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*Paper I*

The Concept of  
an Asian Community  
and the Unity of Religions  
Seen from Christian Scripture

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Introduction

Christianity is a religion that sprang from Asia almost 2,000 years ago. The basic teachings are contained in the New Testament of the Holy Bible, which is composed of four gospels dealing with the life of Jesus Christ and accounts of the works of the apostles in their effort to spread the teachings of Christ. It also includes the letters of St. Paul, called the Epistles. The last book is the vision of St. John of the apocalypse or revelation. This deals with the second coming of the Messiah. Other teachings of Christianity sprang from the practices of Christians in Europe during the medieval period.

Subsequently, Christianity is divided into different divisions. The three major divisions are ; Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant. Other sects and branches later resulted from the different interpretations and practices of the churches. However, there have been many efforts by these churches to return to the teachings of the scriptures.

Today when we speak of Christianity, we refer to a religion that

is based on the scriptures. We think in terms of teachings—in the teachings of Jesus Christ and His disciples—as contained in the Holy Bible. However, facts show that Christianity is not founded primarily on universal principles, but on historical events;<sup>1</sup> actual events that happened 2,000 years ago in Israel. Jesus Christ never wrote down his teachings. He never did any writing at all except on the sand. No record whatsoever is left to show that he ever intended to perpetuate His ideas in writing. The New Testament that we know today was written long after Him—the Gospels, Epistles and Apocalypse are products of the church. Little of these were written until there was a flourishing church all over the Roman world. It was not even gathered in its finally agreed upon form until 692 A. D.<sup>2</sup> When Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire, it was St. Paul who, by writing letter after letter, straightened out the thinking and at times the behavior in these newly established churches. How many of these letters have not survived? We do not know. But those we now have show the real beginnings of the attempt to formalize, rationalize and put down in logical argument the Christian faith. So much so, that it has been charged that Paul, not Jesus, is the true author of what we know today as Christianity, and that differences and divisions among Christians have resulted from the obscuring of the simple moral precepts of the Galilean by the sophisticated metaphysical speculation of this man from Tarsus.<sup>3</sup> This is not to accuse Paul as the cause for all differences in interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, which resulted in the divisions among Christians as well as furthering the distance from other religions. Paul accomplished his mission to spread Christianity, and he did this very well. But it must be pointed out that our present differences among Christians are primarily because we may have really missed the fundamental, basic truth of Christianity.

#### Christianity : A Historical Religion

Christianity is a historical religion. This is because we cannot deny the fact that Jesus Christ lived in history. We may not have enough records or facts about the details of His life to write a conventional biography, because He lived an obscure life. But we know for sure

that this man was a man of strange and incomparable greatness—ultimately heroic. He stands out far above any man that ever lived in history. The influence He has exerted on man since 30 A.D. is so tremendous that, to quote from the Presidio, "All the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that were ever built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as has that One Solitary Life." Simple His life was, but it has become so magnified because of the importance of what He did.

The only record we have of the life of this man is the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. According to these gospels, Jesus was born in a stable. As a boy, he worked in a carpenter's shop, and as a young man, he became an itinerant preacher. Then he was accused of a crime he did not commit, went through a mock trial and was crucified according to the Roman mode of executing criminals at the time. On the third day of His death, His borrowed tomb was found empty, and subsequently He appeared to His mother and Mary Magdalene, then to His disciples. Since then, the impressions of His life have spread all throughout the world. Why did such a simple life spread so tremendously? What did He say or do, that people around Him then were so impressed and captivated that they went on telling others and spread His life like a contagious disease that could not be stopped?

Reading through the New Testament, there seems to be nothing new in the teachings of Jesus Christ. In fact, many of His teachings were already taught by other philosophers and sages before Him. Confucius spoke of doing unto others what you would have others do unto you. He also spoke of loving your neighbors. And Taoism teaches us to repay injury with kindness, evil with good,<sup>4</sup> etc. And yet these teachings seem to have some strange freshness in Jesus Christ. Was it His method of teaching or preaching? Many preachers find ways in which they could captivate and convince their audiences.

Billy Graham did. Was it His voice, His diction? Was it because He was articulate? The answer, we will never know. Nothing is said of His ability to teach or preach that is of record. It is doubted if these were the factors that impressed those that were before Him.

We know that any impressive speaker can only mesmerize for the moment, but his effect is not really lasting. But that of Jesus has lasted thousands of years.

Again, reading through all the New Testament and the history of Christianity since then, we see that what is really fundamental in Christ Jesus is not His life nor His teachings but what He did. His actions are the most significant and the most basic aspect of the Scriptures and Christianity as a whole. His actions spoke louder than words.

### The Deeds of Jesus Christ

John 13 : 1—5 reads,

Now, before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.

And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things unto His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God, He riseth from supper and laid aside His garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that He poured water unto a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded.

This act of Jesus Christ condescending to wash his disciples' feet demonstrates not only his humility, but most of all his love. This love of Jesus was not merely words; it was manifested in concrete actions. Love has no meaning unless it is demonstrated. The act of washing illustrates the impression Jesus made on men. He was apparently a man free to give Himself to others, whoever they were.<sup>6</sup> And He was free because he loved. It is love that frees man from the bad emotions of selfishness, pride, hatred and prejudice. It is love that makes man transcend his basic nature. Because of His love, Jesus was capable of doing things which others could not. It was His love that made Him universal—for all man and for all times—

one who must be emulated by all.

The Gospels are full of accounts of what He did. He moved among the dregs of society. He was free to associate with prostitutes and tax extortionists, with lepers and thieves without self-consciousness. He healed the sick, He helped people in despair, He counseled them and taught them. He loved even children. Peter once compressed the deeds of Jesus Christ in five short words: "He went about doing good."<sup>7</sup>

Once during the feast of the Passover, Jesus entered and passed through Jericho, and because of His popularity, the crowd filled the streets where He would pass. A small man, probably a midget and probably feeling inferior, and hated because his occupation was that of a tax gatherer, climbed up a sycamore tree to have a glimpse of the Man now known to be the friend of all. Little perhaps, people would have thought that Jesus would pay attention to that tax collector, but when Jesus saw him, He shouted and said "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down for today I must abide at thy house."<sup>8</sup> Jesus was not prejudiced against man's poor physical make up. Zacchaeus was small in stature and a tool of Romans to exploit the people, but he was also a brother. Jesus again demonstrated love that had no boundaries.

Again when Jesus had to go to Galilee, He decided to pass through Samaria. In those days there was an old feud between the Samaritans and the Galileans and Jesus was aware of the risk of going through sensitive areas. Nevertheless, He went there with five of His disciples, who went to town to buy food. He sat by a well and a Samaritan woman came to fill her jug with water, and Jesus asked her for water to drink. Stunned, the woman replied why he a Jew would ask a Samaritan for water to drink "for the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans."<sup>9</sup> The old prejudice, the blood feud and old grudges and intolerance between these two people was thus broken by Jesus. This He did deliberately and consciously to teach them a new testament "a perfection of the old law, brotherhood of man for man, for all were children of the Father; an end to old grudges, and blood feuds and hatred; forgiveness, the answer to racial and religious strife; love to heal all wounds."<sup>10</sup> The woman of Samaria was a

prostitute and Jesus knew she was and yet spoke to her. A friend of all—enemy and downtrodden, even the rich had a place in His heart.

After Samaria, Jesus and His five disciples proceeded to Galilee.

There a noble man who had heard of Him came running frantically because his son was at the point of death. He asked Jesus to come and heal his son and Jesus said "Go thy way, your son liveth."<sup>11</sup>

The man left to find that his son had been healed. There were no exceptions to the extent of Jesus' love. He served not only the poor, but also the rich and the guilty.

Again, a woman was brought before Him by the scribes and pharisees. This woman was caught in the act of adultery. It was the law handed down by Moses that such an act was punishable by stoning the guilty to death. They asked Him what He would say and Jesus stooped down, wrote on the sand, as though He did not hear them. But when they continued to ask Him, He lifted Himself up and said "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."<sup>12</sup> With these words, all the accusers, one by one departed. When the woman was alone, He asked where her accusers were and she said she had none. And Jesus said "Neither do I accuse you. Go, do not sin again." This incident was planned to trap Jesus and put Him in a spot where He could not have escaped. They knew He was not likely to order the poor woman to be stoned to death. If He did not, He would also be guilty of disregarding the law, and He would be punished to death. But the answer of Jesus was directed to each man's conscience, and after realizing that they themselves were not guiltless, they withdrew in defeat. Only the love of Jesus, which touched man's heart, could have done this forgiving act for a sinner.

But what is really most amazing in Jesus is His capacity to forgive even those who caused His death, after being betrayed by His friends and brought before Pilate, the Roman Governor of Judea, for trial. Pilate found him innocent of any crime against Roman law, but the crowd cried 'crucify him,' so Pilate washed his hands to show that Roman authority had nothing to do with the execution of this innocent man; but the people, the crowd who asked for his blood

were responsible for it. Jesus then went through torture. He carried his cross up to Mt. Calvary, and there He was nailed to that same cross He carried, and underwent the process of execution by slow and painful death. While Jesus was hanging on the cross and agonizing, He said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."<sup>13</sup> What could be more magnanimous than this act of praying for forgiveness even for one's tormentors? Ordinarily, man when being subjected to torture would curse his enemies, but not Jesus. He showered them with love. Because of this, His love become heroic. He went beyond that of a mere earthly being. He towered above other men in stature and magnitude. That is why Christians are very much convinced that this man is truly the son of God. For how else would God reveal His love to man than to send precisely a man like Jesus Christ?

#### The Love of God in Jesus Christ

As was said earlier, Jesus was capable of doing things beyond what ordinary men do because of His love. Many Christian groups center their ministry on the passage of John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."<sup>14</sup> Christians consider Jesus to be the price paid for man's sin and that the only way to salvation is by having faith in Jesus Christ. What is really vital in this passage is the Love of God. It is very clear that the world is God's object for this love. His love has to be manifested to man, and man in return reciprocates by believing and having faith in Him. Jesus Christ demonstrated this love by directing his active love to all men, even to His enemies and tormentors. By loving, He freed himself from all negative emotions. Distrust was removed, fear totally eliminated, not even death was feared when there was love.

That is why when he was about to die on the cross, he forgave his enemies. He was not afraid to die. His whole life was so full because He loved everyone. When the New Testament tells us that He died not only for our sins but also for the sins of the whole world, it reflects the fact that Jesus was for all men.<sup>15</sup> Christianity

therefore is a religion that embraces all peoples of the world, whether they acknowledge Jesus Christ or not. Even the unbeliever had a place in the heart of Jesus Christ, because all men are the object of God's love and Jesus activates God's love.

Those who follow Jesus must likewise have the freedom that Jesus possessed. When they love, they must activate that love for every their neighbor whether he be black or white, yellow or brown. Whether he is rich or poor, ugly or good looking. To be free is to be indiscriminate as to race, color or creed. To be free is to be trusting and to have that faith that passes all understanding. To be free is to be unafraid. No wonder the early Christians amazed the Roman emperors when they marched to the arena to be devoured by hungry lions. They sang hymns of praise to the Lord. They were unafraid of death because they were free. They loved even their enemies. This freedom of the Christians has led to the spread of Christianity to almost all corners of the world.

#### The Active Love of Jesus: The Key to Unity for All Mankind

When Jesus washed his disciples' feet, He likewise commanded them to wash each other's feet. "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have to you.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his Lord."<sup>16</sup> It is therefore proper for every Christian to act out his love, and not wait for others to show their love to him. Christians must initiate, open up, establish a line of communication with their neighbors by showing love. By the example of Jesus Christ, every Christian that follows Him must show humility and goodwill to everyone, for it is by showing love that the object shall return the same love, and that give and take action begins.

The unity of the world can be achieved only when all people live in harmony in a give and take relationship, and the Christian is expected to initiate this. When there is love, there is tolerance, there is understanding. The world will then be freed from racial prejudice, from injustice and from suspicions that lead to conflict and war. It

is only when we Christians initiate and show our love and goodwill towards all other people of the world who may not share our beliefs, that the present ills of this world will be removed. When thus removed, we can live in peace and harmony under God's guidance.

#### The Essence of Christianity

A scribe once asked Jesus which is the first commandment of all, and Jesus answered, "Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment. And the second is like it, namely this, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is no other commandment greater than these."<sup>17</sup> The essence of Christianity is the love of God to man and man's love to God through his fellowmen. Because of these commandments, all other doctrines, teachings and practices must be adjusted to conform to the essence of Christianity. This love for one's neighbor is exemplified by Jesus' unconditional love for all mankind. The deeds he performed is the fundamental truth of Christianity.

Now, to find a basis for the unity of religions in Asia and the world, there is no better way than to return to the basics—to the essence of our religions. In Christianity, the foundation of all teachings, practices and traditions—the sacraments, the doctrines, the church organizations and all other aspects of Christianity—must be secondary in importance and must be adjusted to the greatest commandment. Nothing else could be said of their presence unless they serve to enhance the true essence of Christianity. For unless they do, they merely obscure meanings and create confusion, conflict and division among the peoples of the world.

#### Conclusion

Christianity is essentially a historical religion centered upon a historical figure, that of Jesus Christ. The essence of this religion is the Love of God and how man must in return love him. The

records of the life of Jesus Christ are scant, not enough details to write a biography in the conventional sense. The proof of his existence is beyond question. He did exist in history, through the accounts of his life by witnesses who related the story of His life, deeds and teachings to others. We have the four Gospels that are the written accounts of his life. They are not eyewitness accounts, but they are the general impressions of faithful believers to an extraordinary character that came and lived with us here on earth and whose presence, though not physical but spiritual, is still very much felt by every Christian who acknowledges Him as their Savior and Lord. The accounts of his life were never intended as documentary evidence for a biography, but as a story to reveal a universal truth, and that is the Love of God for man. If we cannot trust these gospels, what else could we trust?

In the process of spreading the good news about Jesus, His followers attempted to formalize and systematize their teachings, and created an organization, the church, to facilitate the conversion of other people into the faith. In time, conflicts were created, wars ensued and the bloodiest wars fought in Europe were all in the name of Christianity. Crusades against the followers of Islam and expeditions to conquer new lands in the name of Christianity brought Europe to other continents. All these undertakings were largely for selfish ends and Christ was taken as a convenient justification for their deeds. In time, European civilization developed along materialism, which now encroaches on Asia, threatening the spiritual values which Asians have guarded and preserved for centuries.

These problems have arisen, but they are not insurmountable. All that is needed to solve these problems is to examine again the basics of our religions. In the process, we see our direction has veered too far away from the fundamental essence of Christianity, and that is the active love of Jesus as evidenced in the scriptures. By active love, we can create give and take relations with one another in harmony, the unity of all religions in Asia, and unity throughout the world will follow.

Finally, it must be noted that Rev. Sung Myung Moon and the Unification Movement, in their effort to unify all Christianity and

all religions in the world, are following the example of that simple Galilean in initiating give and take relations between all people centered upon God. We of different religious persuasions and different racial and historical backgrounds, must also follow this noble example and come together in unity and harmony under God's guidance.

#### NOTES

1. Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man* (New York: The New American Library of World Literature Inc., 1950), p.274.
2. Paul Hutchinson, "The Onward March of Christian Faith" in *The World's Great Religions* (New York: Time Inc., 1957), p.196.
3. Ibid.
4. Joseph Gaer, *How the Great Religions Began* (New York: The New American Library of World Literature Inc., 1929), p.95.
5. John 13 : 1-5.
6. Paul M. Van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (New York: The11 Macmillan Company, 1963), p.123.
7. Smith, Op. Cit., p.277.
8. Luke 19 : 5.
9. John 4 : 9.
10. Fulton Oursler, *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (New York: Perma Books, 1949), pp.150-151.
11. John 4 : 50.
12. John 8 : 7.
13. Luke 23 : 34.
14. John 3 : 16.
15. Van Buren, Op. Cit., p.152.
16. John 13 : 14-16.
17. Mark 12 : 29, 30, 31.

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## Paper II

# The Concept of an Asian Community and the Unity of Religions Seen from Buddhist Scripture

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Buddhism believes in the unity of the humankind. According to Aggannasutta,<sup>1</sup> sometimes called 'the Buddhist Genesis,' ancestors of humankind lived in outer space as Radiant Beings who were mind-made. When the earth was forming on the surface of the water, these radiant beings descended, tasted the savour of the primordial earth, became solid and lost their radiance and the ability to fly. They had to live on earth, ate grosser food became more solid and distinguished by sex and other physical features. All races of mankind are descendants of these common ancestors.

Buddhism believes in the equality of all human beings. It does not recognize the caste system of the Hindus. While the Brahmins claim their divine origin from the very mouth of Brahma, the Creator God, the Buddha reminds them of the plain fact thus "But, Assalayana, Brahman wives of Brahmans are known to have their menstrual periods, to give birth and to give suck. Yet these Brahmans, born of woman like everyone else, speak thus, "Only Brahmans form the best caste ... heirs to Brahma."<sup>2</sup>

The Buddha dismisses all caste and class differentiation as artificial, biased and unjustifiable. The only difference he recognizes