



INTERVARSITY  
URBANA 15

# *Cross? Lotus?*

*How should we share the gospel with Buddhist and Confucian?*



# Why should we care about them?

- **1, Large People Groups**

- Buddhism:

- 488 million to 535 million people (2010s),
- 7% to 8% of the world's total population.

- Confucianism:

Chinese, Korean, and Japanese

86% of Muslims and Buddhists have never had any personal contacts with Christians.

- **2, Massive Buddhist and Confucian Revivals and Growing Presence in the West:**

- **3. Unique Challenges**















# What make Buddhism unique

- **“The Four Noble Truths”**
- **1, Suffering: Essence of Life;**
- **2, Why are we suffering? Ignorance ,Desire, Craving**
- **3, Cessation of Suffering: Enlightenment or Nirvana**
- **4, How to reach Nirvana?**
  - **A, Good conduct: right speech, right action, right livelihood;**
  - **B, mental development: right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration;**
  - **C, the way of wisdom: right understanding and right thought.**



# Later Developments

- Ideas of “Reincarnation” and “Karma.”
- Proliferation of Idol-worshipping and superstitious schools and practices.
- Hinayana; Mahayana:



# The Issues

- 1, The gap: self-reliance or God's grace?
- A Psychological and Moral Solution? "Buddhism is the most radical system of self-deliverance that ever has been conceived in the world."(Kreamer)
- 2, Buddhist's objections:
  - **A**, Christian theism: unscientific, superstitious;**B**, Historical superiority of Buddhism; **C**, Ethics: Buddhism: tolerant and peaceful; Christianity: exclusive and violent;**D**, Historical factors: Christianity's ties with the Western colonialism: an unspiritual religion ?**E**, Identification of religious and ethnic identities: The examples of Thai and Tibetan.



# Possible Christian Approaches

- **1**, Different approaches: A, Cultural equivalence approach: Finding the cultural forms (terminology, images, rituals, etc.); B, Scientific, medical, and educational witness. Sharing the fruits;
- **2**, Starting with anthropology:
  - “Christian missiology among the Buddhists should begin with anthropology and not with theology. Like the Buddha, we must analyze the human predicament first and lead them to God who can deliver them from their pathetic state.”
- **3**, Address the practical needs of people, rather than theological debate
- **4**, Apology for the wrongs done to Buddhism in the past.



- **5**, Recognizing and appreciate the wisdom of the Buddhist precepts: Religious instinct and hunger for truth; Ethical codes
- **6**, The need for “a non-confrontational preaching method; avoiding arrogant, and defamatory criticism of Buddhism. Hence it includes proclaiming the Christian gospel without criticizing or condemning Buddhism and engaging in religious dialogues with the Buddhists.”
- Helpful Resources: Asia Pacific Institute of Buddhist Study, Philippines;
  - World Christian Missionary Resources: [www.missionaryresources.com](http://www.missionaryresources.com)



# What make Confucianism unique

## 1, Essential Concern:

How to enhance your own good nature and be a moral person?

Human nature: good, and the seat of universal truth, Human nature: good, but overcome by some bad emotions, desires, and wills.

The key: to cultivate your mind and heart, and to achieve self-transcendence and become a superior person or sage

## 2, Emphasis on social behaviors and relations

- Five types of basic human relations: rulers-subject, father-son, husband-wife, brothers, and friends; not equal relation: male-domination and paternalism; obedience; focus on a good society

## 3, No strong interest in the supernatural and religious

- Confucius: agnostic and pragmatic theist? Definitely not atheistic.



# How should we approach Confucians?

- 1, De-institutionalized, diffused, and pervasive presence?
  - 2, There are significant Confucian moral principles we can endorse and use to build bridge;
  - 3, Instead of debating doctrine, starting with human dilemma and moral challenges;
  - 4, Life witness / relationship-building.
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- Help Resources: OMF;
    - Gregg A. Ten Elsof, *Confucius for Christians: What an Ancient Chinese Worldview Can Teach Us about Life in Christ?* (Wm b.Eerdmans, 2015)
    - “Christian, Meet Confucius,” *Christianity Today*, Sept, 2015



# The Biblical Principles We should always keep in mind:

- **1, Be firm on the Biblical Truth:**
  - John 14:6: “Jesus answered: ‘ I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’ (NIV)
- **2, Recognizing God’s image even in non-Christians; (Acts 17:16-34); and be wise in interaction with them:**  
“Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.” (Matthew 10:16)
- **3, Be gentle in attitude**
  - 1 Peter 3:15-16: “But in your hearts set apart Christ as lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”
- **After all, Buddhists and Confucians may have some good points, but the eternal hope for salvation can only be found in Jesus Christ!**