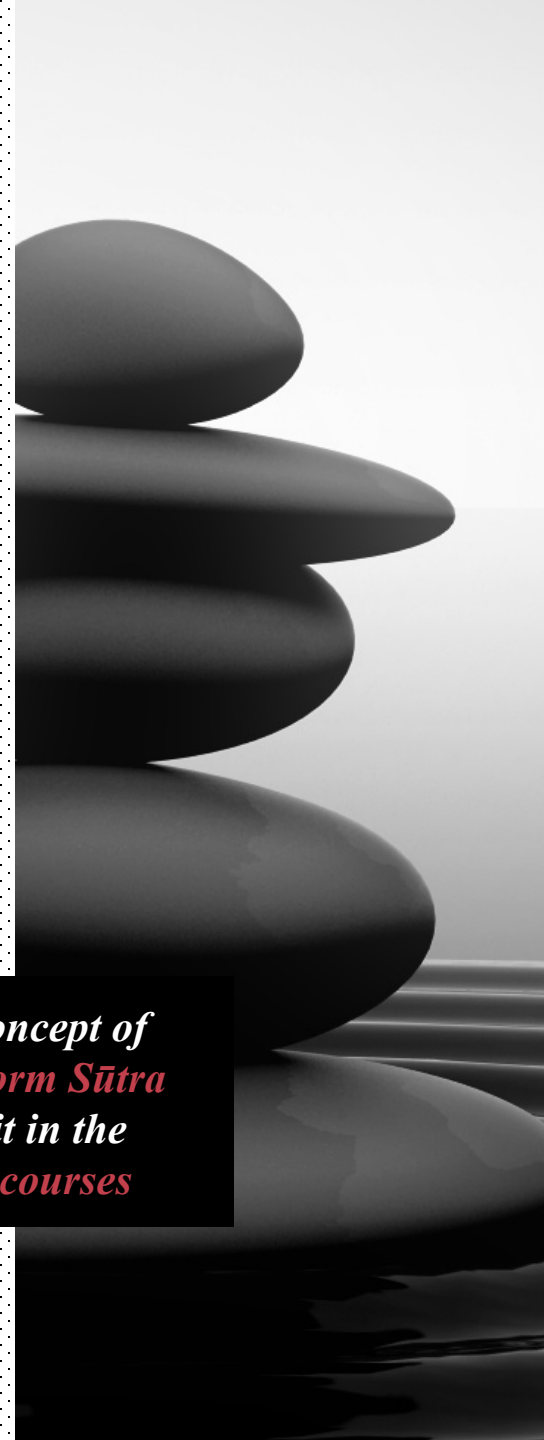


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GUIDING TO THE TRUTH

*A Comparison of the Concept of
Self-Nature in **the Platform Sūtra**
and the Role of the Spirit in the
Johannine **Farewell Discourses***



WHY COMPARE?

Today, one reason that blocks the conversation between religions is people's attachment on the formalism and dogmatism in their belief. These two Scriptures – comparing to the previous doctrinal texts of their religion – pay more attention to the intrinsic and spiritual value of their own religion, emphasising inner experience and practicality rather than external speculation and expression, and hence, they have broken the tedious dogma with a clearer expression of faith.

The Platform Sūtra

- A milestone work of the Sinicized Buddhism in medieval China
- Claims that truth resides within one's own nature, one should not seek for external forms of worship but rather observe inside their mind.
- Highlights the importance of internal religious experience of one awakening his own nature, rather than other forms of worshipping and meditation. It has simplified the eschatology of enlightenment from multi-level stages of meditation to a direct way of awakening to truth.

The Gospel of John

- Being considered “the enduring ‘twin towers’ of NT theology” (Köstenberger 2004).
- Transforming the worship of God from geographical form to spiritual form (John 4:23).
- The Johannine Jesus claims that if one believes in God and in him, he will be able to receive the gift of God – the Spirit who will guide him to heaven. Hence, the gift of Spirit resides within one's body has removed the limitations on time and space of worshipping, but emphasizes on the belief to God itself.



SO WHAT?

When it comes to interfaith dialogues, the main conflict exists between our topic is the centrality attached within the faith itself. Even though the systems and traditions of religions are different, their perceptions of human ontology and consciousness express many commonalities. Hope my comparison on the two iconic texts in Chan Buddhism and Christianity could provide a fresh understanding on the spiritual content in the two Scriptures, and perhaps encourage future comparisons on the spiritual eschatology between the canonical texts of different religions.



THE SELF-NATURE OF THE PLATFORM SUTRA

Self nature: the same unchangeable nature that exists inside the body of every sentient being.

Essence: self-purified, non-dual, completed, unproduced and unceased, has no difference between individuals

Form: it does not have an actual form, but can reflect all the forms, including the Buddhas

Function: arises good and evil thoughts, produces all the principles and doctrines

Purpose: once enlightened, one is a Buddha and unifies with the truth.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN JOHN 14-17

The Spirit is called “Paraclete” which is requested by Jesus from God to abide in all Christians.

- Both God and Jesus abides in the Spirit (14:23)
- By the residence of the Spirit one could experience the apocalypse in the present.
- It does not teach but reflects all the teachings of Jesus, and also guides Christians in their future salvation (14:26b)
- It will judge all the good and evil, convict the world of its sins (16:8).

It is divine due to the presence of Jesus Christ who lives in it.

COMPARISON: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL SOTERIOLOGY

In the paragraph mentioning below, both texts have included a similar scenario whether their disciples ask them for showing the truth. Interestingly, both leaders gives very similar answers as well.

The Platform Sūtra

The entire assembly bowed and said, “If [we] could see [the West Land] here, why should [we] wish to be reborn [there]? [We] ask the Master in your compassion to make the Western Land appear, [that will be] great kindness!”

The Master said, “At this time you have just seen the West. If [you have] no doubts, [we] can disperse now.” (T48, n. 2008, 341b)

- Deluded people do not understand their self-natures and do not know that the Pure Land is within themselves. Thus, they make wishes for the East and wishes for the West. To enlightened people, all places are the same (T48, n.2008, 352a-b).

The Gospel of John

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”

Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:8-9a)

- Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? (14:12a)
- This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you (14:17).

COMPARISON: THE UNITY WITH TRUTH

In the Gospel of John, the unity and returning to God is the goal of salvation. In the Platform Sutra, the final liberation is described as “steams flow into the ocean.” Do they mean the same thing?

The Platform Sūtra

[People with great wisdom] then know that **their original nature obtains the wisdom of *prajñā***. [They] use this wisdom constantly to contemplate and illuminate, [but they] do not rely on written words. Just like the rain water, it does not come from the sky. The truth is that the dragons cause it to fall, so that all sentient beings, all plants and trees, ones with and without feeling may receive their own moisture.

[There are] hundreds of streams which have myriad paths, yet [they all] flow into the ocean and unites in one substance. The wisdom of the *prajñā* of the original nature of sentient beings is also like this (T48, n.2008, 350c).

The Gospel of John

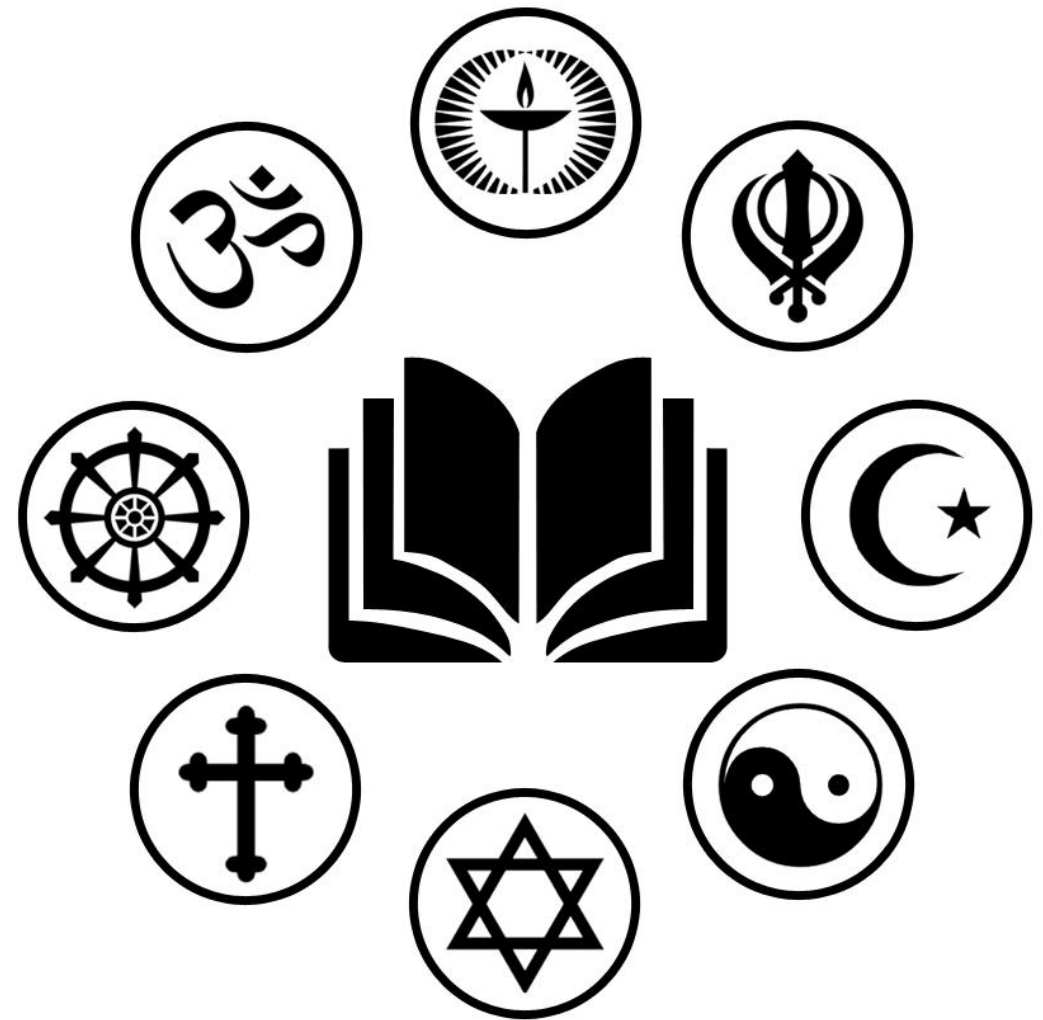
And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one (17:10)

[...that] they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me (17:21-23).

CONCLUSION

The core of every religion is the understanding between self-ontology and transcendent soteriology, whether it is “self-nature” or “Spirit-Paraclete”, their essence all refer to a theoretical reflection and figurative expression of the unspeakable truth, that the religious leaders have used to explain the transcendental existence of the truth and makes it understandable through religious practices. When we do interreligious dialogue, we should not seek for dialogue in the purpose of a mission, but rather place the dialogue and mission as “non-dual”, a position that I think makes equal sense from both sides.

If we keep holding our own centrality of faith and make religions like different schools that cannot bear each other, it would not be beneficial to intercultural communication either. Perhaps, it is time for us to stop attaching ourselves to different kinds of “lamp” and look rather at the same “electricity” inside.



THANK YOU

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