

## Religion and China's Moral and Ethical Crisis

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**Abstract:** China's ethical and moral crisis seems to grow more serious every day. It extends from individuals to the family, workplace, and all of society. Any religion that would hope to make a contribution to this crisis must offer three things: 1. Inner peace and moral transformation for individuals; 2. Clear, authoritative teachings and the inner dynamic to transform families and all elements of society; 3. A relationship with God. This article proposes that Christianity fulfills all these requirements. It is also fully rooted in Chinese society, compatible with globalization, and is capable of motivating people to care for the environment.

**Key words:** Christianity in China; China; Chinese Society; Christian ethics; Family in China; religion and society; moral crisis; moral reconstruction.

### Introduction

China's ethical and moral crisis is apparent to everyone. The newspapers and television news reports are full of stories and comments, and the government is fully aware of the current situation. On the one hand, there are few clear ethical standards; on the other hand, people violate even the moral standards that they know and accept. All around us, we see unrestrained selfishness, greed, self-indulgence, and dishonesty.

In response to this crisis, different belief systems, especially Confucianism, are being suggested as an antidote. Classical schools are instructing children in traditional values, while the government supports Confucianism. (Note: For the purposes of this paper, Confucianism will be classified as a "religion," though this has been a controversial point for a long time. Though it does not purport to worship a transcendent God, and does not speak of rewards or punishments in the next life, it does possess some qualities of a religion – such as a founding Sage (Confucius), a recognized canon of "scriptures," temples, and rituals, and a worldview that encompasses much of reality.)<sup>2</sup> Buddhism is also returning as a major influence in Chinese society. With more

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<sup>2</sup> For a recent discussion of this old controversy, see Annan Sun, *Confucianism as a World Religion: Contested*

and more people becoming Christians, Christianity may have some unique benefits to offer today's society.<sup>1</sup>

## **Part I: China's ethical and moral crisis**

### ***Background***

The Cultural Revolution brought huge changes to Chinese society. Young people denounced their teachers and parents, and even sometimes beat them. Families were separated, sometimes for years. The traditional close family structure suffered great breakdown during these years.<sup>2</sup>

Since 1978, "Opening and Reform" and the market economy have also introduced major changes in both the social structure and in individual behavior. Urbanization has resulted in a great movement of millions of people from the country to the cities. Modernization has introduced new technologies, such as the Internet, the cell phone, computer games, and rapid transportation. Industrialization has altered China's traditional agricultural economy to one based on industry, commerce, and service industries. The one-child policy has created millions of "Little Emperors" and resulted in a shortage of women of marriageable age.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, globalization has brought China into close contact with the rest of the world. Foreigners have come to China to study, teach English and other subjects, do business, or tourism. At the same time, millions of Chinese go overseas, many of them to study in Western countries or even to settle permanently. Those stay for a year or more usually maintain close contact with their families and friends back home, so there is a constant interchange of new ideas and information.

### ***Contours of the crisis***

#### **Individual moral and ethical chaos<sup>4</sup>**

As we noted above, selfishness now rules in the decisions of many people. When choices are to be made, they generally consider only their personal interests. Greed is rampant, as most people seem to be seeking their own personal profit above all else. As a result, there is great alienation and loneliness. One manifestation of this is seen in the growth of addictions: millions of people, including young people, seem to be obsessed with computer games; pornography; drugs and alcohol; and gambling; entertainment of all sorts (music, dance, movies, etc.).

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Histories and Contemporary Realities. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

<sup>1</sup> For the growth of Christianity in China, See Rodney Stark.

<sup>2</sup> For a brief but insightful analysis of the ethical consequences of the Culture Revolution, see Yang Guilin, *China, Christianity and the Question of Culture*, (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2014), pp.67-72.

<sup>3</sup> Though this policy has been revoked, demographic trends will be hard to reverse, partly because the expense of rearing children has made many couples reluctant to have more than one child.

<sup>4</sup> For a brief description of individual pressures and social conditions in China, see G. Wright Doyle, "The Social Conditions of Ministry in China Today," in *China's Reforming Churches*, 159-176. See also the chapters on contemporary China in G. Wright Doyle and Peter Xiaoming Yu. *China: Ancient Culture, Modern Society*.

Perhaps more than ever before, millions are gripped with anxiety, as they face fear of the future – unemployment, financial security, social failure, marriage, illness, old age, and death. Intense competition at school and at work leaves no chance to rest. Many are sleep deprived.

Because every person has a conscience, guilt and remorse over mistakes and wrongdoing deprive people of inner peace. For many, there is a loss of hope that the future will bring improvement in their life. Loss of a sense of meaning in life is common.

### **Breakdown of relationships**

Parents and children: Not only are individuals in a state of crisis, but relationships between people are breaking down also. Parents are so busy at work that they have little time to care for children; they also have little time to care for aged parents, who may live in another city. They usually have only one child, so they focus all their hopes and fears on him. Often, they indulge the child, creating selfish “little emperors,” while at the same time expressing high hopes for his success. Most children have no brothers or sisters to learn from, care for, and learn to live with. More than in previous generations, young people respond with rebellion, which takes various forms. Geographical distance increases the difficulty of bringing up children, as millions are left in the countryside with grandparents, or even in the cities, while others live in distant parts of China and many thousands have gone overseas to study and work.

Men and women: Chaos and competition now dominate the relationships between men and women. There is widespread sexual promiscuity before marriage. Marriages are in trouble. Couples have little time together; conflict leads to arguments and even domestic violence. Adultery is common, and as is divorce.

Friends: Distance and the pressure of work leave little time for friends, increasing a sense of loneliness.

Class conflict seems to be on the rise: There is strife between management and labor, caused by abuse by managers and rising expectations among workers, and resulting in little loyalty to the company or unit. Teacher- student relationships are complicated by bribery and cheating, while relations between doctors and patients are strained by bribery, and, often, anger and violence on the part of disappointed patients or their families, who hold unrealistic expectations towards physicians.

Citizens and the state: There is growing social unrest, as people protest against pollution and corruption by officials; their anger is sometimes expressed in comments on the Internet or even in public protests and violence.<sup>1</sup>

### **Man and “God”**

Finally, for most Chinese, there is little sense of anything, or any one “god” beyond the visible world. Most people do not believe that they have a God who can guide them, provide for them, or help them. As a result, there are no ultimate standards for ethical conduct, and little or no hope or fear towards the afterlife. For them, there is no heaven,

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<sup>1</sup> Even the government admits that hundreds of thousands of “mass incidents” take place every year, with the number increasing rapidly.

and no hell.

## Part II: Can Religion Help?

The question is, Can religion offer anything to society in this moral crisis? The options seem to be Confucianism, Buddhism, and Christianity. I will not discuss Islam, for several reasons: First, it is not an option for most Han Chinese; second, its teachings allow for, and even encourage, oppression of women, slavery, and intolerance of all other religions, and warfare against non-Muslims and other Muslims of different sects. Finally, it does not promote economic prosperity (aside from income from oil) or modernization<sup>1</sup>. Daoism, though listed as an official religion, has no coherent ethical system.

### *Requirements for any religion to help with this crisis*

Let us look now at what any religion would need to provide in order to make a contribution to Chinese society.

First, there need to be clear standards of right and wrong. These need to be based on something more than custom or social agreement; they must have some transcendent basis, as Yang Guilin says.<sup>2</sup> These standards, moreover, must be illustrated by the lives of great men and women who serve as examples. Further, the teachings and examples should be available for all to read about in a recognized body of literature.

Second, there must be an accurate understanding of human nature, one that accounts for both the good that we can do and the bad that we often do, and includes an awareness of our motives.

Third, it must offer some way to personal peace and transformation of character and conduct. Personal peace must include the ability to find forgiveness of wrongdoing; some way to deal with remorse; confidence to face the future; wisdom to make decisions; strength to face daily challenges. Religion should be able to give its followers peace of mind in the face of failure, rejection by others, illness, and death. People must be given inner resolve and strength to tell the truth, obey the law, maintain integrity in all relationships and transactions.

Fourth, it must foster meaningful community and harmony

For this, there must be a clear concept of the relationship of “one and the many,” such that individuals are accorded proper respect and value, while they are taught to consider the interests of the group in all their decisions. We must learn how to work towards reconciliation with “enemies,” those who have offended or hurt us in some way. These will include family members – parents, children, spouse – classmates, teachers, co-workers, bosses, government officials, etc. Reconciliation will have to begin with our forgiving them in our hearts, no matter how deeply they have hurt us, and no matter how they respond to our efforts to resolve the conflict.

Religion must also give us the motive and the power to love the unlovely on a daily

<sup>1</sup> For an excellent critique of Islam, see Samuel Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*.

<sup>2</sup> See Yang Guilin, *China*, pp.55, 56, 60, 73-75.

basis, again, beginning with family members. A basic building block of real relationships is true communication, done in such a way as to encourage others and build them up, not tear them down. Lasting community also requires shared values, a similar worldview, and common standards of conduct. People also long for “safe” community, a place where they can be themselves and can be accepted as they are now. Finally, communities thrive on meaningful ritual, such as celebrations of holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, etc.

**Family:** The family is the basic human community. Religion must help parents to give proper care of children: that includes enough time with them as well as the proper balance of discipline and love. Likewise, religion must help motivate children to offer attentive care of aged parents. Perhaps most importantly, it must nurture harmonious marriages: it must somehow result in husbands being more loving, and wives being more respectful, and both being faithful to each other until death parts them.

**Work:** With so many tensions and challenges in the workplace today, a true religion must show bosses how to use authority and power properly, without exploiting workers, and it must engender honesty, hard work, and obedience in employees.

**Government:** The same is true for the relationship between the state and the people. Officials must be taught about proper use of authority and the necessity of integrity, and they must be motivated to serve the people rather than their own private interests. Citizens need to be encouraged to obey the laws and submit to those in authority.

Fifth, religion must be able to offer motives for ethical and moral behavior. Most of us know what to do, but we lack the inner strength to do it. Usually, that is because something else is motivating us in another direction. For a religion to have ethical usefulness, it must provide compelling reasons for the mind, and powerful commitment in the heart, to overcome our natural selfishness and act lovingly towards others.

Love, hope, fear are three strong motivating emotions. Religion must give people proper love, appropriate and realistic hope, and an appropriate fear for the consequences of doing wrong.

Sixth, it is obvious that any religion must be appropriate for Chinese society. It must be rooted in Chinese society and able to adapt to Chinese customs and culture without compromising its core beliefs.

Seventh, in today’s world, for a religion to make a moral impact on a nation, it must also be compatible with globalization. It cannot be so narrow or restricted to its own national heritage that it cannot equip people to live in a “world without borders,” where people of different backgrounds and cultures encounter each other, and each other’s beliefs and practices, almost daily.

Finally, any modern religion must also inculcate in us a care for the environment that is based upon an accurate understanding of man’s place in the physical world.

### **Part 3: Possible contribution of religion**

Now let us look at the possible contributions that religion could make to China’s ethical and moral crisis.

## **Confucianism**

Confucianism has several obvious strengths: It is firmly rooted in Chinese history, culture, and society. It is supported by the government. It offers clear standards of ethical conduct, and provides examples of great men, beginning with Confucius. The Thirteen Classics, and the writings of Confucian scholars, provide a rich literature for all to read. And it possesses both temples and rituals.

On the other hand, Confucianism also has major weaknesses, especially in today's conditions: It is restricted in its ethical teaching, being focused mostly on the "five relationships"; its teachings are rather weak on the obligations of those in authority to those under them; it offers no transforming power other than self-cultivation; it has no solid basis for gaining forgiveness for one's past wrongs, or for forgiving our enemies; it is based on an optimistic view of human nature that does not take into account the very real power of evil in our hearts; it has almost no room for a relationship with a living, all-powerful, transcendent God to whom one can pray and it offers little hope for life after death. Its standards, therefore, lack transcendent status, either in relationship to a transcendent God or in rewards or punishments after death. Furthermore, though it may encourage harmonious relationships, it does not build real community. Its rituals are overly formal and stylized, and cannot be participated in by people of all sorts in a variety of venues. Though some have spoken of Confucianism as the driving force for the economic growth in East Asia, on the whole it is not a "modern" faith system. Finally, it is completely Chinese, and thus incapable of building of trans-national, trans-cultural relationships and communities.<sup>1</sup>

## **Buddhism**

Buddhism, too, has some obvious strengths: Its teachings contain clear standards for ethical behavior, such as "the fourfold path" and "the eight virtues." The Buddha himself and other great figures, including bodhisattvas, provide examples of holy living. Though Buddha himself and Buddhist philosophy assert the final annihilation of the individual person, or at least absorption into it, popular Buddhism teaches that good and evil will be rewarded and punished in the afterlife. Buddhism has been in China for more than 2,000 years, its scriptures have been translated into Chinese and augmented by works by Chinese Buddhists, and it is entwined with Chinese culture. Buddhist temples and priests can be found in every town. And Buddhism of the Chinese sort is not restricted to China, but has millions of followers in East Asia and Southeast Asia.

On the other hand, Buddhism is beset with major weaknesses. Its scriptures are so numerous and vast that they contain internal contradictions; there is no one recognized, authoritative scripture. Most examples of outstanding Buddhists are of monks or nuns, not ordinary people. It is a "world-denying" religion, and thus not able to equip people to live in modern society. It teaches self-cultivation as the way to overcome human passions, but offers no external help from a transcendent God. It implies, therefore, that

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<sup>1</sup> See Lit-sen Chang, *Asia's Religions: Christianity's Momentous Encounter with the East*, pp.37-38 for a detailed analysis of Confucianism from a Chinese Christian point of view. For a shorter critique, see Lit-sen Chang, *Critique of Indigenous Theology*, in G. Wright Doyle, ed. and trans., *Wise Man from the East: Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng). Critique of Indigenous Theology, Critique of Humanism*. pp. 93-95. See G. Wright Doyle, *Kongzi yu Yesu*, 《孔子与耶稣——克己、公理、敬虔》, 橄榄基金会出版 for an in-depth comparison and contrast of Confucius and Jesus.

we can save ourselves from our own moral weaknesses.<sup>1</sup> Even more than Confucianism, Buddhism has few resources for coping with modern life, and it does not seem to result in prosperity in the nations where it is the majority religion.

### *Protestant Christianity*

The rest of this paper will concentrate upon the possible contributions which Protestant Christianity could make to alleviate China's current moral crisis. I shall confine my remarks to Protestantism because I am more familiar with it and because it is recognized by the Chinese government as a distinct faith from Roman Catholicism.

Clear, authoritative standards: Christian teaching about ethics is found in the Bible, a relatively short book (about 1,200 – 1,500 pages) that contains both moral precepts and many examples of both good and bad behavior. Its basic ethical code is the Ten Commandments, given by God to Moses in the year 1445 B.C. These commandments are explained and amplified in the rest of the Old Testament, and further clarified in the New Testament, where Jesus sums them up this way: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength," and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>2</sup> Jesus is the perfect example of righteous living, as seen in the Four Gospels about his life and death. His example of self-sacrifice, even dying so that others might live, becomes the pattern for Christians, who are taught to love each other as Christ has loved them.<sup>3</sup> The New Testament letters by the apostles apply these basic principles to all domains of society, including marriage, parenting, church life, work and government. The Bible's ethical standards can be followed in any sort of society, and under any kind of government; they have been found to work in hundreds of different cultures over two thousand years.

Biblical ethical teaching has been further explained and adapted to different societies and times by theologians, who largely agree with each other. A major example in the twentieth century is Carl F. H. Henry's *Christian Personal Ethics*, and *Aspects of Social Ethics*,<sup>4</sup> but there are literally thousands of other books, just in English, about how to imitate Christ and obey his teachings.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, Christian ethical standards are backed up by transcendent values. At every point, the Bible grounds moral commands in the character of God himself, who is righteous, true, loving, and just, and who will reward good and punish evil, both in this life and in the life to come. We are to be holy, as he is holy; pure, as he is pure; true, as he is true; kind, as he is kind; loving, as he is loving; just, as he is just; merciful, as he is merciful. Though God does not reward or punish all actions in this life, the Bible asserts that each person will be judged and recompensed according to his deeds.<sup>6</sup>

Christian ethical teachings reflect a balanced understanding of human nature. On the one hand, as Mencius said, we are basically good, for – as the Bible teaches – we

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed analysis and critique of Buddhism, see Lit-sen Chang, *Asia's Religions: Christianity's Momentous Encounter with the East*, pp.107-177. For a shorter critique, see Lit-sen Chang, *Critique of Indigenous Theology*, in G. Wright Doyle, ed. and trans., *Wise Man from the East: Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng). Critique of Indigenous Theology, Critique of Humanism*. Pp.95-97.

<sup>2</sup> Mark 12:30-31.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Ephesians 5:2.

<sup>4</sup> See also his edited volume, *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, G. Wright Doyle, *Jesus: The Complete Man*, and G. Wright Doyle, *Worship and Wisdom: Meditations on Psalms and Proverbs*.

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 62:12; Romans 2:6; 1 Corinthians 3:8.

are created in the image of God, who is good. On the other hand, as Xunzi taught, we are fundamentally evil and selfish, for – as the Bible teaches – we are born with a human nature that has been affected by sin in every department of our personality. That is, our minds, wills, and emotions are ruled by ideas and values that are not true; we put ourselves first, over others; we are rebellious against God’s will and the moral standards which we ourselves claim to accept as right.<sup>1</sup> Though we are all created in God’s image, and therefore equally valuable, we treat others as if they were less important than we are. In particular, we do not give adequate respect to those who are weaker – like women, children, the poor, the uneducated – or who are different from us, like people of other races.

Furthermore, we are captive to this sinful nature. By the way, “sin” is not restricted to murder and arson, but includes any of our motives and our actions that do not reflect God’s love, truth, and justice. We are also vulnerable to Satan, who tempts us not to believe in or obey God’s clear commands. That is, we cannot save ourselves through self-cultivation or self-effort.

### **Personal peace and transformation**

At this point, Christianity has good news. First, those who admit their wrongs and ask God for forgiveness can be pardoned by God. This is because Jesus Christ, who is both man and God, died in our place as a sacrifice, taking our punishment upon himself and allowing God to forgive us and be reconciled with us.<sup>2</sup> When we consider the things we have done wrong in the past, and that we cannot change, we are sometimes overcome with remorse, but Christians believe that God can bring good out of our evil, and that he will “wipe away every tear from our eyes” in heaven.<sup>3</sup> Being reconciled with God, we are allowed to approach him in prayer, knowing that he will accept us as his beloved children. In other words, we have “peace with God,” and therefore peace within ourselves.

With God as our heavenly Father, we have confidence to face the future, for God has promised to help his people if they will trust in him. The Bible also says that God will grant his people wisdom to make decisions, as they read the Bible, pray, and ask the advice of other believers. Christians find strength to meet daily challenges through prayer, the Holy Spirit within them, and the prayers of others. When they fail or are rejected, they know that God still loves and accepts them. When they are sick or facing death, they believe that God is with them and will take care of them, and will finally raise them from the dead, just as he raised Christ from the dead.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, Christians have motives and power to live with integrity, to tell the truth, and to obey the law. They have no reason to lie, steal, or cheat, because they believe that God will provide for them. As they trust in him, they lose all fear of the future. On the contrary, they have hope of future life. They do not place all their expectations on this life, but trust that God will satisfy their deepest desires in the life to come. They also have a fear of God’s judgment in hell; this gives them another motive to obey him.

Inner power to change comes from a variety of sources. First, God gives a new heart,

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<sup>1</sup> See Romans 1:26-32; 2:1-4; 7:18-23; Ephesians 2:1-4.

<sup>2</sup> Romans 3:21-26; 5:1-11; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 2:24-25; 3:18.

<sup>3</sup> Revelation 21:4.

<sup>4</sup> On internal transformation, see Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*.



that is, a new center of affections and decisions.<sup>1</sup> This enables a person to love God and neighbor, and overcomes our inborn selfishness and rebellion. Second, meditation on the Scriptures leads to renewal of the mind, that is, a transformation of values and assumptions, based on new information that is true.<sup>2</sup> The Christian sees that his old values and aspirations – such as a fear of losing face, obsession with success, addiction to pleasure, etc. – were wrong and self-destructive, and he now realizes that knowing and serving God are better for him and for people around him.

A new heart and mind are not enough however, for we still struggle with indwelling sin. The Bible says that God gives his own Spirit, the Holy Spirit, to dwell within those who repent and trust in Christ. This Spirit is the one who gives the new heart, causing what is called “regeneration” (being born again), and thus a new source of moral life. When the Christian prays for God to guide him, change him, or enable him to abstain from what is wrong and do what is right, the Spirit within him will work in ways that are impossible for us to explain, but which are the common experience of all true believers. That is why Christians can live differently than they did before.

They are also liberated from the power of Satan and his demons. This is all very hard to understand, but there is something real about the way that Christians can withstand the temptations of Satan, and even cast out demons from people who are possessed by them, through faith in Christ.

### ***Social community and harmony***

Christian ethics deals with several key areas of life within community.

The first of these is the problem of “The one and the many” – that is, how to balance the significance of the individual and the importance of the group. The Bible describes God as Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are all equal, but distinct in some mysterious way. They enjoy loving community, and have from all eternity. They are a small but fundamental “harmonious society.”

The Bible describes Christians as members of the Body of Christ. This is a living organism composed of the risen Christ and all who have truly repented, believed in him, and received new life through the Holy Spirit. Each person is unique and distinct, and has something to offer for the welfare of the whole. The entire group is expected to honor each individual and care for each person. At the same time, each person is expected to consider the interests of other members of the Body of Christ. We are not to live for ourselves, but for others.

This concept of the “one and the many” also makes possible a balanced view of individuals within the larger society: each is equally valuable, unique, and important to the entire group; at the same time, each one must respect the needs of the whole group when making decisions.

Christianity offers, and even demands, reconciliation with “enemies.” The Bible says that Christians were once enemies of God, alienated from him, and even hostile, doing evil deeds, but God sent Jesus to die for us, so that we might be reconciled to him. God made friends with us; we can, and must, show his love to others. Christian faith

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:10: 10:16.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 1; Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 4:17-24.

also makes possible the forgiveness of “enemies.” Since God has forgiven me, I should forgive others. Moreover, Christians receive the power to love the unlovely: After all, with all my faults and failings, God loves me, so how can I withhold love from people whom I find unlovely?

This is why Christians can enjoy a “safe” community: we accept each other as fellow sinners, and do not pour scorn on each other for our failures and even our sins. Instead, we pray for each other. Many Chinese have commented to me that when they enter a Christian meeting they feel something different, and the usually use words like “peace” and “love” to describe their feelings.

Real community must be built upon true communication; lies will only destroy the fabric of society. Christians believe that Jesus is the Truth, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, the Bible contains the truth, and we must speak only the truth. But we must speak the truth “in love.” That is, we must speak what will build others up and help them, not what tears them down. True things about others’ faults do not always have to be spoken, unless we are saying them directly to the person involved, and for the purpose of helping that person become more like Christ.<sup>1</sup>

To be stable, a community must be founded on shared values. Christianity provides a common set of beliefs and values that transcends culture, distance, and time. The Christian church has basic concepts, such as faith, hope, and love; belief in the same God; the teachings and histories of the same Bible, which Christians consider to be the highest authority for all decisions. Rituals are important for Christians, too. Songs, prayers, sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, listening to sermons – all these join people together in mind and heart to create a strong sense of belonging to a group that is linked to others like it around the world and even to God.

## **Family**

The Bible has a great deal to say about family life. Fathers are told to educate their children in the ways of righteousness; to discipline them fairly, but not to provoke them to wrath or to discourage them by harsh treatment or neglect; to imitate God the Father by being both firm and gentle, and merciful towards those who go wrong. Children are commanded to honor that father and mother; to obey them when they are young and to continue to honor their parents (though not necessarily to obey them) after they get married. When parents are aged, children must take care of them.<sup>2</sup>

Husbands must love their wives as Christ loved his people, giving his own life for them and caring for them with love and tenderness now, even when they are unlovable. They are to lead their wives, but with respect and gentleness, for wives are created equally in God’s image, and Christian wives are equally valuable to God and close to him. In fact, the wise husband will listen to his wife’s advice, and even her criticism, and learn from it; he will also admit when he is wrong, and apologize when he does not love his wife as he should. Wives must submit themselves to their husbands, treating them with respect even when their husbands don’t deserve it, and obeying them even when they think their husbands are wrong – unless, of course, the husband tells the wife to commit a sin. Both husbands and wives must consider the interests of the other,

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 4:25-32; Colossians 3:9-10.

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:20-21. Titus 2:1 Peter 3:1-7

consider the other more important than oneself, and act with humility and gentleness.<sup>1</sup>

Ever since the Protestant Reformation, Christianity has recognized the value of all sorts of honest work. Digging ditches, working in a factory, cooking, washing diapers, caring for children, teaching – all are ways in which we can serve God and each other. Bosses should exercise authority with humility and gentleness, and not by threats; obviously, they should not exploit their employees. Workers should treat their bosses with respect, be honest, do their tasks as well as possible – all to glorify God. Both boss and worker are serving Christ, and will be rewarded by God at the last judgment.<sup>2</sup>

## Government

Perhaps no area of society is more controversial today than politics. Christians disagree among themselves on how they should relate to those in authority, but the Bible is clear:

Rulers should remember that they, too, have a King in heaven. They are to imitate Christ the Servant King, who sacrificed himself for the good of this people. Their authority comes from God, and should be used to glorify God and to benefit those under their care. The Bible is clear that rulers must work for justice, protecting the poor and the powerless, refusing to take bribes, and punishing wrongdoers, no matter how powerful they are.

Citizens should obey their political leaders, as if they were serving Christ. They should speak respectfully of them even when they disagree with them. They should obey all the laws. At times, Christians may speak out against injustice, but they may never use force to rebel against the government. The only time Christians may disobey government authorities is when they are commanded to commit a sin or when they are forbidden to preach the gospel; at those times, they must obey God rather than men.<sup>3</sup>

## Christianity and China

More than two hundred years of history have demonstrated that Protestant Christianity is appropriate for Chinese society.<sup>4</sup> Christians have shown that they make good citizens and that they do good deeds in all domains of Chinese life.<sup>5</sup> Christian missionaries were leaders in the campaigns against opium, foot-binding, concubinage; they founded schools and hospitals, and brought education to women as well as men.<sup>6</sup> Missionaries were pioneers in the modernization of China, translating books of science, medicine, technology, international law, and engineering into Chinese; founding universities; and introducing China to the outside world.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:19-19; Titus 2:4-5; Peter 3:1-7

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-4:1; 1 Peter 2:18-20.

<sup>3</sup> Romans 13:1-7; Titus 3:1-2; Peter 2:13-17.

<sup>4</sup> Standard histories of Christianity in China include those by Bays, Broomhall, Moffett, Charbonnier.

<sup>5</sup> See *Salt and Light: Lives of Faith that Shaped Modern China*, for more than two dozen examples; Doyle, “Xi Shengmo (Pastor Hsi),” *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity*.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Doyle, “J. Hudson Taylor”; “L. Nelson Bell”; “Gladys Aylward”; “Eric Liddell,” in *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity*.

<sup>7</sup> See G. Wright Doyle, “W.A.P. Martin, Pioneer of Progress in China,” in *Builders of the Chinese Church*; G. Wright Doyle, “Timothy Richard,” in *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity*; Eunice Johnson, *Timothy Richard's Vision*.

Ever since the 1920s, Chinese Christians have gradually taken over the leadership of the Protestant church in the nation. John Song, for example, was the outstanding evangelist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; Watchman Nee (Ni Tuo Sheng) and Wang Mingdao founded churches that were totally independent of foreign influence. Since the 1950s, the Three –Self Patriotic Movement has run officially-sanctioned churches, while countless “house” churches have been led totally by Chinese believers. Chinese theologians like Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng) have written major works in theology and apologetics, and Chinese Bible scholars have produced commentaries of the highest quality.<sup>1</sup> In short, Protestant Christianity is fully indigenized now.<sup>2</sup>

### *Suitable for modern times*

More and more scholars now recognize that modernity owes a great debt to Protestant Christianity. Most early scientists were Christians, and many are today. Recent research has shown that there is no conflict between Bible and science, for Darwinism has been proven to be contrary to scientific evidence in a number of fields.<sup>3</sup> Major inventors were Christians, or at least believers in God.<sup>4</sup> From Max Weber to the present, Protestant Christianity has fueled the engine of modern industry, commerce, and international trade; for a long time, countries with the strongest Protestant influence were the most prosperous in the world. Commercial laws, such as intellectual property rights and contracts, issue from a Christian understanding of social reality.

### *Compatible with globalization*

Christianity is the most widely-spread religion in the world. There are Christians in virtually every country, including North Korea, Nepal, and Tibet. People from the most advanced countries to the most backward tribes have the Bible, or parts of it, in their own language. There were more countries represented at the 2010 Lausanne meeting in Cape Town than there are in the United Nations. Despite fierce persecution, the number of Christians is growing rapidly in Muslim societies, too. Christianity is the majority religion in sub-Saharan Africa; more than one-quarter of the people in South Korea are Christians. Remember, too, that Christians are found in all classes of society, both rich and poor, educated and uneducated. From university professors and Nobel Prize winners to construction workers building new skyscrapers, these people all share a common faith in the same God, read the same Bible, and have the same hope of everlasting life.

Christians form networks wherever they go. There are Chinese churches in North America, Europe, Russia, Latin America, and Africa; African churches in the Western nations; and international English-speaking congregations in every major city of the world. I once served in a Christian organization with members from 21 different nations. Our cultures differed, but our core values were the same. In fact, the Protestant missionary movement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a major force in

<sup>1</sup> See G. Wright Doyle, *Wise Man from the East: Lit-sen Chang (Zhang Lisheng)*; see also Zhang's works on systematic theology and apologetics in Chinese. Short biographies of Zhang, Ni, Wang and others may be found on the Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity.

<sup>2</sup> For ample evidence of the indigenization of Protestant Christianity in China, aside from standard histories referred to above, see books by Aikman, Cao, Golf, Liao, Keating, Ling, Ng, Xi, Xin, among many others.

<sup>3</sup> See, among many titles, works by Behe, Berlinski, Denton, Johnson, Wells.

<sup>4</sup> Examples include Isaac Newton, Orville and Wilbur Wright, George Washington Carver, Thomas Edison, Cyrus McCormick, and many others. For a longer list of both Roman Catholic and Protestant pioneers in science and technology, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Christians\\_in\\_science\\_and\\_technology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christians_in_science_and_technology).

creating the “global village” we experience today.<sup>1</sup>

Christianity, therefore, is not only compatible with globalization, but a major force in it. Furthermore, Christians are playing a key role in softening some of the harsher aspects of globalization, such as the exploitation of workers and the pollution of the environment. For example, I once heard a Singaporean Chinese tell of how he had worked to change the policies of Walmart in China to make their operations friendlier to the environment and to the welfare of employees.

In fact, Christianity has been an international religion almost from the beginning. Within thirty years of the death of Jesus, Christians could be found in North Africa, Ethiopia, Arabia, what is now modern Turkey, Greece, Rome, Persia (Iran), India, and Syria. Two thousand years of history in all sorts of cultures. The Christian faith was first brought to China from Syria during the Tang Dynasty.

### ***The environment***

Care for the world created by God as good has become a major theme in Protestant evangelical ethical discourse in recent year.<sup>2</sup> One reason Christians must preserve the integrity of the environment is that pollution hurts everyone, and God commands us not to murder others, even slowly by the degradation of the environment. The Bible says “You shall not steal,” and “You shall not covet.” These two commands forbid making a profit at the expense of others’ health and well-being. Christians also believe in obeying laws concerning the environment, and they are taught in the Bible not to give or take bribes.

### ***Relationship with “God”***

Finally, and most important, Christianity offers a relationship with a living God. He can be known through the truths contained in the Bible, which is a reliable source of knowledge about reality; through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ; and through the direct work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Believers in Christ can, the Bible says, enjoy a personal relationship with God as his beloved children, and they can do this along with other believers. We are not alone in the world. Our life has meaning. We have an almighty, all-wise, omnipresent Friend and Savior. He has promised us everlasting joy with him in a new heaven and a new earth.

### ***“Weaknesses”***

We know, of course, that most people in the world do not believe in Christianity, and that many intellectuals consider the Christian faith to be founded on myths and superstition. There are several major objections to the claims of Christianity. In the rest

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<sup>1</sup>For brief introductions to the Christian missionary movement, see Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations*; Robert, *Christian Mission*; Walls, *Missionary Movement in Christian History*.

<sup>2</sup> See Evangelical Environmental Movement website, <http://creationcare.org/>; articles in *Christianity Today* on Christian creation care, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/topics/c/creation-care/>. Also Brown, Edward R. 2008. *Our Father's World: Mobilizing the Church to Care for Creation* (InterVarsity Press); Merritt, Jonathan (2010) *Green Like God: Unlocking the Divine Plan for Our Planet* ISBN 978-0-446-55725-2; Snyder, Howard A., and Joel Scandrett. 2011. *Salvation Means Creation Healed: The Ecology of Sin and Grace* (Cascade Books); Wilkinson, Katharine K. 2012. *Between God & Green: How Evangelicals Are Cultivating a Middle Ground on Climate Change* (Oxford University Press).

of this paper I shall briefly mention and discuss a few of them.

### **Is the Bible true?**

The most basic question is, Is the Bible true? Usually, this question includes at least three others: 1. Aren't there many contradictions in the Bible? 2. What about the alleged historical mistakes in the biblical narratives? 3. Hasn't science shown the Bible to be wrong?

In response, let me say: 1. Though there is a very small number of apparent contradictions in the Bible which cannot be explained, almost all those which are usually mentioned are not really contradictions, and have very plausible explanations. 2. There are no known historical errors in the biblical narrative. In the past one hundred years, almost all the so-called errors have been cleared up by further research, especially archaeology. 3. Science has not disproven the existence of God – how could it, since science only deals with what can be observed, measured, and repeated in the laboratory? Second, the claim that evolutionism has shown the first few chapters in Genesis about creation are unscientific has been shown to be lacking in scientific evidence. Indeed, as noted above, evolutionism is now widely regarded as a theory with very little real evidence to support it, and many fatal arguments against it.<sup>1</sup>

Though liberal biblical critics have tried to show that the Bible is full of mistakes and cannot be trusted, they have been answered by scholars like Carl F. H. Henry and many others, who demonstrate that the Bible's claim to be the Word of God is worth our consideration.<sup>2</sup>

### **So many denominations!**

One common object to Protestant Christianity is that there are so many different denominations, each one claiming to have the best interpretation of the Bible. Though this can be confusing, in fact, conservative evangelicals only seem to be that different from each other. They really have far more in common than it appears. We this, for example, in the Lausanne Covenant, issued in 1974 at the conclusion of the Lausanne Congress on Evangelism in Switzerland. Thousands of Christian leaders from all over the world signed this statement of faith, and it has been used around the world since as a declaration of common convictions.<sup>3</sup> In 2010, an even larger meeting of the Lausanne Movement was held in Cape Town, South Africa. The "Cape Town Commitment" was signed by most who attended, and again, shows that Protestant evangelicals are united in their basic beliefs.<sup>4</sup>

### **"Christian" wars**

The history of Western civilization, where Protestantism has flourished, is replete with cases of wars fought in the name of Christ. Does this not prove that Christianity fosters war, not peace?

Yes, the fact is that kings and presidents have waged war while claiming that they

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<sup>1</sup> See note 32 above.

<sup>2</sup> See Doyle, *Carl Henry*; also Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*.

<sup>3</sup> For the full text, see <http://www.apuritansmind.com/creeds-and-confessions/lausanne-covenant/>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment>.

are fighting for God. The Cross of Christ has been used as a symbol for some terrible actions. When we examine the issue closely, however, we find two things: First, that politicians and religious leaders are often guilty of using religion for their own selfish ends. This does not disprove the truth of Christianity; it only proves that wicked and misguided people can misuse the name of Christ.

Second, if we look at the example and teachings of Jesus and of the apostles in the New Testament, we see that Christians may not use military force to protect themselves or to advance the interests of the church. Whether all war is totally wrong is a debated question, but it is clear that no war may be waged under the claim that “God is on our side.” God is on the side of no nation or people, and Christians are called upon to suffer rather than to harm others who persecute them.

## **Slavery**

American Christians must face the awful fact that white Christians enslaved Africans for several hundred years. In the American Civil War, southern Christians used the Bible to defend their oppression of black people.

Again, however, when we look more closely, we find that (1) the African slave trade has always been dominated by Muslims, even to this day; (2) Christians led the fight against slavery in England and in the United States;<sup>1</sup> (3) southern American Christians have all denounced slavery as wrong, and have expressed repentance for the sins of their forefathers.<sup>2</sup>

## **Women**

Does Christianity promote the oppression of women? This claim is often made. The truth is that the Bible teaches that females are just as valuable as males; it has always fought against the killing of girl babies. Christianity has limited divorce; has always opposed polygamy (including concubinage); teaches men to be gentle with women (indeed, the concept of the “gentleman” was created in a Christian society). Marriage and motherhood are highly valued in the Bible. Women’s education was first promoted by Protestant Christians. Everywhere the Bible is taught, the position of women has been improved and elevated.<sup>3</sup>

## **American society and foreign policy**

Finally, we should acknowledge that the degradation of current American society and much of American foreign policy has called into question why a so-called “Christian nation” could be guilty of such evil actions. First, we should note that reliable polls indicate that no more than ten percent of all Americans are practicing Christians, though many claim to be followers of Christ. Second, because of the massive rejection of Christianity by intellectuals, the media, and government leaders in recent decades, the entire culture has fallen away from the situation in my childhood, when Christian

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, “William Wilberforce,” in Baer, *Mere Believers*; Doyle, *Christianity in America*, pp.34-36, 112-113, 120-123, 135-137, 145-147, 149-152, 1260-161.

<sup>2</sup> See “Resolution on Racial Reconciliation On the 150th Anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention,” <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/899>; “Southern Baptists Apologize for Slavery Stance.” National Public Radio, August 28, 2009. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=112329862>.

<sup>3</sup> See Mangalwadi, *The Book that Made Your World*, pp.274-297.

moral standards were widely followed, even by non-believers.

American foreign policy has, indeed, often been conducted by people who thought they were doing the will of God. Some of them were quite sincere. They really believed that they were acting to help other nations. Others merely used the name of religion to cover their political and personal motives. I discuss this question at length in my book, *Christianity in America: Triumph and Tragedy*, where I try to show that whenever American Christians have sought to use political power to advance the kingdom of God, they have actually been used by clever politicians who had other motives and interests. The same has been true throughout history, from Constant, emperor of Rome, through the Middle Ages, the Wars of Religion, the imperialism of the nineteenth century, World War I in the twentieth century, and even America's invasion of Iraq. Christians have been deceived in their understanding of the Bible, and have been deceived by their leaders. They have forgotten Jesus' words, "My kingdom is not of this world."<sup>1</sup> This is all a great tragedy, and a lesson for Chinese Christians.

## CONCLUSION

Briefly, then, I conclude that, despite weakness, evangelical Protestant Christianity has much to offer in China's current ethical and moral crisis. It has clear standards and many good examples; is based upon a reliable Bible; provides personal peace and transformation; fosters harmonious social relationships; is a fully indigenized Chinese religion; helped to create, and works well with some aspects of modernization; helped to create, and helps people live in an international environment; advocates care of the environment; and offers a relationship with a living God as Father, Savior, and indwelling Holy Spirit. As such, it deserves careful consideration by all those who care about China.

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<sup>1</sup> John 19:36.



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## 宗教与中国的道德伦理危机

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**摘要：**中国的伦理和道德危机似乎每天都变得更加严重。它从个人扩展到家庭，工作场所，和社会的所有部分。任何希望给这场危机做出贡献的宗教都必须提供三样：1、个人的内心平静和道德转换为个人。2、明确的权威的教义和改变家庭与社会所有元素的内部动力。3、与神的关系。本文提出，基督教满足所有这些需求，且完全植根于中国社会，兼容全球化，能够激发人们保护环境。

**关键词：**基督教在中国；中国；中国社会；基督教伦理；中国家庭；宗教与社会；道德危机；道德重建

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