

RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL TRADITIONS WERE TRANSFORMED AS THEY SPREAD.

In the wake of the decline of the Classical Empires, both Buddhism & Christianity expanded rapidly. So, when you think of the end of the Classical era, match that with the rise of Buddhism & Christianity as major world religions. One reason for their growth was the onset of plague that devastated Classical populations. Political instability turned people inward in a search for spiritual solace. Hinduism also changed as it spread through the subcontinent of South Asia. **Syncretism** (the blending of the old beliefs with the new beliefs) was common as Christianity and Buddhism simply added local traditions to their dogma. Some common characteristics of Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism include:

- Emphasis on inner devotion/piety
- Stress on Spiritual concerns over Secular
- Better life in the Afterlife
- Response to political instability/poverty

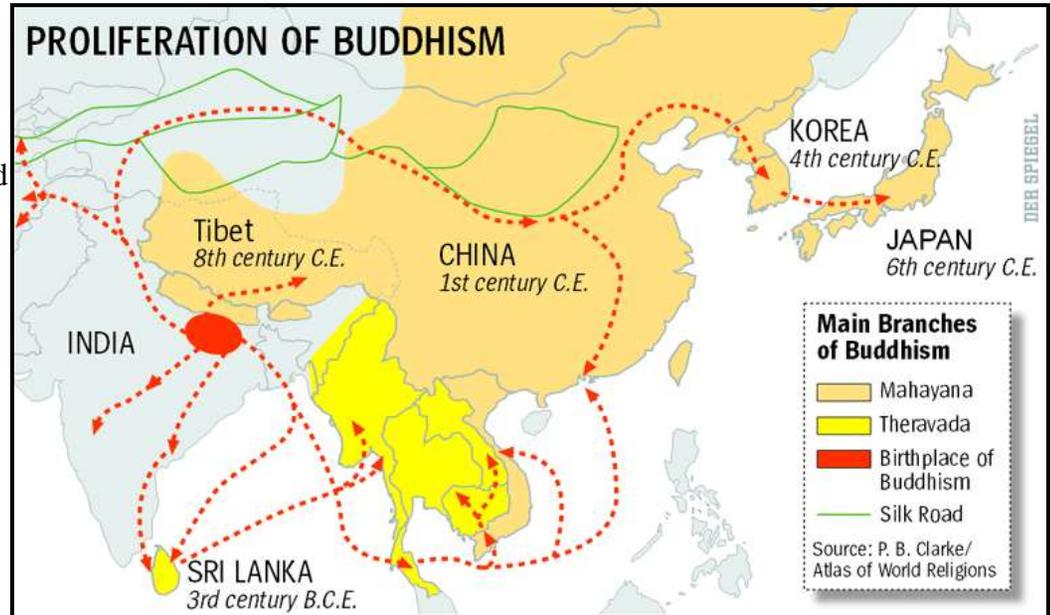
# BUDDHISM

Although it was founded in India (see the map →), Buddhism remained but a small minority in its homeland. The main way that Buddhism spread was through the work of **Monks** (known as Bhikku, literally “beggar”; a person devoted to living a simple life and attaining *Nirvana*). Buddhism was divided among a *small* number of devoted monks and a large number of those who continued about their daily lives while trying to meet their spiritual obligations.



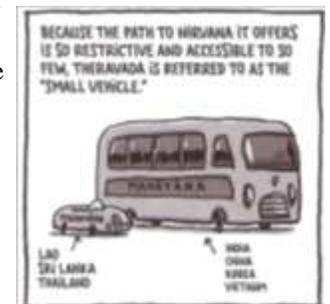
A new idea that arose within Buddhism in this era was the doctrine of **Bodhisattvas**. These are people who reached nirvana but chose to stay in this world as a kind of Saint. These Bodhisattvas would then serve as an example to others and aid them in prayers.

Buddhism changed from its focus on ethics to a devotional, emotional cult stressing popular salvation. Bodhisattvas were crucial in guiding people towards this salvation.



The East Asian form of Buddhism that emerged was **Mahayana** Buddhism. Known as the “Greater Vehicle” because more people could reach salvation, Mahayana Buddhism would often see the Buddha as divine. This runs contrary to early Buddhist teachings. **Theravada** Buddhism required the follower to devote their life to Buddhist teachings (something fewer people were able/willing to do). Buddhism never dominated a society; rather, it co-existed alongside other dominant religions leaving its largest impact in Korea, Vietnam, and Japan.

**SYNCRETISM:** Buddhism should have changed Chinese Patriarchy (Buddhism teaches that *women have souls!*) They changed Buddhist phrases from “Husband *supports* wife” to “Husband *controls* wife”.



# HINDUISM

The Classical/Post-Classical era saw changes come to the ancient religion of Hinduism.

The new devotional focus was led by

**Hymnodists**. The Hymnodists composed music and taught in the local vernacular (the language spoken by the people).

Another change to Hinduism was the addition of personal, devotional gods or **Bhakti**. These had existed since the Upanishads (commentaries on the Vedas), but now took on a larger role. They were now highly charged with emotion with special focus on the relationship between the worshipper and the divinity.

The new Tamil “Saints” stressed this intense love for the Bhakti in poetry or hymns. These poems were often accompanied with song and dance. They often encouraged the virtues of love, humility, and brotherhood. This new intense focus on spiritualism further weakened Buddhism, already in decline in India. Occasionally, resulting in aggressive persecution of the Buddhist Minority

# Christianity

While Buddhism spread east from its birthplace, Christianity spread west. Christianity (although much slower to spread/convert) would end up having the largest impact of any of the Classical religions. Christianity was the driving force in the development of both Post-classical Eastern Europe and Western Europe. Christianity and Buddhism did share some similarities (emphasis on Salvation and spiritual guidance of the Saints). However, there are far more differences.

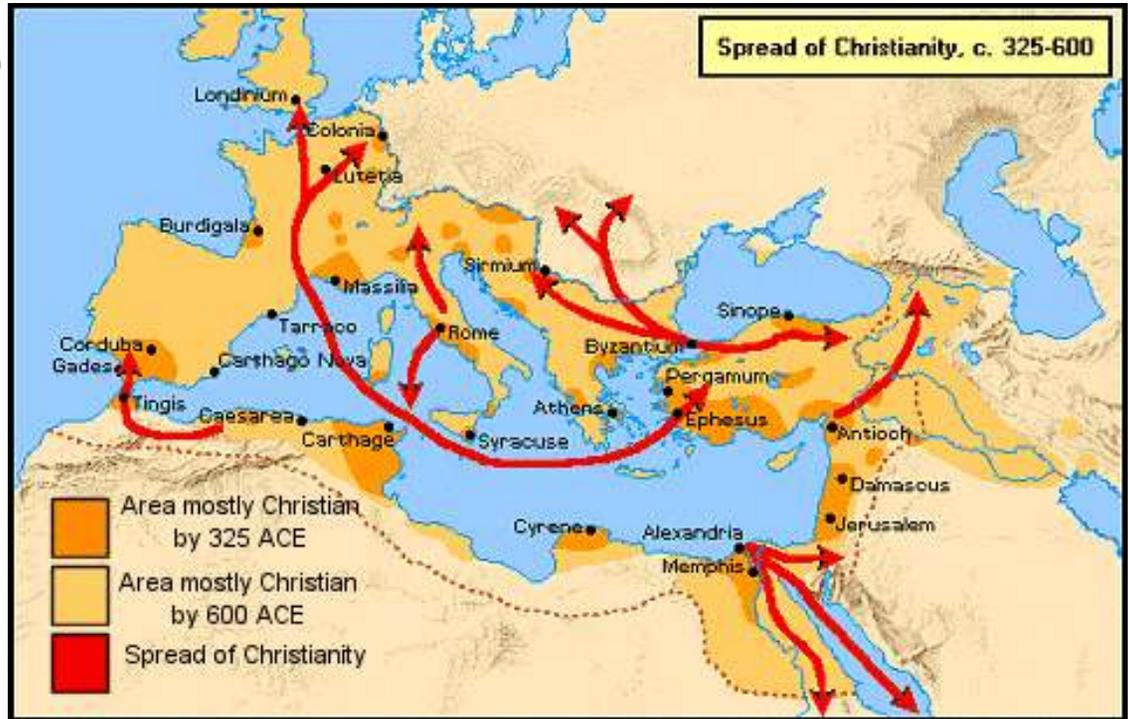
Christianity put more of a focus on the hierarchy and organization of the church itself (basing this on the Roman Empire’s structure... Pope=Emperor, etc.) Missionary work played an even larger role in Christianity than it did in Buddhism. One key feature of Christianity, more than any other religion, was the exclusive nature of its beliefs and the

intolerance of others beliefs (initially the Romans, later the Jews).

200 years before Jesus, several reactionary groups to the rigidities of Jewish priesthood arose. Many of these taught of the coming of a **Messiah** (Savior) who would bring about the Final Judgment. This movement culminated in Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus taught around Israel and gathered a small, loyal group of followers or **Disciples**. Once Jesus crucified, his followers expected his return, and with his return, the End of the World. When this did not happen, the disciples spread out across the Roman Empire.

Greek/Roman religion had grown stale, especially to the poor. Christianity’s emphasis a simple life and the spiritual



equality of everyone (not to mention the rituals the early Christians developed, Communion, etc.) gained it attention all over the Empire. The Roman Empire’s reach allowed for easy travel across its great size for the missionaries. They even went beyond to Axum, Persia, and Ethiopia. As the Empire fell, people turned to this new religion for comfort/spiritual solace.

Paul of Tarsus (an early convert, but not an original Disciple), led this effort to spread the teachings of Jesus and helped solidify it into a true religion (rather than a Jewish reform movement). This included the establishment of a formal church organization, with a **Bishop** appointed for each region. The writings of early converts and other stories were collected into what would become the **New Testament** (in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century).

Early on, the Christians had to compete with other “*Mystery religions*”. After years of persecution (from a normally tolerant Imperial government), the Roman Emperor Constantine converted. This was the first huge convert (later followed by Clovis (France), Vladimir (Russia)).

Early Christian ideas to develop include the Trinity (God, Jesus, Holy Spirit), and the tying of Classical philosophy to Christian beliefs. Also, **Monasticism** developed under Benedict in Italy with peasants he converted from the worship of Apollo. **SYNCRETISM**: Christmas=Roman Winter Solstice Holiday. Churches built using Roman architectural styles.

PAUL of TARSUS

