

Harvard Theological Review

<http://journals.cambridge.org/HTR>

Additional services for *Harvard Theological Review*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



The Three Religions of China. W. E. Soothill. Hodder & Stoughton. 1913. Pp. xii, 324.

George F. Moore

Harvard Theological Review / Volume 8 / Issue 01 / January 1915, pp 136 - 137
DOI: 10.1017/S0017816000008427, Published online: 03 November 2011

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0017816000008427

How to cite this article:

George F. Moore (1915). Harvard Theological Review, 8, pp 136-137
doi:10.1017/S0017816000008427

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

THE THREE RELIGIONS OF CHINA. W. E. SOOTHILL. Hodder & Stoughton. 1913. Pp. xii, 324.

This volume contains lectures given in Oxford in 1912 under the auspices of the Board for the Training of Missionaries, the establishment of which was one of the fruits of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference in 1910. The author, who spent thirty years in China, was formerly Principal of the Shansi Imperial University and is to be the President of the United Universities Central-China University.

Chapters are devoted to Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, severally, dealing chiefly with the origin and the distinctive types of the three religions. These religions are not, however, like so many streams flowing each in its own proper channel, but have overflowed and mingled their waters, so that the common notions of the Chinese on religious subjects and their religious life are a fusion or confusion of ideas and practices derived from all these sources. The following chapters, accordingly, show how early and classical Chinese conceptions have developed, and how they have been modified by Taoism and Buddhism, under the heads: "The Idea of God"; "Man's Relationship to God and Approach to the Divine"; "Cosmological Ideas"; "The Soul, Ancestor Worship, Eschatology"; "Moral Ideals"; "Sin and its Consequences"; "The Official Cult, or Public Religion"; "Private Religion."

The treatment is well suited to the purpose of the lectures; the main features are clearly set out and illustrated, without being obscured by a multiplicity of details. The author does not follow Legge and Ross in their reconstruction of primitive monotheism, nor does he imitate De Groot in carrying back the dualism of Yin and Yang to the beginnings of Chinese religion or in finding the key to everything in the idea of "Tao." An admirable sanity pervades the whole discussion, and full justice is done to the higher elements in Chinese religion and morals, without disguising its animistic and polytheistic features.

Like several recent writers, Mr. Soothill is inclined to ascribe some of the characteristic developments of Mahayana Buddhism to Christian influence. He thinks that the notions of heaven and hell may have come from farther west than India and be associated with some branch of the Christian Church, and that the doctrine of salvation which Buddhism brought to China was not its own, but had been appropriated by it; especially that the doctrine of Amitabha, the Saviour, is a "Western accretion." "The influence of Buddhism on Western theology through Gnosticism, which is

only another word for Buddhism, has already been referred to [p. 86—Pfleiderer is the authority], and there can be little doubt that Western ideas of retribution and salvation, possibly Messianic, more probably Christian, are at the base of the teachings of the Mahayana system as found in China and Japan" (p. 262 f.).

That Gnosticism "is only another word for Buddhism" does not mean that Gnosticism is only Buddhism under another name, but that the author is trifling with an etymological parallel which is not parallel. As for Christian influence in Mahayana doctrine, the initial question is, Through what channel did an "essence of Christianity" reach India or China in the early centuries of our era from which everything specifically Christian had been eliminated?

One of the best things about this volume is the spirit in which it is written, and the incidental counsels to those who expect to be missionaries among the Chinese are as admirable in temper as they are wise in substance. The book may be commended not only to future missionaries and those particularly interested in missions, but to general readers, as the clearest and most comprehensive popular presentation of the subject that has appeared.

GEORGE F. MOORE.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY.

THE NEW PHILOSOPHY OF HENRI BERGSON. ÉDOUARD LEROY. Translated from the French by VINCENT BENSON, M.A. Henry Holt & Co. 1913. Pp. x, 235. \$1.25.

BERGSON AND THE MODERN SPIRIT: An Essay in Constructive Thought. GEORGE ROWLAND DODSON, Ph.D. American Unitarian Association, Boston. 1913. Pp. vi, 304. \$1.35.

M. LeRoy writes with the enthusiasm of a disciple, and at the same time with the conviction and mastery of one who has thought things out for himself. "It is after cool consideration," he says, "with full consciousness of the exact value of words, that we are able to pronounce the revolution which it [Bergson's work] effects equal in importance with that effected by Kant, or even by Socrates" (pp. 1-2). But he remarks in the Preface that he has not had the honor of being Bergson's pupil, and that when he became acquainted with Bergson's philosophy his own direct reflection had already produced in him similar trains of thought. The Preface contains also Bergson's acknowledgment of the author's "deep sympathy of thought" and "power of rethinking the subject in a personal and original manner" (p. vi). M. LeRoy is un-