Agape, Dharma, Tao as Key Religious Motifs

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This paper analyzes the concept *agape* as a characteristic motif of the Christian tradition, as a distinctively religious concept, and in relation to other key religious concepts. A clear analysis of *agape* should be suggestive for our understanding of the nature and structure of the Christian tradition, of other religious traditions, and perhaps of the nature and structure of religion *per se*.

First, in the context of the Christian tradition, *agape* is presented as a link between the individual's religious experience and the overall Christian tradition. *Agape* serves as the ideal for the exemplary Christian and calls upon the Christian tradition to renew its commitment to this ideal; the great religious personality and his importance for his religious tradition, however, should be understood not in terms of doctrines or truths but of his way of living.

Second, it is argued that the religious quality of *agape* (and therefore, of the exemplary Christian personality and of the Christian tradition in general) is due to three characteristically religious functions: integration, non-attachment, and transformation. *Agape* counts as a major religious concept precisely because it serves these functions whenever it is adhered to by a serious or ultimate commitment.

Finally, *agape* is indirectly compared with the Indian con-

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dialogue as "grounded on the certainty that the meaning of existence is open and accessible in the actual lived concrete." This is the wholly particular content of each moment of lived dialogue, in which the reality one meets is neither subjectivized nor objectivized but responded to.

Revelation is neither objective knowledge nor subjective inspiration but happening, event-life lived in dialogue. "The religious statement is the witness of this dialogue." Because man is taken into the duty of knowing, this witness is one in which the relationship of I-Thou is still illumined yet detachment has begun: "no longer I-Thou knowing, not yet subject-object knowing." That means that this witness points back to the I-Thou knowing, the meeting itself, but the word of this witness is not the Word of God. It is the product and expression of meeting. But one must guard against removing the reality of this witness into one's own soul.

In revelation something happens to man from a side that is not man, not soul, not world. Revelation does not take place in man and is not to be explained through any psychologism. He who speaks of "the God in his breast" stands on the outermost rim of being: one cannot, one may not live from there. Revelation does not gush forth from the unconscious: it is mastery over the unconscious. Revelation comes as a might from without, but not in such a way that man is a vessel that is filled or a mere mouthpiece. Rather the revelation seizes the human elements that are at hand and recasts them: it is the pure shape of the meeting.¹²

¹² The Philosophy of Martin Buber, p. 135.
cepts dharma and yoga, and the Chinese concept Tao, in order to indicate some of the factors involved in a comparative study of the structure and key ideals of religious traditions.

Agape has traditionally been a favorite of those interpreters who have sought to isolate and define the so-called “essence of Christianity.” Perhaps the most scholarly and elaborate of such efforts is Anders Nygren’s Eros and Agape. According to Nygren, Agape is the center of Christianity, the Christian fundamental motif par excellence, the answer to both the religious and the ethical questions. Agape comes to us as a quite new creation of Christianity. It sets its mark on everything in Christianity. Without it nothing that is Christian would be Christian. Agape is Christianity’s own original basic conception.¹

Similarly, Paul Ramsey argues that “Christian ethics proposes that the basic norm and the distinctive character of the Christian life is Christian love (agape).”² With less evidence, but with a more interesting slant, R. B. Braithwaite contends that the “Christian’s assertion that God is love” epitomizes “the assertions of the Christian religion”; and again: “I myself take the typical meaning of the body of Christian assertions as being given by their proclaiming intentions to follow an agapeistic way of life.”³ Rather than contribute to this effort, either by citing further references, or by offering yet another definition of Christianity, this paper offers an analysis of agape in terms of a variety of contexts or functions. Specifically, it analyzes agape as it functions first in the religious experience of individuals, then in the expression of such experiences, and finally in relation to other religious individuals and religious traditions.

It is a moot question whether the tradition or the individual's faith is primary; the religious personality and the cumulative religious tradition are so interdependent that each presupposes and leads to the other. As Bergson wisely notes, “mysticism and religion are mutually cause and effect, and continue to interact on one another indefinitely.”

Using Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s categories, we would urge that it is the interaction of faith and the cumulative tradition which constitutes what is usually called a religion. Every religious personality draws upon and to some extent revises the religious tradition as he finds it. It is only in relation to the individual’s religious and cultural context that his experience, and the expression of it, can be fully appreciated. Consequently, the meaning of key concepts and claims depends upon the religiousness both of the individuals and of the cumulative tradition. An analysis of the characteristically Christian expression, “God is Love,” for example, involves the interaction between the individual Christian committed to agape who expresses this commitment in word and deed, and the tradition from which or in which he learns to live agapeistically. As Ian T. Ramsey explains, the logic of the phrase “God is Love” can only be understood in terms of a religious commitment:

The logical structure of the phrase “God is Love” would be something as follows: We should have to tell a story of human devotion until a characteristically religious situation was evoked. We should have to tell the stories of the “lives of good men” until a point was reached when we did not merely admire the “goodness” or try to express it in some precept, but where, when characteristic “discernment” was evoked, we responded with a total com-

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6 See Bergson, p. 239: “What the mystic finds waiting for him, then, is a humanity which has been prepared to listen to his message by other mystics invisible and present in the religion which is actually taught.”
mitment: “Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.”

Thus, the terms God and Love perform the same function for the believer. This finding should not be surprising, however, since God and love have long been considered equivalent terms in the Christian tradition. The more momentous consideration is: what is the ‘logic’ of this equivalence? Thus far, this paper has drawn from Bergson, W. C. Smith, and Ian Ramsey in an effort to show that the logic of agapē involves the interaction between the agapeistic personality and his religious tradition. Before the analysis of agapē (or the agapeistic personality) in relation to non-Christian ideals, it remains to show that agapē or the agapeistic way of life is an excellent way of understanding both the Christian tradition and its most illustrious personalities. This effort will draw on the work of R. B. Braithwaite.

In “An Empirical Approach to the Nature of Religion,” Braithwaite contends that a religious assertion “is the assertion of an intention to carry out a certain behavior policy, subsumable under sufficiently general principles to be a moral one, together with the implicit or explicit statement, but not the assertion, of certain stories.” Although Braithwaite’s reduction of all religious statements to moral statements is surely too simple, there is considerable merit in his contention that the key to religious assertions and concepts is the believer’s “resolution to follow a way of life.” More specifically, Braithwaite argues that the body of Christian assertions amounts to the Christian’s declaration of his intention “to follow an agapeistic way of life.” In this sense,

8 Ibid.: “To say that ‘God is Love’ is thus to claim that the word ‘God’ can be given in relation to a total commitment (alternatively labelled ‘Love’) which can be approached by considering those partial commitments which we normally describe in terms of the word ‘love.’”
9 Braithwaite, p. 250.
10 This identification of the religious with the moral fails to account for the philosophical, sociological, ritualistic and aesthetic aspects of the religious.
11 Braithwaite, p. 249.
12 Note that Ramsey and Braithwaite represent the “left-wing” of the dispute concerning the cognitive content of religious assertions—i.e., they contend that
Braithwaite's thesis supports both Nygren's idea of *agape* as the defining Christian motif and Ramsey's account of *agape* ("God" and "Love") as commitment. The function of *agape* in the Christian tradition, then, is more conative than cognitive: in the experience of the agapeistic personality, *agape* is not a matter of factual or doctrinal knowledge, but a matter of his style of living. The agapeistic personality serves as a model or symbol which affects the styles of other members of the tradition; the institutional tendency to render religious experience in terms of truths and prescriptions obstructs a distinctively religious quality of experience—namely, its transformative or recreative power. A transforming power such as Christian love, which characterizes the life of the religious personality and influences both groups and entire religious traditions, operates by inspiration or contagion; as with the presence of a mystic, the exemplar of the agapeistic way of life arouses "in the innermost being of most men the whisper of an echo."13 What the life of the religious soul echoes through his followers is a kind of style or *techne* concerning the Divine.

Although the great Christian personalities have frequently been made the captives of their teachings (or what they and their interpreters derive from the original experience), the religious importance of these personalities is due to their having discerned, and having made it possible for others to discern more clearly, the divine quality of human experience. In the Christian tradition, this religious function has usually taken the form of a love experience which reveals how to see the human and divine in terms of a love relationship. Religious souls such as Jesus, Paul, and Augustine and a host of later Christian figures offer not so much knowledge or truth but a vision and a method of spiritual growth. In short, they show how one attains a love relationship with God and the world. As a result of the experiences of these

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religious assertions are devoid of factual or literal meaning. Their analyses resemble Hare's "blick theory" in that concepts such as *agape* function for the believer as that without which there would not be any religious (specifically Christian or agapeistic) facts. See R. M. Hare, "Religion and Morals," in *Faith and Logic*, ed. Basil Mitchell (London, 1957), p. 192.

13 Bergson, p. 214.
great religious figures, concepts like *agape* can be used to "produce results in conduct." One such result of the agapeistic person's influence, finally, is that it reveals the various ways in which *agape* functions as a distinctively religious ideal.

In addition to the various components of both one's individual religious style and of a religious tradition—namely, the personal, philosophical, and cultural—there are also various functions which are characteristically religious. Among these are the integrative, detaching, and transforming functions. More precisely, being religious involves, first, being integrated within the self and in relation to whatever is ultimately real. Second, being religious is striving to overcome attachment to one's world and ultimately to oneself. Finally, religiousness is also characterized by the process of transforming the self and its manifold relations. In terms of the present discussion, *agape* is presented as an ideal which performs these functions: i.e., *agape* as practiced and taught by great Christian personalities, and as enshrined in the various components of the Christian tradition, fosters greater integration, non-attachment and transformation. Furthermore, *agape* as a religious ideal with these three characteristic functions is operative in the several components of a religious life—namely, in the mystical, philosophical, and cultural. *Agape* as we have conceived of it thus far can now be discussed in the context of each of these three components.

Despite Nygren's contention that mysticism is characterized by *eros* rather than *agape*, there is nevertheless an impressive Christian mystical tradition which is characterized by a broadly agapeistic ideal. Furthermore, this tradition reveals the re-

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15 Nygren argues that like *eros*, mysticism presupposes that the soul is of divine origin and is intimately related to the Divine; *agape*, by contrast, "starts with the conviction of one's own lack of worth" (*Eros and Agape*, p. 222; see also pp. 647–651). Nygren's distinction between *eros* and *agape* here would seem to be drawn too sharply; Eckhart's mysticism, for example, is as characterized by man's lack of worth as by the Divine within—indeed, this is a very creative tension in many Christian mystics. Augustine's highly personal conversion (*Confessions*, Bk. VII), for example, served as the basis for his synthesis of human reason and Christian revelation which were thereafter locked in a creative and characteristically
ligious quality of Christian agape in all three of the requirements cited above: typical Christian mystics such as Augustine, Bernard, Richard of St. Victor, Eckhart, Boehme, Catherine of Genoa, and John of the Cross, all serve as models for religious integration, non-attachment and transformation. Each of these mystical souls exemplifies the true integration of the self, and the integration or love relationship between the self and God. This love relationship, furthermore, involves the second religious function, non-attachment; virtually all of the Christian mystics interpret their experience in terms of selflessness over self-love, or non-attachment to anything associated with the self. Meister Eckhart typifies Christian mysticism in his insistence that the first and ultimate task of perfection is to be entirely empty of self and all things to which the self might be attached. This emptying of all traces of the self would seem to be perfectly expressed by Eckhart's theory of disinterest: "Perfectly disinterested, a man has no regard for anything... He desires only to be one and the same; for to want to be this or that is to want something; and the disinterested person wants nothing." When Eckhart places disinterest above love, he is referring to Pauline caritas; his conception of disinterest is actually the same as Nygren's definition of agape, namely sensitivity to nothing but God. In this respect, Eckhart is the exemplar and the articulator of the agapeistic ideal in terms of non-attachment.

Finally, in the personal or mystical component, agape serves a transforming function: the new or incarnate life to which the Christian is called and to which he aspires is effected by a gradual transformation of the old or natural life. Many exemplary agape-

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16 Nygren admits that texts such as the following from Theologica Germanica (chap. xxxvi) suggest agape (according to his conception), but the basic idea behind such a text is eros rather than agape: "Adam, the I, the Self, Self-will, Sin, or the Old Man, the turning aside or departing from God, do all mean one and the same thing."


18 Eckhart cites I Cor. xiii.1.

19 Meister Eckhart, p. 83.
istic personalities such as Paul, Augustine and Francis of Assisi are also models of radical transformation; still other examples of Christian agape such as Cusa, Luther, and Kierkegaard typify a more gradual, but no less significant and lofty process of transformation. In this transformist function, as well as in the integrative and non-attachment functions, the religious quality of agape involves both the individual's own experience and the tradition of which he is a part. The religious quality itself, however, consists in the three functions discussed in the personal or mystical aspect of a religious tradition. Thus far we have discussed these functions in the context of the personal aspect only; we now turn to the philosophical or conceptual aspect.

Despite claims for the subjectivity and even ineffability of religious experience, great religious personalities and their followers have never hesitated to formulate the implications of these experiences in the form of doctrines and truths. Agape, after all, is just such a doctrine which has been reified as though it somehow existed on its own, irrespective of the variety of Christian personalities and the variety of components and developments in the Christian tradition. If, however, we understand the key concepts of a tradition in the way described above, then such concepts can be seen as markers or instruments of the way which the religious person conveys to the faithful. The religious concept of Christian love also consists in its threefold capacity to foster integration, detachment and transformation.

In effect, then, the concept of agape mediates between the individual and the tradition, and does so in three ways: first, it refers to the ideal integration of the human or natural and the divine or supernatural dimensions of human experience as realized and advocated by the agapistic personality. The model for this function of agape is a kind of religious humanism (typified by the Renaissance philosophies of Ficino and Cusa, and by many Christian thinkers since the Enlightenment) for whom the Divine and the human are more complementary than opposed. For Nygren, this closing of the gulf between the human and divine is
not agape at all, but eros—and, consequently, a humanistic and an anthropological rather than a Christian and a theological concept. Since this humanistic conception of agape is shared by many contemporary Christian thinkers, it follows that integration is one of the most significant functions of agape as a conceptual idea.

Transformation is another significant function of agape, and again for the Christian transformist the love relationship between God and man is far more positive and intimate than Nygren finds to be characteristic of true agape. Finally, the less humanistic conception of agape renders the self not only as a derived and dependent reality, but as something created precisely in order for it to transcend its own value and existence. This meaning of agape refers to the Christian emphasis on selflessness and the relatively low status of the self in several Christian conceptual schemes, primarily those which Nygren cites as holding the true conception of Christian agape. Whether conceived in terms of integration, non-attachment or transformation, the conceptualization of agape is but an approximation of the kind of style of living the religious person bequeaths to the tradition. Since this style almost inevitably involves certain assumptions about man, his world and the Divine, it is a logical step from religious experience to philosophical theology; unfortunately, however, the theological and philosophical schemes by which religious experiences are expressed very quickly become autonomous conceptual schemes. As such systems are developed and elaborately defended, they frequently become further removed from their experiential roots and may ultimately limit the possibility of new experiences and novel interpretations of more

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21 See, for example, selections in Roy Eckhart’s representative volume, The Theologian at Work (New York, 1968).
22 For the transformist motif, see “Christ the Transformer of Culture” in H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York, 1951). This chapter could well be extended to include Teilhard de Chardin (see especially The Divine Milieu), Charles Hartshorne and other Christian process philosophers, and in a general way, both Tillich and Jaspers.
23 See Nygren on Augustine, Dionysius and Luther.
ordinary experiences. Studies of philosophical theology and of comparative religions alike very often approach theological questions and religious concepts without regard to the mystical and cultural aspects of the tradition which are so intimately related to the conceptual scheme of that tradition.

Although few objective observers would dispute the lack of agape in the behavior of Christian individuals and groups, or in the overall impact of the Christian tradition, there is, nevertheless, a sense in which all aspects of the Christian culture are informed by the ideal. Christian ethics, rituals, art and literature all show that agape is the characteristic aspect of Christian culture. And again, this religious quality consists in at least the three functions cited with respect to the personal and conceptual aspects of religious traditions. Agape in the cultural sphere provides for a greater integration of believers among themselves, through various cultural media, and a collective integration of believers with the Divine. The commitment to live the agapeistic way of life, then, seems to unite all such committed persons in a spiritual bond such as the Mystical Body of Christ. The implications of this bond, or of membership in this Body, of course, reach into every aspect of one’s religious and cultural life. Indeed, it is by virtue of one’s communion with all other agapeistic persons that the believer’s every thought and action is rendered an act of love. No activity and no ideal is impervious to the integrative power of the agapeistic way of life.

Similarly, in a variety of cultural forms, agape fosters non-attachment to self in favor of service to God and man. When rendered in terms of love of God and neighbor (rather than in terms of Eckhart’s lofty ideal of disinterest), agape serves as a distinctively religious ideal which affects the entire culture, not merely the community of believers.

Finally, agape in its transformative function serves as a catalyst for the re-creation of the culture. Augustine’s conception of the City of God and City of Man has long served as the standard model for this ideal, and a new model based on evolution and
process philosophy has been constructed by Hartshorne, Chardin and other contemporary Christian thinkers. The newer model is also based on *agape*, but simply adds that “God” or “Love” is historical, and it is by advancing the ideal historical possibilities that man religiously participates in the Divine Life.

Thus, every activity and ideal would count as religious to the extent that it fostered greater integrativeness of the individual and the rest of reality, non-attachment of the self and to the self, and transformation of the self and the historical or cultural process. Christian *agape* is a religious ideal, then, not because it is characteristically Christian—at least not until it is shown to be religious for the same reasons that Christian individuals and the Christian tradition are religious—but because it functions religiously both in the lives of model Christian personalities and in the conceptual and cultural aspects of the Christian tradition. In short, *agape*, in its characteristic functions, helps provide the religious quality to Christian faith and the Christian tradition. Furthermore, since *agape* performs so essential a role in whatever is counted as Christian, a study of its various functions helps to reveal the nature and structure of everything Christian. In order to discern both its unique and common qualities as a religious motif, however, *agape* should be compared with some of the key concepts of non-Christian religious traditions.

There are a great many concepts which, in varying degrees, reveal the significantly religious quality of various religious traditions; for a brief comparison with *agape*, the most helpful concepts are probably the Indian terms *dharma* and *yoga* and the Chinese terms *Jen* and *Tao*. *Agape* can be compared both positively and negatively to each of these terms, and these comparisons are instructive in several ways: first, for the religious meaning of *agape* and the other major concepts; second, for the nature and structure of the religious traditions involved; and third, for the interpretation of the nature of religiousness itself.

Since the Hindu tradition is far less unified than the Christian tradition, and furthermore, does not aspire to be unified, *dharma*
and *yoga* are even less capable of defining the Hindu tradition than *agape* is of defining the Christian tradition.\(^{24}\) Despite this lack of historical and systematic unity, or perhaps because of it, an adequate understanding of *dharma* and *yoga* does account for the important ways in which Hindus and the Hindu tradition are religious. For the Hindu, being religious mostly involves adhering to one's *dharma* and following one or more *yogas*.\(^{25}\)

Whereas Christian *agape* has been defined in distinction from and (according to Nygren) in opposition to *eros* ("man's desire for heavenly things") and *nomos* ("man's fulfilling of the Law"), *dharma* probably covers a set of meanings as inclusive and as complex as *nomos, eros* and *agape* combined. First, *dharma* is a kind of social and natural norm of law which governs all who would live in accordance with the divine order of things.\(^{26}\) The divine order of things ranges from the minutest details of daily life to the ultimate plan and purpose of all existence. In this respect, *dharma* is both more inclusive and more precisely delineated (by one's caste,\(^{27}\) one's stage in life, \(^{28}\) and by the various

\(^{24}\) Smith, p. 66. Smith contends that of the several religious traditions that have been refuted by Western scholarship, the term *Hinduism* is "a particularly false conceptualization, one that is conspicuously incompatible with any adequate understanding of the religious outlook of Hindus" (p. 63). And again: "The concept of a religious system, whether ideal or sociological, is here alien and invalid. It is a Western (and Muslim) concept, which Westerners (and Muslims) have tried to impose upon their understanding of India; but it does not fit. There are Hindus, but there is no Hinduism" (p. 65).

\(^{25}\) Despite phrases such as "The Essence of Hinduism" and "The Hindu Way of Life" made popular by Indians such as Radhakrishnan and Nikhilananda, who write primarily for a Western audience, Hindus themselves are apparently not informed by the concepts 'Hindu' or 'Hinduism.'

\(^{26}\) J. A. B. Van Buitenen, "*Dharma* and *Moksa,*" *Philosophy East and West,* 7 (April–July 1957), 36. In the same place Van Buitenen offers this excellent definition: "*Dharma* is all that activity that a man, if he is to live fittingly, is required to contribute to the fixed order of things, to the norm of the universe, which is good and should not be altered." See also the more philosophical treatment of *dharma* in Karl H. Potter, "*Dharma* and *Moksa* from A Conversational Point of View," *Philosophy East and West,* 8 (April–July 1958), 49–63. For Radhakrishnan's reconstruction of *dharma*, see "The Hindu *Dharma,∗" in *Religion and Society* (London, 1959).

\(^{27}\) The four scheduled castes or *varnas* are Brāhmin (priests and religious teachers), Kshatriya (kings, warriors, aristocrats), Vaiśya (traders and similar occupations) and Šudra (cultivators and servants). The untouchables comprise the so-called unscheduled caste; their *dharma* consists in contributing to the social
aims of life) than agape. As Arjuna and countless other souls have learned from the Krishna of the Bhagavadgītā, the perfect fulfillment of one’s dharma may begin with obedience to one’s caste duties, but ultimately requires a total identification of the individual self with Isvara (the Divine Personality) and Brahman (the Absolute, the One without a second). This progression resembles agape in that it moves from the immediate set of obligations (e.g., “love thy neighbor as thyself”) to an all-consuming love for God; in this process Krishna and Christ play comparable roles as exemplars, teachers, and ultimately as the sole medium of spiritual growth respectively in the agapeistic and dharmic disciplines.

It is also significant that integration, non-attachment and transformation, are even more obvious in dharma than in agape. By perfecting one’s duties, whether they be conceived in social, moral or metaphysical terms, the Hindu is also becoming increasingly integrated with his true self, increasingly selfless (since identity with Isvara or with Atman destroys the illusion of the phenomenal self), and is increasingly transformed from a desiring, determined and unhappy existence into a free, blissful and divine existence. These are three ways of realizing dharma, and three ways in which Hindus are characteristically religious.

As a religious or Hindu term, yoga includes a wide range of religious disciplines, namely, karma-yoga (way of action), bhakti-yoga (way of devotion), and jñāna-yoga (way of spiritual knowledge); the Hindu tradition may be said to consist in the tension and moral order what they allegedly owe as a result of their previous existence.

28 The four āśramas (stages of life) are: brāhmaṇacārya (period of discipline and education), gṛhasthāya (householder), vānaprasthāya (period of lessening responsibilities), and saṅhārya (life of a hermit).

29 The aims of life are kāma (physical pleasure), ariha (practical skills), dharma (fulfillment of duty), and moksa (final liberation; bliss).

30 There are two models for this process of integration into some larger reality: jīva-Atman-Brahman (i.e., the phenomenal self becomes a universal self, and the universal self is really the Absolute Brahman), and world-Isvara-Brahman (i.e., the phenomenal world becomes the Lord, whether Vishnu or Śiva, who in turn realizes his identity with Brahman when the world, which is its body, is perfected).

31 As distinct from sāṇkya-yoga, the classical philosophical system adopted by Patanjali in creating his raja-yoga system, and an important element in the theological-philosophical structure of reality as developed in the Bhagavadgītā.

32 A more complete list would include Patanjali’s raja-yoga (an extremely ad-
among these three disciplines. Hindu as well as Christian saints and scholars have differed on the emphasis to be given work, devotion, and knowledge as the proper way to salvation. Christian agape is not as explicitly related to these three disciplines as is yoga but, like yoga, it includes all three.  

If we can derive any lessons from the ideal blending of these disciplines in Hindu yoga, it would seem that agape as a religious ideal should combine these three religious disciplines. It is to the credit of the Christian tradition (and its key concept, agape) that it includes, in an ever-changing order of priorities, an emphasis on knowledge, devotion or faith, and action or works. The role of knowledge, natural reason or philosophy was a problem for the Christian community from its first centuries. Similarly, the tension between faith and action was a central issue in the Reformation. Various great religious personalities will emphasize one or another yoga, one or another Christian concept, but the traditions will usually manage to foster all three.

Although the Confucian and Taoist traditions are usually counted among the world religions, a survey of their respective components and key concepts indicates that both traditions are structurally limited as compared with the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Many interpreters of Chinese culture insist that Confucius and Lao-Tzu should not be considered founders of a religion, that their writings should not be

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83 Interpreters of the Bhagavadgītā, for example, can be classified according to the emphasis each gives to jñāna, bhakti and karma: Radhakrishnan’s translation and commentary, The Bhagavadgītā (London, 1960), emphasizes jñāna-yoga; Franklin Edgeron, The Bhagavadgītā (New York, 1944), emphasizes bhakti-yoga; Elliot Deutsch, The Bhagavadgītā (New York, 1988), emphasizes karma-yoga; but all interpreters agree that whichever one is emphasized, the other two are indispensable.

84 See Randall’s The Role of Knowledge in Western Religion, and Etienne Gilson, Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages (New York, 1938).

85 See, for example, A Reformation Debate: Sadolet’s Letter to the Genevans and Calvin’s Reply (New York, 1996).
considered sacred, and that they were not so considered until pious individuals reconstructed the basic texts to serve a variety of religious purposes.\textsuperscript{38} The point here is not to deny the religious importance of the Confucian or Taoist worldviews; rather, it is to show that they are not autonomous and full-scale religions, but thought traditions which can function as an individual’s religious position or as a part of a religious tradition. I would suggest that they are both part of the encompassing tradition called Chinese religion.\textsuperscript{37} Although the classical forms of the Confucian and Taoist schools do not contain the components which characterize other religious traditions, terms like Tao and Jen (and to some extent tê and li) serve as the key concepts of a religious view of the world. Whereas the Confucian texts emphasize the social and moral order as an approximation of the natural order\textsuperscript{38} and tend to neglect both the metaphysical and subjective aspects, the Taoist texts are highly subjective at the expense of the moral and sociological order.

In the Confucian texts, Tao refers to a set of social and moral principles (based primarily on the Way of the ancient Chou dynasty); in the Taoist texts, Tao refers to the ideal of living in an aesthetic and perhaps mystical harmony with the ultimate principle of reality (Tao here becomes a metaphysical rather than a sociological concept). In both traditions Tao serves religious functions but cannot be considered the motif of a Confucian religion or a Taoist religion since neither tradition gives this concept, or any other concept, the range which is characteristic, and perhaps required, of religious traditions. In short, it is only when understood in the context of the Confucian and Taoist traditions combined that Tao assumes the comprehensiveness of agape, dharma, or yoga.

\textsuperscript{38} See D. Howard Smith, 	extit{Chinese Religions: From 1000 B.C. to the Present Day} (New York, 1968), Chaps. 3 and 9; Holmes Welch, 	extit{Taoism: The Parting of the Way} (Boston, 1957); Max Kaltenmark, 	extit{Lao-Tzu and Taoism} (Palo Alto, Calif., 1969), Chap. 5.

\textsuperscript{37} See Laurence G. Thompson, 	extit{Chinese Religion: An Introduction} (Belmont, Calif., 1969).

\textsuperscript{38} That is, the way of man (Tao) must be brought to conform to the Way of Heaven (T'ien).