

Some Answered Questions, The Two Kinds of Prophets

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Translated. Original Persian



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Budda & Confucius

Question: To which category do Buddha and Confucius belong?

Answer: Buddha also established a new religion and Confucius renewed the ancient conduct and morals, but the original precepts have been entirely changed and their followers no longer adhere to the original pattern of belief and worship. The founder of Buddhism was a precious Being Who established the oneness of God, but later His original precepts were gradually forgotten and displaced by primitive customs and rituals, until in the end it led to the worship of statues and images.

Consider, for example, that Christ admonished the people time and again to heed the Ten Commandments of the Torah and insisted upon their strict observance. Now, one of the Ten Commandments forbids the worship of images and statues.[122] Yet today there are a myriad images and statues in the churches of certain Christian denominations. It is clear and evident, then, that the religion of God does not preserve its original precepts among the people, but that



TRANSLATION

it is gradually changed and altered to the point of being entirely effaced, and thus a new Manifestation appears and a new religion is established. For if the former religion had not been changed and altered, there would be no need for renewal.

In the beginning, this tree was full of vitality and laden with blossoms and fruit, but gradually it grew old, spent, and barren, until it entirely withered and decayed. That is why the True Gardener will again plant a tender sapling of the same stock, that it may grow and develop day by day, extend its sheltering shade in this heavenly garden, and yield its prized fruit. So it is with the divine religions: With the passage of time, their original precepts are altered, their underlying truth entirely vanishes, their spirit departs, doctrinal innovations spring up, and they become a body without a soul. That is why they are renewed.

Our meaning is that the followers of Buddha and Confucius now worship images and statues and have become entirely unaware of the oneness of God, believing instead in imaginary gods, as did the ancient Greeks. But such were not their original precepts; indeed, their original precepts and conduct were entirely different.

Again, consider to what an extent the original precepts of the Christian religion have been forgotten and how many doctrinal innovations have sprung up. For example, Christ forbade violence and revenge and enjoined instead that evil and injury be met with benevolence and loving-kindness. But observe how many bloody wars have taken place among the Christian nations themselves and how much oppression, cruelty, rapacity, and bloodthirstiness have resulted therefrom! Indeed, many of these wars were carried out at the behest of the popes. It is therefore abundantly clear that, with the passage of time, religions are entirely changed and altered, and hence they are renewed.