

Comparing and Contrasting Confucianism with Christianity

Jesus and Confucius

Jesus Christ is the Savior of humankind according to Christian belief. We human beings cannot save ourselves, because all of our attempts to do so are caught up in the sinfulness from which we need to be saved. Confucians, in contrast, do not see Confucius as a savior figure at all. Confucius thought humankind is naturally good rather than sinful and believed that with proper education and upright, skillful leadership, people are fully capable of achieving a good and moral life. In other words, people need training, encouragement, and education rather than salvation.

Religious Practice

Christians, including Catholic Christians, hold a variety of beliefs about the truth of religions other than their own. When it comes to religious practice, however, the majority of Christians practice only Christianity. This having been said, we must note that there are a whole host of different ways in which Christianity is practiced, influenced by cultural variables as well as by the interpretation of Sacred Scripture and Church Tradition, along with people's personal preferences. Confucians, however, assume that their religious practice will be informed by the variety of religious traditions found in East Asia, including folk religions, Taoism, Shinto, and Buddhism. They see no conflict between them, understanding them as knit together into a cultural whole that transcends the discrete religions.

The Bible and the Books of Confucius

Most Christians believe the Bible is a part of God's Revelation and refer to it as the Word of God. It has been, and continues to be, transmitted through the Christian Church. Confucians also have books at the core of their tradition, including the Analects, the Book of Mencius, and the Great Learning. These books, and others similar to them, are regarded as having been written or assembled by wise human beings, or sages, rather than being divinely inspired. The principal route of transmission through the ages has been through the formal educational system. The strength of Confucius's own character also informs the Confucian way of religion. He is an example of the ideal human being, as is Jesus for Christian faith.



What Is Worshipped

Finally, congregational worship and individual devotion in Christianity are directed toward the triune God. Confucian worship includes the observance of ancestral rites and rituals and participation in public rites and rituals that are much less focused on a deity. Confucius, who apparently did not believe in a God, nonetheless believed that worship was important for holding a society together and reinforcing morality and good citizenship. For Christians, congregational and private worship are far more important than they are for Confucians.

