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A REJOINDER TO WONG CHIN FOO.

BY YAN PHOU LEE

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I draw a sharp distinction between Religion and Ethics. Religion pertains to the heart. Ethics deals more with outward conduct. Religion inculcates principles. Ethics lays down rules. Religion without Ethics is like a disembodied spirit; Ethics without Religion is a body from which the soul has fled. The most intelligent form of Heathenism, namely, Confucianism, never taught the “elations and acts of individuals toward God,” the Ruler of the Universe. Confucius inculcated a lofty morality, but left Religion to shift for itself.

“Born and raised a heathen, I learned and practiced its moral and religious code,” by worshipping the prescribed number of idols, and I was useful to others, though not to myself, because I helped to fatten the lessees of the temples, incense-venders and idle priests. “My conscience was clear,” because I knew not what I was doing, “and my hopes as to the future life were undimmed by distracting doubt,” simply because they were never very bright. In fact, I was not precocious enough to think much on the subject.

I came under Christian influences at the age of thirteen, and I am ashamed to confess that I did not take to Christianity kindly at first, and for three years to come—for it takes a long time to weed out error, and my Chinese friends and teachers had taken special pains to prejudice my mind against Christianity. But in 1876 that grand man of God, Mr. Moody, came to proclaim the Gospel in Springfield, Mass. I attended the meetings and listened to his presentation of the truth with wonder, and, at length, with conviction of my lost estate, of my need of redemption. I had a personal interview with Mr. Moody, and was strengthened in my resolution to be a Christian. That was one of the happiest periods of my life. I did not join the church then, as friends advised me to wait; for it was feared that the Chinese Commissioner of the Educational Mission, to which I belonged, might send me home before I got well started on the right road. I identified myself with

Christians, and took part in all religious exercises; and certainly friends there are who can testify that I became more gentle and more thoughtful of others. I got along well with my studies, because my mind was free and I had learned concentration. When the Chinese students were recalled in 1881, I went home with the rest. The mandarins made some attempt to draw us back to heathenism, with varying success. Not confident of my strength to stem the current that was setting in toward heathenism, I left the naval school as soon as I could get leave of absence, went to Canton, and joined the Presbyterian Church in charge of Rev. Dr. A. P. Happer. I had to give up the government service and heathenism at the same time; but do you suppose I regretted it?

I did not bother myself with the peculiarities and shortcomings of different denominations. It mattered little to me which sect I identified myself with. For the frailties of human nature are no part of Christianity. They are the very things it teaches us to overcome. There are as many conceptions of Christianity as there are men who give any thought to the subject. But Christianity is one; it is like its head—the same yesterday, today, and forever. It appears to be distorted on account of the human medium through which it must pass. But the very fact that so many people misunderstand it, misapply its principles, and abuse its privileges, is proof positive of its Divine origin. Whatever is human can be understood of man; whatever is from God can only be apprehended imperfectly by man.

Thus, I not only discriminate between Christianity in the abstract and Christianity in the concrete, but also between its correct application and its perversion. There was at one time a dyspeptic who preached a crusade against eating. He argued that, because a great many men abused it, and injured themselves by eating too much, and ruined their health by defying its rules and violating its principles, therefore the whole doctrine and practice of eating was a humbug. He said, moreover, that eating, instead of giving health and maintaining life, was every day making people sick, and in some cases people had actually died from eating. In consequence of such representations, he converted a great many to his views, and was hailed as a great deliverer of mankind. The more zealous of his followers eschewed eating, and, as they persisted to the last, of course they died. Then people began to open their eyes, and said: "Since without eating we die anyway, while with eating we may live to a green old age, we will stand by eating and let those cranks do as they please." The doctrine and practice of Christianity is very much like the doctrine and practice of eating.

I did not have much difficulty in believing the Bible to be an inspired book. If the wickedness and imperfections of men

obscured the mercifulness and goodness of God, it was a great pity; but that is no argument against Christianity. Clouds may get between me and the sun, but I believe it is there, and that it shines all the same.

I did not profess to comprehend the Divine Will, Purpose, Wisdom, and Justice, in the plan of Salvation. What a conceited fool you would have called me if I did! I accepted the truth as it is told in the Bible, and confessed that there were things that I could not comprehend, and was not expected to comprehend.

If others believe that a man can enter heaven by repenting at the eleventh hour, what is that to me? How should that destroy my faith in the saving grace of Christianity? Such, indeed, is its power to change the heart of man, that even if Dennis Kearney should slip into the Heavenly Jerusalem, he would be lamb-like and would be heard to say: "*The Chinese must stay!* Heaven is incomplete without them."

It is very easy to misinterpret the Bible. Some minds are so crooked that everything which goes through invariably comes out crooked. Some men understand the Bible literally. Others take each verse out of its context and tack it to some other place, and the result is something like this: "And Judas went out and hanged himself," "Go and do thou likewise."

The reason why I am enabled to sign myself a "Christian" is because I am endowed with the faculty of reason, which I have supplemented with formal logic and *a desire to tell the truth*.

Heathenism teaches nothing if it does not teach fatalism and control of Destiny. If it does not go so far as predestination, it is because its notions of a future life are a confused heap of nonsense.

Now, my faith teaches me to cultivate my mind, rectify my heart, and to make my conscience delicate and sensitive. It bids me to be tolerant, charitable, and just to my fellow men. It tells me to faithfully discharge my duties, public and private. It gives me the requisite strength to act the good citizen and the true husband. It commands me to accord to others their rights, and to take nothing that is not my due. Finally, it teaches me how to discharge my duties towards God, Father and Preserver of us all.

I not only discriminate between Christianity and its professors, but I also discriminate between true Christians and hypocrites. Confucius says: "It is impossible to carve on rotten timber." Christianity is not responsible for the acts of morally rotten men, and yet, where there is any soundness at all, it has demonstrated its power to heal and to save. I think that ministers should be paid according to the work they do. The laborer is worthy of his hire. But I am not "down" on *all* ministers, because *some* betray their trust. I do not believe that *all* Christians are worldly, because I have met *some* conspicuous cases of worldliness among them.

Organized charities may seem to lack sympathy, and, perhaps, have too much of red tape to be vigorous; but private charity is too apt to be indiscriminate, and too liable to be imposed upon, so that, instead of relieving the distress of the really deserving, it may encourage shiftlessness and idleness. Neither method of relief is perfect. But that is owing to the sinfulness of man, which Christianity alone can cure. When the Chinese were persecuted some years ago—when they were ruthlessly smoked out and murdered—I was intelligent enough to know that Christians had no hand in those outrages; for the only ones who exposed their lives to protect them were Christians. The California legislature that passed various measures against the Chinese was not Christian, the Sandloters were not Christians, nor were the foreign miners. They might *call* themselves Christians, but I don't call a man a great genius simply because he *claims* to be one. Let him *do* something worthy of the name first. You shall know a man by his works. If there is any sentiment in this country in favor of the Chinese today, it is only to be found in the Christian church. I don't forget that that Congress (which was most liberal and most jealous of the national honor) that finally voted the magnificent indemnity, was influenced and urged on by Christian opinion as expressed in petitions and the press. If there was no Christianity in this land, things would be too hot, not only for the Chinese, but for all who form the base of the social pyramid.

I flatter myself that I am broad, and entertain cosmopolitan views. For while I glory in China's ancient civilization, her extensive literature, and lofty philosophy, I am aware that other nations are superior to her in science and the arts. While I am proud of China's philosophers, statesmen, and heroes, I can admit that other countries have also produced great men.

Murders and robberies may be pretty frequent in New York State, but who knows how many are committed in China in a year? If foreigners have such paradises in their native countries, why do they persist in staying *here*? For my part, I am content to stay and cast my lot with the good people of this country, who, you will find, are mostly Christians.

I do not confound Christian congregations with cowardly mobs organized for arson and murder, and I deny that Christianity encourages the young to abuse the aged. Granting that there is more wickedness in the neighborhood of a single church district of one thousand people in New York than among one million heathen in China, that only proves that one thousand heathen in New York have a greater capacity for wickedness than one million heathen in China.

By no torturing of Aristotelian logic can I connect heartbreaking and suicides in New York with Christian charity,

and wherever I have met with any “fraternity” I invariably found it in the Christian church. Having been a heathen myself, and an associate of the heathen, I am competent to say that they never do any good without expecting a return, or gaining some merit. The true Christian does good for the love he has toward all God’s creatures. When I was in need of friends, Christians befriended me. Christians helped me to return to this country, and they said nothing about it either. When I was in doubt about the advisability of returning to college, Christian friends gave me encouragement and promised help. When I undertook to work my way through college, Christian people assisted me in pursuing that course. They got me to lecture, and aided me in the disposal of my literary wares. When I stood on the commencement platform to denounce the anti-Chinese policy of this government, it was the Christians who strengthened me with their enthusiasm and their applause. It is the Christian who looks on me as his equal, and who thinks that the Chinese are as well endowed, mentally, as he. The true Christian is the friend of the poor, the down-trodden, and the oppressed of all countries. When the famine was at its height in China, some twelve years ago, Christian missionaries went into the doomed districts to heal the sick and relieve the distressed.

If England were a truly Christian country, as she *claims* to be, the Opium War would have never taken place. Christianity is nowhere so explicit as where it warns people against the sin of covetousness. If Mephistopheles persuaded John Bull Faustus to sell his soul for gold, I don’t see what Christianity has to do with it. Were half the Christians running mad after the Golden Calf, Christianity would still be the only saving religion in the world.

The ways of the American heathen and the Chinese heathen are wonderfully alike. Only the American may become a Christian whenever he chooses with greater facility than the Chinese. That is not saying, however, that the American heathen may not be worse than the Chinese.

I fervently believe that if we could infuse more Christianity into politics and the judiciary, into the municipal government, the legislature and the executive, corruption and abuses would grow beautifully less. The Christian men are the last hope of the Republic. The final appeal is to be made to the Christian sentiment of the nation.

I have the misfortune to be a college-bred man; but a collegiate education does not necessarily disqualify one for the duties of life. A classical education would not have injured men like Lincoln and Greeley, but they had something better than that—they had a Christian education. No greater praise can we give them than this: They were *Christian* gentlemen.

The duties of parents and children are reciprocal. The Americans lay more stress on the duty of parents towards their children, while the Chinese insist too much on the duty of children towards their parents. Both have departed from the golden mean. Christianity alone can restore harmony in the domestic relations. Neither foolish parents nor undutiful children are the products of the Christian religion. They are such either from imperfect training or natural depravity. Water, and air, and sunlight are beneficent things, but when applied to some seeds, fine fruit-trees spring up from the soil; when applied to others, poisonous weeds overrun the land. In the last case, water, air, and sunlight are misused. So the perversion of Christian teachings has produced many poisonous weeds.

It is hard to tell what a heathen fears or what he believes. It is some consolation to know that he does believe something. He is slightly better off than the atheist. There are good men among the heathen. Such men you will find to be just, reasonable, honest, and truthful. Christianity would make such men perfect almost. But a bad heathen is quite the reverse.

I have some confidence left yet that Christianity will survive this last and most terrible of attacks. Indeed, I am silly enough to believe that that religion, which flourished in spite of the Pharisee and the Sadducee, which survived the persecutions of the Caesars, and finally supplanted them, which passed through the Dark Ages of ignorance and barbarism undimmed in lustre, which rose serenely after the terrible French Revolution, will continue to reign supreme so long as eternity itself shall endure.

Christianity has demonstrated its fitness to supply my spiritual needs. Its authenticity as a history no reasonable man can deny. I believe, I accept, its truths, as I hope to be happy in this life and to enjoy a blessed immortality in the life to come.

Do you wonder that I am a Christian? I cordially invite all heathen, whether American, or English, or Chinese, to come to the Saviour.

YAN PHOU LEE