

## **The seven-fold wisdom of love**

### **A Comparative Confucian-Christian reading of 1 Corinthians 13**

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**Abstract:** This is the third paper in a series of comparative Confucian-Christian studies by the author. The paper examines points of contrast and comparison between ‘love’ (Gk:agape) in the ‘Hymn to Love’ of 1 Corinthians 13 and *Jen/Ren* and *Aiin* in the Confucian classics (esp. *Analects/Lunyu*). Drawing on earlier studies of the ‘love’ theme in Confucius, the paper resists forced parallelisms and explores seven comparative resonances that recognize the multi-faceted conceptual and practical character of ‘love’ in classical Christianity and Confucianism. Through both traditions, a global appeal to harmony and selfless service is voiced.

**Key words:** Love, 1 Corinthians 13, Confucian-Christian dialogue, T E Lawrence, Harmonious Society

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#### **Introduction**

This is the third paper in a series of comparative Confucian-Christian studies. In the first paper, “‘Wisdom as Folly’ : Comparative reflections on a Pauline Paradox’”, published in the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* in 2006<sup>[1]</sup>, I argued that classical Confucian, Mohist, and Daoist texts could be found which reflected something of St Paul’s paradoxical view of true wisdom (revealed for him paradoxically in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ) as seeming to many people profoundly ‘foolish’. As *Zhuangzi* 22.61, memorably asks, “Is it when not knowing that one knows? Is it that when one knows one does not know? Who knows the knowing which is not-knowing?” Or, as we read in *Dao de jing* 71:35, “To know yet to think that one does not know is best.” In the second paper, a reply to Harvard Professor Tu Weiming at a Library of Congress Conference in January 2008, entitled ‘What hope Confucianism?’<sup>[2]</sup>, I contrasted the prominence of the ‘hope’ theme in the New Testament and much twentieth century Western theology, with its notable absence in classical, neo- and New Confucian writings, where fatalism and determinism appear to pre-dominate. Indeed, Confucius’ abrupt answer to Zilu’s question about death – “You do not understand life – how could you possibly understand death?”<sup>[2]</sup> – is widely recognised as illustrative of the

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[1] See , Christopher D. Hancock, “‘Wisdom as Folly’ : Comparative reflections on a Pauline Paradox’”, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. 33:3 (2006), 421-438

[2] *Analects*, 11.12 (see *Confucius’ Analects. With selections from traditional commentaries*, Translated by Edward Slingerland, (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc: Indianapolis/Cambridge, 2003), 115

Master' s general reserve in talking about death and the after-life.

Building on this earlier work, the comparative analysis in the present paper examines 'love' (Gk: *agape*; Chinese: *Jen/Ren* or *Ai*) as it is articulated in two texts, viz. the 'Hymn to Love' in Chapter 13 of St Paul' s first letter to the young Christian church at Corinth and the Confucian classics, especially *Analects*.<sup>[3]</sup> As in my other papers, my aim is neither to force an artificial harmony in understanding, nor to deny the potential mutual illumination comparative studies of this kind can produce. As indicated in the synopsis, I am grateful for other treatments of the 'love' theme in Confucius, such as Yao Xinzhong' s *Confucianism and Christianity: a comparative study of Jen and Agape* and the more general works of Wm Theodore de Bary, Raymond Dawson, Charles Moore, Julia Ching and Tu Weiming. <sup>[4]</sup> In contrast to these authors, I approach the theme first as a Christian theologian and then as a student of Confucius. Like them, however, my aim is to let the texts speak to us and to each other, for the 'wisdom of love' in a troubled world to be heard. Hence the title of my paper, 'The Seven-Fold Wisdom of Love: A comparative Confucian-Christian reading of 1 Corinthians 13' .

### ***The Seven Pillars of Wisdom and Love***

As students of Western history and literature will recognise, my title echoes World War I soldier and author, TE Lawrence (of Arabia)' s *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, a text which he famously lost in MSS form when he was changing trains at Reading Station in 1919, but which he re-wrote, abridged, and re-published in various versions between 1919 and 1926. Though conceived before the war as a study of seven great Middle Eastern cities, the final theme of Lawrence' s work is his experience while serving as a liaison officer with rebel forces during the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Turks between 1916 and 1918. To most scholars *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is less a work of history and more an oddly romantic, rather idiosyncratic, recollection of how Lawrence experienced the war. The work is, as scholar diplomat Charles Hill aptly dubbed it, "a novel traveling under the cover of autobiography" . But few doubt its fascination and power to disclose the inner turmoil of an iconic figure of British imperial life. Lawrence took the title from the Old Testament Book of Proverbs, Chapter 9:1f, "Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out its seven pillars"<sup>[5]</sup>, which he had applied to one of the dramatic rock formations he saw when based in Wadi Rum (in present day Jordan) between 1917-18. In Proverbs, the image evokes the creativity, hospitality and durability of the wisdom that begins in "the fear of the Lord" (1.7). Lawrence' s work is valuable for us in providing more than a vivid geological or architectural image: love appears prominently in the dedicatory poem to "S.A." which Lawrence placed at the start of the 1922 Oxford text. "S.A." is thought by many to

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[3] Cf. The paper draws on an unpublished MSS *Christianity and Confucianism: A dialogue between cultures* (T&T Clark, forthcoming). Quotations from the *Analects* are necessarily selective, and are made mindful of the breadth, depth and fluidity of many of the topics treated here within Confucian tradition.

[4] Yao Xinzhong, *Confucianism and Christianity: a comparative study of Jen and Agape* (Sussex University Press (UK), 1997); See Wm Theodore De Bary,, *The Trouble with Confucianism* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass, 1991); Raymond Stanley Dawson, *Confucius* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1981); Charles Moore, ed., *The Chinese Mind. Essentials of Chinese Philosophy and Culture* (East-West Center Press/University of Hawaii Press: Honolulu, 1967); Julia Ching, *Chinese Religions* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 1993); among many titles by the same author, see Tu Weiming, *Humanity and Self-Cultivation: Essays in Confucian Thought* (Lancaster-Miller Publishers: Canada, 1978)

[5] The Holy Bible, New International Version (Zondervan Corporation, 1996)

be Selim Ahmed ‘Dahoum’ , the dark, young Syrian Arab Lawrence employed in archeological work in Carchemish before the war and as a translator during it, until the former’ s death from typhus in 1916. The poem begins,

*I loved you, so I drew these tides of  
Men into my hands  
And wrote my will across the  
Sky and stars  
To earn you freedom, the seven  
Pillared worthy house,  
That your eyes might be  
Shining for me  
When we came*

In the stanzas that follow, Lawrence’ s affection for (some would say, obsession with) “S.A.” - before death “...took you apart:/Into his quietness” - expresses itself in vivid imagery drawn from the dust and stuff of earth and the radiant luminosity of a starry-sky. But, for Lawrence, no temporal house, or earthly memorial, is adequate to capture the memory of the profound ‘gift’ of human affection. As the poem ends,

*Men prayed me that I set our work,  
The inviolate house,  
As a memory of you  
But for fit monument I shattered it,  
Unfinished: and now  
The little things creep out to patch  
Themselves hovels  
In the marred shadow  
Of your gift.*

Whatever we think of Lawrence or his relationship to Salem Ahmed, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is a useful reminder that poetry and architecture, imagery and memorials are inadequate tools to fashion what St Paul called “the most excellent way” of love; for it is love, *agape*, as Swiss theologian Karl Barth translated the end of 1 Corinthians 13, “that alone endures”<sup>[6]</sup>. However, as we can see in 1 Corinthians 13, all of these tools can usefully serve the greater purpose of turning the elusive idea of “love” into a concrete, visual, physical form.

### ***Agape in 1 Corinthians 13***

As intimated earlier, 1 Corinthians 13 appears to have been inserted (textually rather awkwardly<sup>[7]</sup>) by Paul as “a ready-made piece”<sup>[8]</sup> that he deemed relevant both to his argument and to the proud and conflicted spiritual situation of the Corinthian church. In Chapter 14.1 he picks up the theme of “spiritual gifts” (especially speaking in tongues and prophecy) that he has been addressing in Chapter 12. In-

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[6] q. Charles Kingsley Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2nd Ed., (A&C Black: London, 1971), 299

[7] For a discussion of the textual puzzles surrounding 1 Cor 12:31, see Barrett, 297

[8] Barrett, 297

between, we find thirteen rhythmic verses that celebrate the greatest “gift” (NB. as in TE Lawrence) of love. To nineteenth century German Liberal Protestant theologian Adolf von Harnack 1 Corinthians 13 was, “the greatest, strongest, deepest thing Paul ever wrote”<sup>[9]</sup>. For our present discussion, its central theme of love, *agape*, must feature in any meaningful comparative philosophical-theological discussion of Christian theology and practice. For, if Christianity cannot be articulated apart from reference to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, neither can it be separated from the “law of love” that shapes and guides a believer’s relationship to God and neighbour. As an exposition of the word *agape*, which the early Christian community took and applied as “a new word for a new idea” (Morris<sup>[10]</sup>), 1 Corinthians 13 is unique in the New Testament. As Australian scholar Leon Morris summarises the distinctive Christian meaning of *agape*,

Whereas the concept of love before the New Testament was that of a love for the best one knows, the Christians thought of love as that quality we see displayed in the cross. It is a love for the utterly unworthy, a love that proceeds from a God who is love. It is a love lavished upon others without a thought whether they are worthy to receive it or not. It proceeds rather from the nature of the lover, than from any merit in the beloved. The Christian who has experienced God’s love to him...sees men (sic) in a measure as God sees them. He sees them as the objects of God’s love, as those for whom Christ died. Accordingly his attitude towards them is one of love, of self-giving *agape*.<sup>[11]</sup>

This is the general meaning which 1 Corinthians 13 unpacks in celebration of the seven-fold wisdom of love. *Agape*, I argue in this paper, constitutes a divinely-inspired, radical invocation of unconditional neighbour love, which in its moral expression produces a quite different type of social and relational contract from the measured obligation of Confucian social relationships.

#### ***Agape and the seven-fold wisdom of love***

*Agape* is, as we have seen, described by Paul in verse 1, firstly, “*the most excellent way*” . Like that most fundamental, natural and ‘fitting’ of Chinese philosophical principles<sup>[12]</sup> *dao* (way) the Greek *hodos* (way) combines a sense of identity, journey, morality and overarching theology, or philosophy. Like Jesus’ self-description as “the way” in John 14.6, *agape* is presented here by Paul as the pre-eminent truth about the Christian’s vocational identity, life journey, social morality and perception of theology. In contrast to *dao*, however, this “way” is first a “gift” from God, not the moral fruit of human effort, or even that higher orientation and transcendent sense of purpose of classical Confucianism and Daoism; as we find self-motivation stressed in *Analects* 7.6, “The master said, ‘Set your heart upon the Way, rely upon Virtue, lean upon Goodness, and explore widely in your cultivation of the arts.’ ”<sup>[13]</sup> The “way” of love to Paul and the early Christian community begins, as we heard in Morris, in the demonstrative outpouring of love seen in the life and death of Jesus Christ. It is a “way” that is personal and visual before it is moral or relational. Its inner dynamic is

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[9] q. Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, (IVP: Leicester, 1976), 180

[10] Morris, 181

[11] Morris, 181

[12] See *Analects* 6.17; and Zhang Dainian, “The concept of *dao* is perhaps the most important concept in Chinese philosophy” , in *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy*, Transl. Edmund Ryden (Yale University Press: New Haven & London and Foreign Languages Press: Beijing, 2002), 11

[13] q. Slingerland, *Analects* 7.6, 65; see also *Analects* 2.4

a “gift” generously given and thankfully received, not a work performed or an effort made.

The second feature of *agape* from verses 1-3, is that it is *the substance and end of Christian spirituality*. As we read,

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Paul’ s words are a searing critique of the forms of pagan piety, mystery religions, and rigorous asceticism that prevailed in the first century Greco-Roman world where unintelligible incantations, bell-ringing, secret truths and magical arts, together with self-centred acts of charity, flagellation and immolation, were common. In Paul, *agape* is the highest expression of Christian spirituality and the antithesis of empty religiosity and ritual indulgence. The necessary balancing of interiority (in motivation) and exteriority (in action), that characterises Paul’ s account of *agape* stands in stark contrast to sound moral intentions (that remain private) and impressive charitable works (that are essentially self-interested). In many respects, Paul’ s attitude towards the potentially deflecting power of ritual and the need to cross-examine human motivation echoes Confucius in *Analects*. For, though Confucianism is ‘a tradition of ritual’ <sup>[14]</sup>, the Master was clear in his advice to Zixia, in *Analects* 6.13, “Be a gentlemanly *ru*. Do not be a petty *ru*.” <sup>[15]</sup> Hence we find in *Analects* 3:3, ‘If a man is not humane (*ren*), what has he to do with ceremonies (*li*)? If he is not humane, what has he to do with music?’ The true *ru* is above material inducements and bureaucratic pettiness, and pursues virtue and graciousness to do the *right* thing, rather than simply to do the *proper*, *convenient* or *advantageous* thing. As we see in *Analects* 1:12, Confucius esteemed ritual insofar as it enabled and reflected ‘harmony’ (*he*), in which a person’ s ‘native substance’ (*zhi*) and ‘cultural refinement’ (*wen*) are preserved in an easy, or natural, balance (see also 3:8; 6:18). In living ‘the Way’ the true *ru* surrenders results to ritual, convenience to rightness, and personal advantage to social benefit.

The third pillar in Paul’ s exposition of the wisdom of love is as *the height of social and relational civility*. Listen to verses 4 and 5, “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.” If *agape* is contrasted in verses 1-3 with other forms of religious practice, it is antithetical here to other types of social behaviour: the power of love’ s positive character being the more forcefully expressed by a series of negations. Reading this in light of *Analects* and what we know of Confucius’ life, I am struck by their common emphasis on propriety, deference and humility in inter-personal relations; as we read of the *chün-tze* in *Analects* 6:27 “The superior man (*chün-tze*) studies literature (*wen*) and restrains himself with the rule of propriety (*li*). Thus he will not violate the Way (*dao*).” <sup>[16]</sup> Likewise, in *Analects* 12:1, we read, “Yen Yuän asked about humanity. Confucius said, ‘To master oneself and return to propriety is humanity. If a man (the ruler) can for one day master himself and return to propriety, all under heaven will return to

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[14] Yao Xinzhong, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2006), 101

[15] q. Slingerland, *Analects* 6.13, 57; see also *Analects* 13:4, 20, and perhaps 2:12

[16] See Slingerland, *Analects* 6.27, 62 for an alternative translation

humanity.’ ”<sup>[17]</sup> Confucius would agree *ren* does not envy, does not boast, and is not proud. However, in presenting *agape* as “not rude...self-seeking...easily angered... (nor keeping a) record of wrongs” , Paul presents an exalted view of civility and moral propriety. Though Confucius does much to democratize his pedagogy and moral vision, classical Confucian tradition sees the *chün-tze* as an exceptional individual whose thought and behaviour are benevolent, disciplined and exemplary. There is relatively little sense here that *ren* or the conduct expected of the *chün-tze*, apply to relationships with the socially inferior or the unknown neighbour,<sup>[18]</sup> for the moral virtues of the *chün-tze* are honed to suit the public servant fulfilling his obligations to his superior, not the general duty of a moral person living as a civilising agent in a wayward society. Hence, in *Analects* 17:6, with the public servant clearly in mind, Confucius presents *ren* as the overarching virtue to be seen in the *chün-tze*,

To be able to practice the five virtues everywhere in the world constitutes humanity (*ren*)...: Reverence, magnanimity, trustworthiness, diligence, and kindness. He who is courteous is not humiliated, he who is trustworthy wins the people, he who is diligent attains his objective; and he who is kind can get service from the people.<sup>[19]</sup>

*Ren*, like *agape*, as we begin to see here, is far from vague: it is a structured, deliberate expression of thoughtful, loyal (*zhong*), reciprocal (*shu*) altruism that the *chün-tze* seeks to embody and inspire; as we read in *Analects* 6.30, “The humane man, desiring to establish himself, seeks to establish others; desiring himself to succeed, he helps others to succeed. To judge others by what one knows of oneself is the method of achieving humanity (*ren*).” Crucially, it is often pointed out that if *ren* and *agape* have similarities in Confucius, in his disciples *ren* is more frequently paired with *yi* (viz. what is right, or ought to be done) than in the Master himself. In Mencius, for example, *ren* is essentially a family virtue and *yi* that which is owed to society and a worthy person. Taken together *ren-yi* constitutes the virtuous end of human endeavour; as we read in Mencius, “If one abides in benevolence and proceeds from respect, then the great person’ s affairs will all be included.”<sup>[20]</sup>

In verses 6 and 7 Paul celebrates *agape* as, fourthly, *the epitome of practical wisdom*. He connects love with truth, or truthfulness, as well as with the practical relational acts of protection, trust, hope and perseverance. Hence, “Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” That is, to Paul, *agape* does not take pleasure in another’ s misfortune, does not fixate on corruption or lies, and does not turn a blind eye to moral questions. Instead, it is passionate about truth, eager to forgive another’ s flaws, inclined to believe another’ s good intentions, and always keen to look beyond the immediate to the ultimate in an attitude of single-minded fortitude. There is much here which is common to Confucian morality; the single-minded pursuit of moral and ritual propriety (*li*) warranting the *chün-tze*’ s greatest effort. As we find in the Master’ s exchange with Gong Xihua in *Analects* 7.34, “The Master said, ‘How could I dare lay claim to either sageliness of Goodness?

[17] Cf. as Slingerland translates the final sentence of this paragraph in *Analects* 12.1, “The key to achieving Goodness lies within yourself – how could it come from others?”

[18] There is some sense of this in *Analects* 6.30, but it is for Confucius the rarely found sage who “extends his benevolence to the common people and brings succour to the multitudes.”

[19] See Slingerland on *Analects* 17.6 for commentarial disagreement surrounding the meaning of *min* (diligence)

[20] Mencius 7, Exhausting the Mind A, #33; q. Dainian, Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy, 295

What can be said about me is not more than this: I work at it without growing tired and encourage others without growing weary.’ Gong Xihua observed, ‘That is precisely what we disciples are unable to learn.’”<sup>[21]</sup> But *agape* goes beyond this duty of moral courage and readiness to commend what is right. It avoids moral superiority or censure by demonstrating acceptance, forgiveness, healing and hope. It is difficult to find a comparable generosity or lasting tenacity in Confucian social mores. A tone of moral conditionality runs through *Analects*. We see this, for example, in Confucius’ opinion of his disciples Zilu and Ran Qiu voiced to Ji Ziran in *Analects* 11.24: they are only “useful” not “great ministers” being “minimally competent” in their official duties.<sup>[22]</sup> Likewise, in *Analects* 4.3, “The Master said, ‘Only one who is Good is able to truly love others or despise others.’” In contrast, Paul celebrates the gracious durability of *agape* in the link sentence at the beginning of verse 8, “Love never fails” (*katargeo*); literally, it does not “collapse” or “fall” . *Agape* is the practical wisdom that does not easily give up when it is disappointed by other people. As John Donne’ s seventeenth century poem puts it, “Love is not love, that alters where it alteration finds.” As Swiss theologian Karl Barth expresses this, quoting the historicist sceptic Ernst Troeltsch, love is “the power of this world which already as such is the power of the world to come.”<sup>[23]</sup> It endures because its source is trans-temporal and supra-human: it comes from God and shares his eternity.

Paul develops this in verses 8-10, celebrating *agape* as also *the infinite and enduring heart of life*. We read,

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.

Returning to the pattern of contrasts seen in verses 1-3, Paul presents *agape* here as that perfect reality which survives after the charismatic gifts of spiritual prophesying, tongue-speaking and divinely inspired insight have faded away or been fulfilled. They are, for Paul, provisional and partial. *Agape*, however, participates in both the eternity and the perfection of its divine source. There is no place here for an impersonal, deterministic ‘mandate of heaven’ or a humanistic confidence in individual self-improvement. *Agape* is for Paul the central reality at the heart of the divine will, which Jesus’ life and death demonstrate in visible, tangible and historical form. It is the inspiration at the heart of faithful Christian discipleship. This is not to deny the power classical Confucianism ascribes to the human spirit, moral virtue and the will of heaven; all have a demonstrably dynamic function in *Analects* and other early Confucian texts. For ren is, as Hall and Ames put it, “a person-making process”<sup>[24]</sup> in which “the completion of self means humanity (*ren*)”<sup>[25]</sup> . This stands in stark contrast, however, to the essentially theological, or Christological, core of Christian faith and practice which we see in *agape*. For Paul, and the classical Western theological tradition, the heart and source of *agape* are perceived by faith, not the exercise of human reason, will, effort, sight, or intellect. Though *dao* possesses a transcendent quality in much classical Confucian thought, it requires active pursuit of ren for it to be fully realized; as we read in *Analects* 15.29, “The

[21] q. Slingerland, *Analects* 7.34, 75

[22] See Slingerland on *Analects* 11.24, 121

[23] q. Barrett, 305

[24] David L Hall & Roger Ames, *Thinking through Confucius* (State University of NY Press: Albany, 1987), 84

[25] Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book of Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1963), 108

Master said, ‘Human beings can broaden the Way – it is not the Way that broadens human beings,’”<sup>[26]</sup> The orientation of moral or spiritual, energy is quite different in 1 Corinthians 13.8-10: *agape* is caught from God not taught by humans or investigated by the diligent.

This leads us on to the sixth pillar of Paul’s poetic celebration of *agape*; namely, love as *the expression of mature reason*. The progressive, developmental element in this ‘Hymn to Love’ resonates with Confucian pedagogy. The *chün-tze* aspires with ‘sincerity’ (*cheng*) to learn, grow, and develop in understanding and self-discipline.<sup>[27]</sup> Spiritual cultivation comes through ‘nourishing the vital force’ (*yangqi*) and ‘developing virtues by righteous deeds’ (*jiyi*). The quest for maturity is not an alien concept in either Confucianism or Christianity. 1 Cor 13.11,12 represent two different perspectives on progress towards Christian spiritual maturity. In the first, in verse 11, mature talk, thought and behaviour are contrasted to ‘childish ways’ : “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.” *Agape* induces and expresses itself both in the process and in the fulfilment envisioned here. For love transforms speech, thought and act and draws a Christian to a mature rejection of old, childish behaviour and an embrace of maturity. Crucially, the instrumental agency in this development is *agape*, not human effort, scholastic formation, moral discipline or even communal tradition and expectation. But, as Paul makes clear, this development is both rational and intentional: *agape* is not irrational sensibility or erotic passion. It is trained service, selfless generosity, humble obedience and mature, practical wisdom at work in God’s world. The second perspective on progress towards Christian maturity is teleological: maturity is being drawn into a future when imperfect vision, understanding and knowledge will be displaced by their perfect future forms. As we read in verse 12, “Now we see but a poor reflection in a mirror: then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” If, as argued in my previous paper, there is little sense of eschatological hope in classical Confucianism, this teleological perspective on moral understanding and love’s fulfilment in 1 Corinthians 13 is distinctive and new. To Paul, the Christian looks forward – indeed, is drawn forward – by a dynamic, eschatological Spirit of love and hope into the fulfilment of all things in heaven and eternity. In contrast, the fulfilment of life in classical Confucianism is in recovering the golden age of King Wen, in treasured ritual memory of loved ones through acts of filial piety, and in the harmony the human spirit finds in virtue and ritual. As we read of ritual (*li*), for example, in *Analects* 1:12.

Among the functions of propriety (‘*li*’) the most valuable is that it establishes harmony. The excellence of the ways of ancient kings consists of this. It is the guiding principle of all things great and small. If things go amiss, and you, understanding harmony, try to achieve it without regulating it by the rule of propriety, they will still go amiss.<sup>[28]</sup>

*Agape* knows life as more than the disciplined pursuit of moral or ritual, maturity: it is the dynamic love which transcends human individuality and imperfection, and fulfils human identity in relationship with God.

Finally, the enduring solidity and spiritual durability of *agape* is expressed for Paul in its outlasting

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[26] Q. Slingerland, *Analects*, 15.29, 185

[27] Cf. Chan, *A Source Book of Chinese Philosophy*, 465, fn.28: *Cheng* “means not only sincerity in the narrow sense, but also honesty, absence of fault, seriousness, being true to one’s self, being true to the nature of being, actuality, realness” (q. Yao Xinzhong, *An Introduction to Confucianism*, 217)

[28] See Chan, *A Source Book of Chinese Philosophy*, 21



even faith and hope; that is, creedal convictions about the truth of God and persevering courage grounded in belief in, and experience of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. To echo Lawrence, these are mere “hovels” in comparison with the seven-pillared “*inviolable house*” which true love is and inhabits. As we read in verse 13, “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” *Agape* is here then, for Paul, lastly, *the highest and most enduring virtue*, and finds its true form amidst the other Christian realities of faith in God and hope in Christ. Though, as we have seen, classical Confucianism has a highly-developed sense of love as relational responsibility and, even, romantic fulfillment, the centrality of *agape* to Christian tradition generally and 1 Corinthians specifically, is striking. Though Confucius stressed, “The gentleman (*chün-tze*) does not go against Goodness (*ren*) even for the amount of time required to finish a meal,”<sup>[29]</sup> he recognizes the partial and provisional nature of the human act and quest for *ren*. As we read in *Analects* 4.6, “The Master said, ‘I have yet to meet a person who truly loved Goodness or hated a lack of Goodness.’”<sup>[30]</sup> Though we find in Confucius’ ‘paradox of *wu-wei*’ a sense that *ren* is the highest virtue that can be developed into unselfconscious spontaneity of ‘goodness’, he still wonders, “Is there a person who can, for the space of a single day, simply devote his efforts to Goodness?”<sup>[31]</sup> His doubt contrasts with Paul’s confidence in *agape*; which he trusts not as a human exercise of will, but as a divine and eternal ‘gift’. But we do not say this in competitive or adversarial terms; for that would be to miss the heart of the love-principle Christianity enjoins. For, as we see in 1 Corinthians 13, *agape* possesses a remarkable rhetorical power and issues to all a global invitation to embrace and be embraced by it in our quest for a harmonious world.

## 中文题目：

### 爱的七重智慧：对《歌林多前书》十三章的儒基比较性阅读

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**提要：** 本文是作者探索儒基对话的第三篇文章。该文分析《歌林多前书》第十三章“爱之歌”里的“爱”（希腊语为 *agape*）与儒家经典（特别是《论语》）里的“仁”和“爱”的对比与比较之点。根据笔者先前对孔子的“爱”之主题的研究，本文拒绝强制的并行主义，探索七个比较共振来确认古典基督教与儒家中的“爱”的多面的概念性和实践特征。通过这两个传统，可以听到一个全球化的对和谐与无私的呼吁。

**关键词：** 爱、林前十三章、儒基对话、托马斯·爱德华·劳伦斯、和谐社会

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[29] q. Slingerland, *Analects* 4.5, 31

[30] q. Slingerland, *Analects* 4.6, 31

[31] q. Slingerland, *ibid.*

