Forgiveness in Religious Thought

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A STRIKING emphasis in Jesus's ethical thought is his insistence upon multiple or unlimited forgiveness. The most conspicuous example of it is his reply to Peter's question, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus said unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times: but until seventy times seven." (Matthew 18: 21-22). Thus in terms of the question how often should one forgive, Jesus tells us to forgive an offender not once but many times.

What of the question whom shall one forgive? Jesus's answer is found in a passage in the Sermon on the Mount:

> Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you (Matthew 5 : 43-44).

If the word forgive is substituted for love, the answer is obvious. We should forgive not just our friends but enemies as well. Why? For two reasons at least.

> For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more *than others*? Do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5 : 46-48).

Again if the word love is replaced by forgive, the answer is self evident. It is not difficult to forgive those who forgive us, or whom we know will forgive us. Mutual forgiveness requires little of one. It is much more difficult and demanding to forgive those who do not reciprocate, however. But only by doing the latter does one attain a state of perfection or Godliness.

To summarize, Jesus taught that one should forgive unconditionally. This has at least three aspects—forgiving not once but many times, attaching no prerequisites to one's forgiving by saying I will forgive you if you will forgive me, and forgiving because it is intrinsically the only right or God-like thing to do.[1]

What of the role of forgiveness in other religions? When evaluating Confucius's view one may be tempted to conclude it is like Jesus's. Confucius advocated forgiveness and associated virtues—love, brotherly feeling, benevolence towards all, non-resentment. Some statements attributed to Confucius suggesting this are:

> Po-i and Suh-Ch'h were never mindful of wrong done them, hence they had few enemies.
>
> No blame should be made for errors that have been committed.

> His possession looked like non-possession; his fullness resembled emptiness; mistreatment he did not return.[2]

Further investigation, however, shows that Confucius's view was quite different from Jesus's. He emphasized brotherly feeling but with limitations, benevolence yes, but of a more passive than active sort, good will surely, but only as a response to the same already proferred. One does not find Confucius advocating, as Jesus did, the plus factor, that is going the second mile, giving the cloak also, or turning the other cheek. Confucius's view is illustrated best by his reply to a follower—"If you recompense injury with kindness, with what then will you recompense kindness? Recompense injury with justice and kindness with kindness"[3] and by his statement, "Is there one word…? Reciprocity! What you do not wish yourself, do not unto others."[4] Reciprocity, or returning like for like, is then the central principle of Confucius's ethics. Forgive others if others forgive you. If they don't, you need not forgive them.[5] Among the Chinese traditions it is Mo Tzu and the Mohists on the one hand and Lao Tzu and the Taoists on the other whose teachings most resemble Christ's. The difference between Confucius and Mo Tzu is seen in the former's "graded love" and the latter's "universal love"[6] and the dissimilarity between Confucius's and Lao Tzu's views is apparent in two statements of Lao Tzu's, "He who fights with love will win the battle ; he who defends with love will be secure" and "requite injury with kindness."[7] The Mohists and Taoists' emphasis upon love and forgiveness is much like that of Christ's; however, Confucius's view has been the dominant one.

In regard to Islam, the conclusion seems inescapable that Jesus's concept of multiple forgiveness is absent in both Mohammed's and his followers' teachings. It is true that Mohammed's practises were more advanced than many of his contemporaries. He did not allow unlimited revenge on enemies; he insisted on kinder treatment of prisoners of war and their release at the war's end. He did not annihilate whole tribes or cities. He curtailed polygamy and elevated the status of women. Yet his ethics, unlike Jesus's, never went beyond the level of equal retribution—"the recompense of evil is punishment like it." We do not find a chapter in the New Testament the equivalent of Surah VIII, the chapter on Spoils in the Koran, where Allah is pictured as a God supporting his followers in their bloody battles with the enemy. Nor do we find in the New Testament a parallel to Chapter XLII where Allah is pictured as a bargaining God who offers paradise if one believes and imposes torment if one does not.[8]

In regard to Judaism as found in the Old Testament, its views on forgiveness are like those of Islam. In the early portions of the Old Testament, Yahweh is a tribal God who fights with the Israelites insuring the enemy's defeat. Forgiveness is to be shown fellow Israelites but not to outsiders, and unlimited revenge is not uncommon[9] Later, a higher level is reached when equal retribution is enjoined, an eye for an eye and no more. One finds in the Old Testament God continually forgiving the Israelites for their sins; thus there is a definite repentance-forgiveness-reconciliation schemata as far as man and God are concerned. We do not find this multiple forgiveness carried over into human relationships, however, which is the realm we are concerned with here. If one were to claim that the prophets implied it in such statements as Micah's "What doth the Lord require of thee but to love mercy, do justly, and walk humbly with thy God", this is granted.[10] However, as Mo Tzu's and Lao Tzu's were a minority voice in the Chinese tradition and the Sufis in Islam, so are the middle prophets in Judaism. A legalistic view based on retributive justice became the dominant one.

When one turns to Buddhism and Hinduism, one finds an outlook much different from Confucianism, Judaism and Islam. Buddha's ethical teachings are much like those of Jesus. In the

Sermon on Abuse is the statement about overcoming evil with good—"Buddha said, If a man foolishly does me wrong, I will return to him the protection of my ungrudging love; the more evil comes from him the more good shall go with me."[11] The equivalent of Jesus' injunction to love one's enemies is found in the story of Prince Daghavu and the King of Kasi:

> He abused me, he struck me, he defeated me, he robbed me:
> If any cherish this thought, their hatred never ceases.
> He abused me, he struck me, he defeated me, he robbed me:
> If any cherish not this thought, their hatred ceases.
> For never in this world do hatreds cease through hatred;
> Through love alone do hatreds cease: This is an eternal law.[12]

The Buddha's statement of the Golden Rule is: "Hurt not others with that which pains thyself." The oneness of man and non-killing are enjoined in the passage:

> All men tremble at punishment, all men fear death;
> remember that you are like unto them, and do not kill, nor cause slaughter.
> All men tremble at punishment, all men love life;
> remember that thou art like them, and do not kill, nor cause slaughter.[13]

His teaching on compassion is seen in the verse:

> When thou seest that thine own self is at ease and thy fellow in distress, that thou art in high estate and he is brought low, that thou art at rest and he is in labour, then make thine own self lose its pleasure and bear the sorrow of thy fellows.[14]

The right means to use are indicated in the statement:

> Let a man overcome anger by love; let him overcome evil by good.
> Let him overcome the greedy by liberality, the liar by truth.[15]

He characterized the truly religious person as follows:

> Him I call a Brahmana from whom anger and hatred, pride and hypocrisy,
> have dropped like a mustard seed from the point of a needle.[16]

When these teachings are viewed as a whole, their similarity to Christ's is striking. Also, Buddha, like Christ, was consistent in his teachings. One finds an occasional statement contrary to the themes mentioned above, but the overwhelming emphasis in Buddha's gospel is as the above quotes indicate. Actually the situation seems much as it is with Christ. One could make a case for one point of view by quoting isolated instances such as Christ driving the money changers out of the temple or the "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's" statement, but in so doing one overlooks a vast amount of evidence pointing in the opposite direction. The same is true with Buddha. A further point is that there is little variation from the original Buddha by the Buddhist disciples of later centuries, a situation much different in Christianity, the reasons for which I shall suggest later.

Forgiveness and associated virtues are strongly emphasized in Hinduism also. Dasgupta points out that the virtues stressed in the Bhagavadgita are *Ksanti*—a forgiving spirit; *Odroha*—not to think ill of others; Dhrti—patience under stress; *Sattva-Samsuddhi*--purity of heart; *Akrodha*—control of anger; and *Apaisuma*—not to backbite. Pride, egoism, arrogance, selfishness, vanity, and greed are denounced as enslaving the individual while the opposite

liberate.[17] He indicates that the Bhagavadgita emphasizes repeatedly what he calls the virtue of sameness; subjective sameness or equanimity of mind (the sameness in joys and sorrows for example); objective sameness (regarding all people, good, bad, friend, foe, with equal eyes and in the same impartial spirit); transcendent sameness or equanimity (when one rises above and is unperturbed by worldly things).[18]

The emphasis upon love, compassion and forgiveness is seen in Krishna's statement:

> A man should not hate any living creature. Let him be friendly and compassionate to all. He must free himself from the delusion of I and mine. He must accept pleasure and pain with an equal tranquility. He must be forgiving, ever contented, self-controlled, united with me in his meditation.[19]

Not harming and other practises are enjoined in the Puranas:

> ...Kindness toward all creatures, patience, humility, truth, purity, contentment, decorum of manners, gentleness of speech, friendliness, freedom from envy or avarice and the habit of vilifying, these constitute the common duty of all castes.[20]

Two very forceful statements on genuine goodness are found in the Panchatantra:

> Praise not the goodness of the grateful man who acts with kindness to his benefactors. He who does to those who do him wrong alone deserves the epithet of good. Hear then a summary of righteousness, and ponder well the meaning; never do to the other persons what would pain thyself. The little minded ask, belongs this man to our family? The noble hearted regard the human race as all akin. The noble minded dedicate themselves to the promotion of the happiness of others, even those who can injure them.[21]

As in Buddhism, the right means is also alluded to:

> Conquer a man who never gives by gifts; subdue untruthful men by truthfulness; vanquish an angry man by gentleness; and overcome the evil man by goodness.[22]
>
> God accepts the services of those who, instead of employing all the various means of subduing a crooked enemy, adopt only the means of friendliness to them[23]

The Mahabharata also has a statement of the Golden Rule:

> This is the sum of duty; do naught to others which if done to thee, would cause thee pain.[24]

Manu, the early Hindu law giver, taught the same principles as Jesus:

> Let him (the Ascetic) patiently bear hard words, let him not insult anybody, and let him not become anybody's enemy for the sake of this perishable body. Against an angry man let him not in return show anger ; let him bless when he is cursed, and let him not utter speech, devoid of truth, scattered at the seven gates.[25]

What Vishnu upheld as virtuous is reflected in the following from the Puranas:

> He who does not vilify another either in his presence, or in his absence, who does not speak untruth, does not injure others, pleases Vishnu the best. Vishnu is pleased with him who neither beats nor slays any animate or inanimate thing.[26]

Hindu ethics, then, bear a striking resemblance to Christ's and Buddha's. Hinduism is like Buddhism also in that first, the original teachings form a consistent whole and second, the teachings of the later Hindu seers do not compromise with the original.

Three assertions have been made thus far about the concept of multiple forgiveness. It is an original and continuing precept of Buddhism and Hinduism. It was taught by Christ but subsequently abandoned or minimized by the Church. It was not the view of either the founders or later apologists of Confucianism, Judaism, and Islam. Let us assume the principle of multiple forgiveness taught by Christ, Buddha, and the Hindu seers is the most sound view. We can then ask why in three of the religions it was rejected from the beginning, in one it was ultimately, and in only two was it accepted both initially and afterwards.

Two answers shall be considered. One shows how external factors influence a value system. The other indicates how an ethical system is determined by its initial postulates. Let us look at the latter first. Two presuppositions moral systems may be based on are justice and love. In a system based on retributive justice the moral problem is set within the context of a wrong-punishment structure. A wrong has been committed; the offender must be punished in proportion to the crime. After he has undergone punishment, the wrong has been repayed and the demands of justice have been met. Justice, then, is viewed as the dispensing or receiving of punishment and reward depending on the nature of the deed. Within such a framework unconditional forgiveness would be a denial of equity or justice. The initial assumption being that each man shall receive his due, then forgiving rather than punishing the offender would be unfair or inequitable to those who are virtuous.

Regarding a system based on love and forgiveness, two characteristics are to be noted immediately. First, punishment and rewards are separated. Right and wrong are not treated in relation to each other but as separate instances. What is done to an offender is not deter-mined by what happens to the virtuous. This is what Jesus had in mind when he said "Verily, they have their own reward." Secondly the moral problem is viewed in a quite different perspective. It is not centred on the dispensing of justice but the achieving of reconciliation and the restoration of the harmony which was broken when the offence was committed. If forgiveness is the best way of restoring harmony, then one should forgive as many times as is necessary.

The ethics of Confucius, Mohammed and the founders of Judaism are grounded on the presupposition of justice. Thus, with them the law of retribution was central. They began with the principle that like deserves like or, do unto others as they do unto you. Kindness merits kindness; to return the opposite would be unfair or inequitable. For them forgiveness was conditional—You are under obligation to forgive only if you have been or know you will be forgiven too. You are under no obligation to forgive those who not forgive you. Such a juridical ethics is based upon philosophical naturalism and dualism. Implied by dualism is the view that a man is innocent or guilty and the blame for a wrong is the offender's alone. Every cause must have an equivalent effect; every crime must have an equivalent punishment. Like begets like; wrong invariably begets punishment and virtue reward. Man is motivated by fear of punishment

or hope of rewards. It is only reasonable and natural that virtue be rewarded and wrong be punished. Social custom has accepted and nurtured such justice through the ages. Law and a system of punishment are necessary for the continuation of the social order.

The ethics of Jesus, Buddha, and the Hindu seers are based on the presupposition of love and forgiveness. Such love is self giving, patient (long-suffering), and suffering. Its goal is to accomplish what a legalistic ethics cannot, namely bring about a change within the offender. From such a perspective punishment is not an answer and morality cannot be equated with justice. A genuine moral solution involves getting the offender to recognize and admit his wrong and to determine not to do it again. That is, there must be self understanding and a self-initiated change of the will. Long suffering by the offender is required because it may take time for the offender to come to his senses. Self giving is essential in order to help the offender awaken to the nature of his offense. The under-going of further suffering may be necessary before the offender's self understanding and change of will finally occurs. That Jesus recognized this ethical-psychological truth is seen in such statements as:

> But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.
>
> And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have *thy* cloak also.
>
> And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away (Matthew 5: 39-42).

Buddha was especially attracted by the psychological sanction for love and forgiveness. He began by considering the effects of forgiveness and non-forgiveness on both the offender and the offended. Forgiveness frees the offended from harbouring thoughts of anger, ill will and malice. It frees the offender from harbouring thoughts of resentment and retaliation and enables reflection on the self and the wrong committed followed by regret and a determination to change to occur. The result for both is self purification and reconciliation.

On the other hand he who does not forgive but instead desires punishment and demands retribution becomes a victim of his own insistence or cravings. To desire punishment is to give vent to passions and emotions harmful to both him in whom they originate and him on whom they are expended. The demand for retribution is an evil one for it is born out of self assertiveness, a false sense of the self and self pride, and the failure to recognize the finiteness of all things. Both enslave one. They become as chains or fetters, and they must be given up if one is to achieve the purity, repose and desirelessness of Nirvana. The craving for punishment is to be renounced since the inner remorse and suffering felt by the awakened offender is sufficient punishment. Buddha laid great stress on mercy, compassion and good will. His compassion consisted of sorrow and regret that man commits such wrongs and of pity toward those who do. His mercy took the form of forgiveness without regard to merit or demerit. His love was one which willed to all men good rather than equity or retribution. These themes are recorded in such sayings of Buddha's as:

> The evil doer mourns in this world, and he mourns in the next; he mourns in both. He mourns and suffers when he sees the evil results of his own work. Victory breeds hatred, for the conquered is unhappy. He who has given up

> both victory and defeat, he, the contented, is happy…[27]
> Not hate but love makes hate to end and reconcileth friend to friend.[28]
> Cleanse your heart of malice and cherish no hatred, not even against your enemies; but embrace all living beings with kindness.
> The robe of the Tathagata is sublime forebearance and patience. The abode of the Tathagata is charity and love of all beings.[29]
> Through hate, by hate overwhelmed, fettered in mind, one leads an evil life in bodily deeds, words or thoughts, and understands neither one's own welfare, nor the welfare of others, nor the welfare of both sides, according to reality. If, however, hatred is overcome, neither in bodily deeds, words or thought, does one lead an evil life, and according to reality one knows one's own welfare, the welfare of others and the welfare of both sides[30]

Forgiveness may be sanctioned psychologically as with Buddha. It may be verified metaphysically and theologically as well. To sanction forgiveness metaphysically is to assume that man can be motivated in other ways than physically grounded emotions. His acts are not determined by sensual pleasure and pain only. Material rewards are not the sole possible stimulus for acting. Man can find satisfactions on a level other than the physical. He can act in terms of principle. He can be virtuous for its own sake. There need be no external resaon. In a metaphysically ground ethics forgiveness is accepted *a priori* as good. One will practise it not because he has reflected and concluded beforehand that it will work, but because he believes it is in itself the virtuous thing to do. A metaphysical sanction rejects a natural law basis for ethics. The ought is not determined by the is. It is contrary to philosophical dualism in the sense that it rejects an absolute dichotomy between the sinner and the sinless, the offender and the offended, the one and the many. The sin of the offender is not his alone; it is shared by all to one degree or another. Individuals are parts of a whole and there is no sharp dichotomy between the two.

Both Christ and the Hindu seers propounded a metaphysical basis for forgiveness. In Christ's case any of the beatitudes illustrate this. The two parts of Jesus's statement "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy," are not interchangeable, and it is not a conditional statement. It would be invalid to restate it, "If you want to obtain mercy, be merciful." Jesus simply said, "be merciful." That you may be shown mercy is a by product of and not a motive for being merciful. "Blessed are the merciful" or "be merciful" is a command assumed *a priori* as true. It is to be done as a duty. Or one may use Jesus's reply to Peter again. Jesus did not say to Peter, "If you want to be forgiven seventy times seven, then you forgive likewise also." Instead he simply said, "Forgive, not seven times but seventy times seven."

A number of statements may be found in the Hindu scriptures exemplifying a metaphysical basis for ethics. Doing good works in terms of principle rather than rewards is one example.

> Wherefore apply thyself to work that ought to be done, but always without attachment for the man who applies himself to work without attachment attains to the Supreme.[31]
> True piety seeks no fruit; that is only trading in virtue.[32]

Professor Carpenter in his book points out that forgiveness is one of the nine duties of universal obligation[33] The practise of Ahimsa (non-injury) is central in the Hindu tradition, and a metaphysical basis for forgiveness is seen in Prince Yudhishthira's reply to his wife as described in Carpenter's book:

> Anger, replies the prince, leads to all sorts of crimes, brings weak men to ruin, and true energy is shown in renouncing it. The man who, when reviled, reviles again; who repays injuries by injuries, spoils the world's peace, for the birth of new generations depends upon forgiveness. Does not Kacyapa say in his hymn that forgiveness was virtue, sacrifice, the Vedas, Brahman (i.e. holiness), truth, the power that upholds the world? Whoever forgives all, attains to Brahman.[34]

For Christ, however, the highest sanction for forgiveness was the theological. He pointed out, as indicated at the beginning, that there is nothing meritorious about reciprocal forgiveness, (If ye love [forgive] those who love [forgive] you, what do ye more than others? Do not the publicans the same?). He noted that for wrong committed out of ignorance, retaliation or insistence on exact retribution is an unsatisfactory countermeasure, ("Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"). He recognized that love and forgiveness have a redeeming, reconciling power while estrangement and alienation is the result of the opposite. Like Buddha, he realized that forgiving liberates the person offended from the passion of revenge and malice and the offender from resentment, guilt and hostility. He believed that forgiveness is necessary because all share or participate to one degree or another in the sin of the offender. Beyond these considerations, however, Jesus enjoined forgiveness because it is grounded in God's example, nature, and will. As God has forgiven us, so must we forgive others. In fact we cannot expect God to forgive us, if we do not first forgive others.[35] God's forgiveness is an example for us to follow. But forgiveness is a valid inference even more because of God's nature. Jesus conceived of God not in terms of justice, sovereignty, wrath and punishment but as mercy, compassion, love, good will, and forgiveness. God by his very nature seeks to redeem and reconcile men to himself through love and forgiveness. Likewise only through the same means can man be reconciled to man. The reluctance to forgive, the insistence on retribution, requital, and exact justice is based on what might be called a juridical, Calvinistic view of God. When stressed excessively, justice may be misused by man, since justice "is safe only in God's hands, for in him. It is held in the eternity of holy love."[36] It is important to note that one's view of the nature of God will determine whether he emphasizes multiple forgiveness or juristic retribution.

Two more points might be added in regard to the Christian view. First, the law of forgiveness is a law given to man by divine revelation. It is the divine will in the case of Christianity, and for the Christian this would be its first justification. A second sanction would be that this divine law is a true law promulgated by a benevolent deity and so expresses ultimate goodness and wisdom. Thus, even though men practise unlimited forgiveness in specific situations with reluctance or hesitancy, because they only foresee the negative consequences of such, they can in the end practise unlimited forgiveness because they have faith in the divine nature and divine providence. Secondly, as Professor Gardner says regarding love, "It is not sufficient simply to forgive those who ask to be forgiven, but the imitation of God's Agape means that the believer will take the first step and bear the "cost" involved in leading the unbeliever toward a goal which he has not yet seen and accepted. It means taking the initiative in effective reconciliation and brotherhood when one has been wronged."[37]

Regarding the question why the six religions differ regarding the question of forgiveness, the first answer has been that it is due to the variance in the initial presuppositions. We have seen that there are two types of value systems, one grounded in the concept of justice, the other in love. Confucianism, Judaism and Islam exemplify the first; Buddhism, Hinduism and

Christianity typify the second. A further distinction has been made regarding the second group. While the three are based on the principle of love, the justification varies. For Buddha love and forgiveness was sanctioned psychologically. In the Hindu tradition there is a strong emphasis upon the metaphysical. For Christ and the Christian its verification is theological. There is another, quite different, answer to the question of forgiveness, however. It involves analyzing beliefs in relation to the environment in which they emerge and drawing conclusions on the grounds that a person's or group's beliefs are coloured to a larger extent than is often realized by the external or environmental factors or millieu.

For instance, Confucius did not preach multiple forgiveness because he supported a specific type of political-socio-economic system (a feudalistic, paternalistic, semi-aristocratic juridic one) and his philosophy was aimed in part at rationalizing that system.[38] Also Confucius, like the Sophists who were his Greek contemporaries, was immediately dependent for his livelihood, his very means of subsistence on those he sought to persuade, a situation which is always a rather delicate one. Further, Confucianism, as it developed, became rather early in its history a state religion—the official religion of the empire. This occurred in 140 B.C. in the reign of the emperor Wu Ti, who thus might be characterized as the Constantine of Confucianism. On the other hand neither Mo Tzu nor Lao Tzu were in a position of having to bend their views because they had a status quo to uphold or an accepted system to defend.

In the case of Islam, Mohammed was not a religious teacher only. Soon after receiving his revelations, he began gathering his disciples around him and shortly became involved in the practical task of setting up a theocratic nation state. He was faced with the necessity of amalgamating hostile tribes, warding off a common enemy, and reconstructing the existing social and economic systems, practical concerns which in the end influenced his ethical precepts quite extensively. As for Judaism, it was from the beginning identified with a particular group who in the end became a particular nation or national unit. The religion of Judaism became the religion of the state of Israel and as such could not free itself from a national self-consciousness. At the same time, as with Confucianism, Judaism as it developed in Israelite history, became institutionalized and thus ritualistic, legalistic, rigid, inflexible, a religion of law bereft of spontaneity and immediacy.

It is true that within Hinduism there are time variations and differences. Generally, however, in its long history basic Hindu ethical thought remained unchanged for two reasons. First, Hindu religion did not become highly institutionalized as in Judaism because of recurring reform movements which prohibited it. Secondly, it did not become tied to a nation state or a strong nationalistic consciousness as in Confucianism and Islam. The same is even more true of Buddhism. It did not become highly institutionalized or the tool of the state in as much as it originated in India and subsequently spread to other areas—China, Japan, Burma, the whole Malayan Peninsula, and in fact in the end became almost extinct in the land of its birth. It is true that Buddhism had its Constantine, namely Asoka, emperor of India from approximately 269 to 232 B.C., but he became a genuine convert of Buddhism and did not use it for his own imperial ends.

In regard to Christianity, Jesus preached multiple forgiveness, non-resentment, universal love, and the brotherhood of man because he had no political system or nation state he felt bound to, limited by or obligated to rationalize. For three centuries after his death Christians were in similar circumstances and promulgated his teachings. Beginning in the fourth century the tide turned for several reasons. One was that Constantine out of pragmatic motives made Christianity

the official religion of the empire and, once having been elevated to the status of the religion of the empire, Christianity became in the end the slave or tool of the empire. Secondly, in order to adjust her thought to the fact of the huge Roman Empire, which had now become the Holy Roman Empire, and which was held together by a legal system based on natural law, the Church disowned neo-Platonism and turned to Aristotle and his concept of retributive justice. Thirdly, the Church itself in the Medieval Period became wealthy, institutionalized, and a defender of the status quo.

The major religions of the world, we may conclude, can be divided into two groups with regard to forgiveness and their other ethical teachings. The differences may be accounted for in two ways. The first is, in terms of internal factors, the initial premises each begins with. The second is in terms of external factors. Whenever a religion becomes highly institutionalized or whenever a religion becomes affiliated with a nation state, in either or both cases the religion loses its original purity; its ethical precepts suffer; it fails in its divine mission of leading men in the ways of God and truth.

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[1] It should be pointed out that this article deals with the problem of forgiveness on the human level, that is, in man's relations with his fellowmen whether individually or collectively. It does not deal with forgiveness on the divine level, in relation to Christian eschatology for example. I would like to thank Dr. Warren Steinkraus of the State University of New York at Oswego for his helpful suggestions.

[2] James R. Ware, *The Sayings of Confucius,* (New York, 1959) pp. 42, 32, 57.

[3] Charles S. Braden, *Jesus Compared,* (New Jersey, 1957) p. 127.

[4] Ware, *Op. cit.* p. 101.

[5] The rule of reciprocity can be taken as a basic principle of Confucius's ethics. It should be pointed out that in practise he leaned away from a strict legalism while on the other hand Hsun Tzu and the Legalist School upheld such. Professor Creel has a very good discussion of this in his book, *Confucius and the Chinese Way,* pp. 140-1, 162-172.

[6] Fung Yu-Lan characterizes Mo Tzu's view as "all-embracing love," the doctrine that "everyone in the world should love everyone else equally and without discrimination." (p. 53, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy).* Mo Tzu's views on universal love are found in three chapters of *The Ethical and Political Works of Mo Tzu,* translated by Mai Yi-pao. They contrast with the graded love taught by Confucius that naturally one loves his own family more than others, members of his own village more than others etc. (p. 71 *op. cit.).*

[7] Lionel Giles, *The Sayings of Lao Tzu,* (London, 1904) p. 51. In his book, *Chinese Thought and Institutions,* Professor Fairbanks points out that Lao Tzu is much more like Christ in his teaching that one should "recompense injury with kindness." (p. 293).

[8] Examples are :

> "When your Lord inspired the angels—verily I am with you ; make ye firm then those who believe; I will cast dread into the hearts of those who misbelieve—strike off their necks then, and strike off from them every finger tip. That is, because they went into opposition against God and His Apostle ; for he who goes into opposition against God and His Apostle—verily, God is keen to punish." Chapter 8, verses 13-14, Vol. VI *Sacred Books of the East* edited by F. Max Muller.
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> "He it is who accepts repentance from His servants and pardons their offences and knows that which ye do. And, He answers the prayer of those who believe and do right, and gives them increase of His grace ; but the misbelievers—for them is keen torment." Chapter 42, verses 24-25. Vol. IX *Sacred Books of the East,* edited by F. Max Muller.

In Islam it is the Sufis who, more than other groups, stress love and forgiveness. See D. M. Donaldson, *Studies in Muslim Ethics.*

[9] An example is in Joshua 8 : 7-8, "Then ye shall rise up from the ambush, and seize upon the city ; for the Lord your God will deliver it into your hand. And it shall be, when ye have taken the city, that ye shall set the city on fire, according to the commandment of the Lord shall ye do."

[10] E. B. Redlich points out that the prophets were "protectors of the oppressed and advocates of forgiveness *(The*

Forgiveness of Sins, p. 21) and that "Hosea's great discovery was that the highest attribute of God was not justice but love." p. 33.
[11] Paul Carus, *The Gospel of Buddha,* (Chicago, 1894), p. 145.
[12] One account is in Eugene Burlingame, *Buddhist Parables,* (New Haven, 1922) pp. 20-29.
[13] Lewis Browne, *The World's Great Scriptures* (New York : 1946) p. 178.
[14] *Santideva's Bodhicharyavatara.*
[15] Lewis Browne, *Op. cit. p.* 182.
[16] E. A. Burtt, *The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha* (New York: 1955), p. 71.
[17] Surendranath Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy,* III (Cambridge, 1932) p. 29.
[18] Dasgupta, *Ibid.,* II, p. 512.
[19] Lewis Browne, *Op. cit.* p. 117.
[20] Lewis Browne, *Ibid., p.* 122.
[21] S. Champion and D. Short, *Readings From World Religions,* (Greenwich, 1959 p. 22.)
[22] Champion and Short, *Ibid., p.* 42.
[23] Dasgupta, *Op. cit.,* Vol. III, p. *70.*
[24] Champion and Short, *Op. cit.,* p. 41.
[25] F. Max Muller, editor, *Sacred Books of the East, XXV* (Oxford 1886) p. *207.*
[26] Browne, *Op. cit.,* p. *120.*
[27] Lewis Browne, *Ibid., pp.* 173, 181.
[28] E. W. Hopkins, *Ethics of India,* (New Haven 1924), p. 160.
[29] Paul Carus, *Op. cit.,* pp. 126, *127.*
[30] Phra Khantipalo, *Tolerance* (London, 1964) p. *49.*
[31] John Davies, *The Bhagavad Gita,* (Boston, 1882) p. 50.
[32] J. Estlin Carpenter, *Theism in Medieval India* (London, 1921) p. 158.
[33] Carpenter, *Ibid.,* p. 162
[34] Carpenter, *Ibid.,* p. 157. This is not to deny that forgiveness is sanctioned psychologically and theologically by Hinduism as well. As Hopkins points out the Vedic Gods were characterized by, forgiving (p. 39ff), and Carpenter says that the forest sages in the pre-Buddha period advocated the granting of forgiveness for its own sake "in fulfillment of sacred ordinance." (p. 176).
[35] "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way ; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." (Matthew 5 : 23-24).
[36] Interpreter's Bible, VII (Nashville, 1955) p. 302.
[37] E. C. Gardner, *Biblical Faith and Social Ethics,* (New York, 1960) pp. 172-3.
[38] See Creel, *Confucius and the Chinese Way,* chapter X on this. Fung Yu-Ian also discusses this on pp. 50, 70 of *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy.*