also full of sorrow and suffering. There is evil in existence, but existence is fundamentally good. Hundreds of millions of Buddhists daily repeat for a creed: "Ameisa, Dukka, Annath" - "Impermanence, Suffering, Emptiness". Existence and suffering are one. As one attains to the state of Nirvana, literally of "the snuffed-out candle", one has passed beyond everything and all things, for there is no longer one to suffer. The enlightened one is released and will manifest a spirit of disinterested, disillusioned aloofness. Action will go on as a wheel once

turned will continue to turn even after the force applied has been removed, but gradually it will cease to turn and come to rest. In Christianity the concepts of both Confucius and Buddha meet, but the Christian philosophy of life insists that man is not to accept suffering, nor merely to endure it, but he is to use it. This is what E. Stanley Jones calls VICTORIOUS VITALITY. Jesus' answer to "Impermanence, Suffering, Emptiness" is: "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly." (John 10:10) Unsatisfied desire is removed not by its extinction, but through its satisfaction.

The Christian view of human destiny is therefore a positive one. The eschatology of Christianity springs from its character as a teleological religion. There is a unity in the world because of the Christian conception of an end or aim. Our Bible gives us the true life philosophy when it teaches that the same God who cares for stars cares also for souls; that the very hairs of our head are all numbered; that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without our Heavenly Fathers' <sup>knowledge</sup> that we are made for all eternity. He is the Cause of all things, the Creator God, but also the One who is infinitely near to us:

"Speak to Him thou, for He hears,  
And spirit with spirit can meet,  
Closer is He than breathing,  
And nearer than hands or feet."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Tennyson's Higher Pantheism.

A truly purposeful life is only possible on the basis of a world view which has a definite aim. In both Confucianism and Buddhism we find splendid and exceedingly high ethical teachings concerning morality, benevolence, patience, forbearance, but there is no great impelling motive, no power provided which will make life essentially worth the living and which will lift man to a fellowship with God and give to him a sense of purposefulness now and the assurance of the continuance of life and of personality hereafter.

#### B. Radical Dissimilarities of Christianity

We have thus far in this chapter, for the most part, considered possible similarities between the philosophies of Confucianism and Buddhism and their relation to Christianity, but we would now ask the question, "Wherein does the essential difference lie?" In what sense, if any, may Christianity and its philosophy be considered unique when it is placed along-side of Confucianism and Buddhism? As Robert E. Speer has so aptly stated:

"We need to remember that similarities give us only our contact; they do not furnish our impact. Similarities never convert, only contrasts do that. Conversion for the sincere non-Christian is not a matching, but an exchange, not an easy transition, but a transformation."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Speer, Robert E.: The Finality of Jesus Christ, p. 366.

1. Christianity a Pleroma, or Fullness of Life.

Clarke states the difference between Christianity and that of these other religions as one of "quantity" and not "quality".

"Christianity differs from each of the others particularly in that it is a pleroma, or fullness of knowledge. It does not differ in many respects in its teachings from what has been said or thought before. Jesus does not claim originality of truth, but he DOES call Himself "the Light of the World", the Way, the Truth, and says that though he does not come to destroy either the law or the prophets, he comes to fulfill them in something higher. His work is to fulfill all religions with something higher, broader, and deeper than what they have, accepting their truth, supplying their deficiencies." 1.

Christianity to Clarke is a Pleroma, or fullness of life. We would not disagree with him as far as he goes, but we would go further and say that Christianity is not only quantitatively different but qualitatively so.

2. The Uniqueness of Christianity

While it is to be conceded that the high ethics of Christianity can undoubtedly be duplicated in Confucianism and Buddhism, we are not studying the ethics of these religions, but rather their fundamental life philosophies. There are, I believe, in Christianity three unique features which can be paralleled in neither Confucianism nor Buddhism. These distinctive features will be recognized as being those which Christians them-

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1. Clarke, James Freeman: Ten Great Religions, Vol. I, p. 492.



selves throughout their history have regarded as essential.

a. The Character of God - as a Loving Heavenly Father.

This concept of God as a loving, spiritual father is nowhere found in the Sacred Books of either Confucianism or Buddhism. Buddhism has no God; Confucianism has no personal God available to all men. How then could they even approach the thought of a God of love who is called Father? "In every religion the controlling and comprehensive conception is concerning the character of the Supreme Being."<sup>1</sup> The God of Christianity is the sovereign and moral personality of the world. He is all-seeing, and all-knowing, Lord of heaven and of earth, righteous, holy, merciful, a just judge and a great king, but the new emphasis is that He is supremely loving. Jesus' characteristic designation for God as "Father" is reported about one hundred fifty times in the four Gospels, being used in various connections.

"The Father" used in 61 vs.

"O Father" in prayer to God - 17 vs.

"My Father" in 50 vs.

"Your Father", sometimes "Your Heavenly Father" - 18 vs.

"Our Father" in the Lord's prayer.

Altogether the word "Father", as referring to God, occurs<sup>2</sup> about three hundred times in the New Testament.

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1. Hume, Robert Ernest: The World's Living Religions, p. 247.
2. Ibid, p. 251.

We may therefore conclude that the God of Christianity is a God of love, a personal Father-God.

b. The Character of the Founder as Son of God.

Both Confucius and Buddha passed through a preliminary period of uncertainty or of searching for religious life. Confucius late in life confessed his own sense of shortcomings:

"The Master said, 'In the letters I am perhaps equal to other men, but the character of the superior man, carrying out in his conduct what he professes, is what I have not yet attained to!'"

(Analects, Book VI, Chap. 32)

Buddha spent years searching for the Truth and finally arrived at his state of enlightenment, not by divine revelation, but by intuitive knowledge.

Jesus Christ alone is reported as having had a consistent God-consciousness, and consistent character. "The most remarkable and valuable aspect of the personality of Jesus Christ is the comprehensiveness and universal availability of his character, as well as its own loftiness, consistency, and sinlessness."<sup>1</sup>

It is not, however, merely in the realm of personality that we would present the uniqueness of Jesus Christ; it is rather as to his nature and very

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1. Hume, Robert Ernest: The World's Living Religions, p. 275.

essence. He seems to have developed normally. "And Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men". (Luke 2:52) He was normal as the son of man, but He was also the Son of God. He is the unique, yet exemplary combination of being a son of man, and also preeminently the Son of God. The General Council of the Church at Nicea, as early as 325<sup>A.D.</sup>, went on record as unequivocally affirming that Jesus was truly man and at the same time truly God; that He was not a creature, but of the very essence of God; that He was as much a part of God as the Father Himself. Jesus was of the "same substance" with the Father and as eternal Being had never been created at all.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God."

(John 1:1-3)

"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth."

(John 1:14)

Jesus Christ, therefore, is God with us and, as such, He is the Revealer of God. We know what God is like for God is like Christ. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father". (John 14:9) If God is Christ-like, life takes on new meaning and purpose. We are lifted to fellowship with the Divine and are co-workers together with God.

We, therefore, recognize Jesus Christ as the Eternal Son of God and as the Revealer of God, but it is

Jesus Christ, the Saviour, which strikes the key-note of Christianity. Christianity is not primarily a system of ethics or philosophy, though it is actually both; nor is Christianity primarily a way of life; it is essentially and foremost a Person and that Person is Christ, the Saviour of men. Salvation in Christianity is not by merit, not by knowledge or meditation, but by the acceptance of the love and grace of God as provided in the death of Christ:

"For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life."  
(John 3:16)

Any religion that fails to deal adequately with the problem of sin is inadequate. Our hearts are truly restless till they rest in Him and there is no repose or rest while man is separated from God. The one purpose of His coming was to be a great High Priest, to bring men into fellowship with God, and He could do that only by offering Himself vicariously for all men everywhere. All else in Christianity is secondary to that. His incarnation is pointless unless it eventuates in His great sacrifice.<sup>1.</sup>

c. The Work of the Divine, Universal Holy Spirit.

Along with the unique character of God as Father and of the Founder as the Son of God, there is a third item in the characteristic Christian belief and in Christian experience. That aspect of God which connotes

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1. Cf. Dr. Caroline L. Palmer, Prof. English Bible, The Biblical Seminary in New York, Hebrews Class, April 12, 1934.

the everlasting presence and power of God in the human life may best be known as the Holy Spirit.

Confucius teaches that the nature of man is aboriginally or divinely good; but Confucius does not teach that in the efforts of man for complete goodness there is any help from God available for every day.

Buddha teaches that there is no real self or "Ego", and that all effort is worse than useless, and that there is no possible power available whereby men may live in their present environment triumphantly.

Christianity teaches a Redemptive Purpose, whereby God is reaching down to man to lift him to Himself. As a child of God, he is thereupon given the promise of all available power of God through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Christianity asserts that it will impart to the believer a dynamic which is due to the Holy Spirit's indwelling and which is itself the enabling factor lacking in both Confucianism and Buddhism. In Confucianism duties are enjoined, but no power outside of one's self is available. In Buddhism a way of escape is provided. In Christianity we find salvation, which contains the source of all power, available to every believer, under all circumstances, thus presenting a radiant hope and the assurance of continual victory day by day, and everlasting joy and peace in the hereafter.

Therefore, it is not a question of Christ versus Confucius, or Christ versus Buddha, but rather Christ, the Son of God, who is the Saviour of mankind. He is not the fulfillment of Confucianism and Buddhism. In His coming He will preserve all that is really good and true and beautiful in each of these, but He will replace and destroy the systems as such and will establish His Kingdom in the hearts and lives of men. Salvation comes therefore not from mere human striving, but from the grace of God and is received by faith. Christianity gives us a God of yearning love that became incarnate in Jesus Christ, who gave Himself as a sacrifice, a propitiation for sin, who conquered death, rose a victor from the grave, and in His Spirit makes His home in the hearts of His people. He is alive and in our midst saying,

"Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

(Matt. 28:20)

### C. The Heart of the Matter

In conclusion we might consider what is the heart of the matter to one considering the Great Commission with its personal implications? Unless Christianity is essentially different and unique there is no missionary drive or impelling motive.

The incentive to Christian missionary enter-

prise is a living faith in a living Christ, which is the power of God to regenerate individuals and society; it is a personal experience of Jesus Christ and the conviction that a similar experience is possible for all men of all races. This impulse which has sufficient dynamic to carry one to the uttermost parts of the earth can be appreciated only by those who have shared in this experience, but for all such it has absolute values.

Mankind wants God. God can be found in clear expression only in the Lord incarnate. Our great task, therefore, is the creating of the direct experience of God through faith in Christ. The Christian message lies clearly in the definite faith in God as Father, and in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, through whom His believing children may have personal communion with Him through the living of a life as exemplified in Jesus, a life of moving and conquering love.

There is in Christianity the personal note of a good God and a loving Father whom we may know by coming into fellowship with Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. He would have all men everywhere come by a path all may travel, that of faith. When the horror of sin falls like a pall over the heart, the tender word of forgiveness may be spoken which will bring joy and peace. And in place of palsied impotence in the presence of temptation may come the assurance that a new dynamic

has been placed at the disposal of men which will make them "more than conquerors". And lest the danger should arise that sin may be thought of too lightly there is the cross of Christ, revealing the awful agony in the heart of God, due to human sin, and the cost to God to deal with it adequately.<sup>1.</sup> The cross is the reconciling place between Karma and forgiveness, between Law and Love. The one upstanding beam of the cross represents the law of Karma - how straight and unbending it stands! The other beam, the wide-stretching one, represents the love of God reaching out arms to save and heal. These two - the Law and the Love coming together - make the cross, and the cross unites them. In a temple of Peking one sees the statue of Buddha reciting the law of Karma. At the rear, back to back with Buddha, is the Goddess of Mercy. The Chinese felt that they should both be there, but the nearest they could get them was back to back.<sup>2.</sup> In the cross of Christ they melt into glorious harmony.

There is in Christianity the social note. It is not sufficient that a man should be saved alone. Unless his religion reaches out and seeks to make all other relationships an expression of the same spirit which fills his heart, the very meaning of what he has received is

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1. Cf. Soper, Edmund D.: The Religions of Mankind, p.328-9.
2. Cf. Jones, E. Stanley, Christ and Human Suffering, p. 164-5.



largely lost. Is he a Christian? Then his business, his family, his social relationships, even the state must feel the steady pressure of his influence as he seeks to transmit to them the power of God which motivates his own life. The result will inevitably be a brotherhood of men in which the principles of the Sermon on the Mount shall prevail. This may be an ideal which is far from realization, but it is an essential note in that earthly kingdom which Christ came to found.

And finally, there is in Christianity the universal note. Since Christianity is able to speak the word of peace to the individual, since it has the power to release all men everywhere from the power of sin and to so change their lives and hearts that they shall become children of God, since Christ is able to do all this, it then becomes our duty to lay hold on this power and to take unto ourselves personally Christ's last command:

"All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matt. 28:18-20)

"Christ is the end as Christ was the beginning,  
Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Speer, Robert E.: The Finality of Jesus Christ, p.374, taken from F. W. H. Myers' poem on St. Paul.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

None other Lamb, none other Name,  
None other Hope in heaven, or earth or sea,  
None other Hiding Place from guilt and shame,  
None beside Thee!

My faith burns low, my hope burns low;  
Only my heart's desire cries out in me,  
By the deep thunder of its want and woe  
Cries out to Thee!

Lord, Thou art Life, though I be dead;  
Love's Fire Thou art, however cold I be;  
Nor heaven have I, nor place to lay my head,  
Nor home, but Thee.

-Christina G. Rossetti.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

### I. A Re-statement of the purpose and procedure of the present study.

As was stated in the Introduction, the purpose of the present study has been to make a comparative study of the philosophies of Confucianism and Buddhism, as found in their Sacred Books, and to establish such relationships and to make such comparisons as would reveal the unique features of the Christian philosophy of life.

### II. The Results of the present study.

The outstanding results of the writer's findings may be briefly set forth as follows:

1. In neither classical Confucianism nor in Buddhism is there an adequate conception of God. Both are agnostic and have failed to find the one true God.
2. Although both religions have a high moral law, they lack any motivating power or dynamic which would enable man to attain to such an ethical standard.
3. Neither religion deals adequately with the problem of sin and salvation. Both seek to attain salvation by a system of ethical self-culture. Man needs no Saviour, and thus by his own works, or lack of such works, as is the case in Buddhism, he is to find salvation.

4. Finally, the philosophies of both Confucianism and Buddhism were found to be essentially this-worldly, and the responsibility for ultimate salvation and satisfaction rests with the individual. The one has failed to see God in all His fullness and adequacy; the other takes no cognizance of the possible existence of God.

In both instances it appears from our study that while there is no clear-cut God idea in either religion, that through the years the founders themselves have become deified and are today the object of worship, adoration and sacrifice.

### III. The Conclusion of the Present Study.

It is the writer's conclusion, after a study of the life philosophies of these two religions, in relation to Christianity, that Christianity is unique in the following respects, viz.:

1. The character of God - as a Loving Heavenly Father.
2. The Character of the Founder as Son of God.
3. The work of the Divine, Universal Holy Spirit.

In Confucianism and Buddhism man is seeking God; in Christianity God is seeking man, and in the cross He has come all the way to re-establish a love relationship

with His children, who were created in His own image.

Again may the writer state her conviction that it is not a question of Christ versus Confucius, nor of Christ versus Buddha, but rather Christ, the Son of God, Christ the Saviour of all men everywhere.

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other Name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

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