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

BODHISATTVAS

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 The East Asian form of Buddhism that emerged was Mahayana Buddhism. Known as the

as an example to others and aid them “Greater Vehicle” because more people could reach salvation, Mahayana Buddhism

would often see the Buddha as divine. This runs contrary to earlyin 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.

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

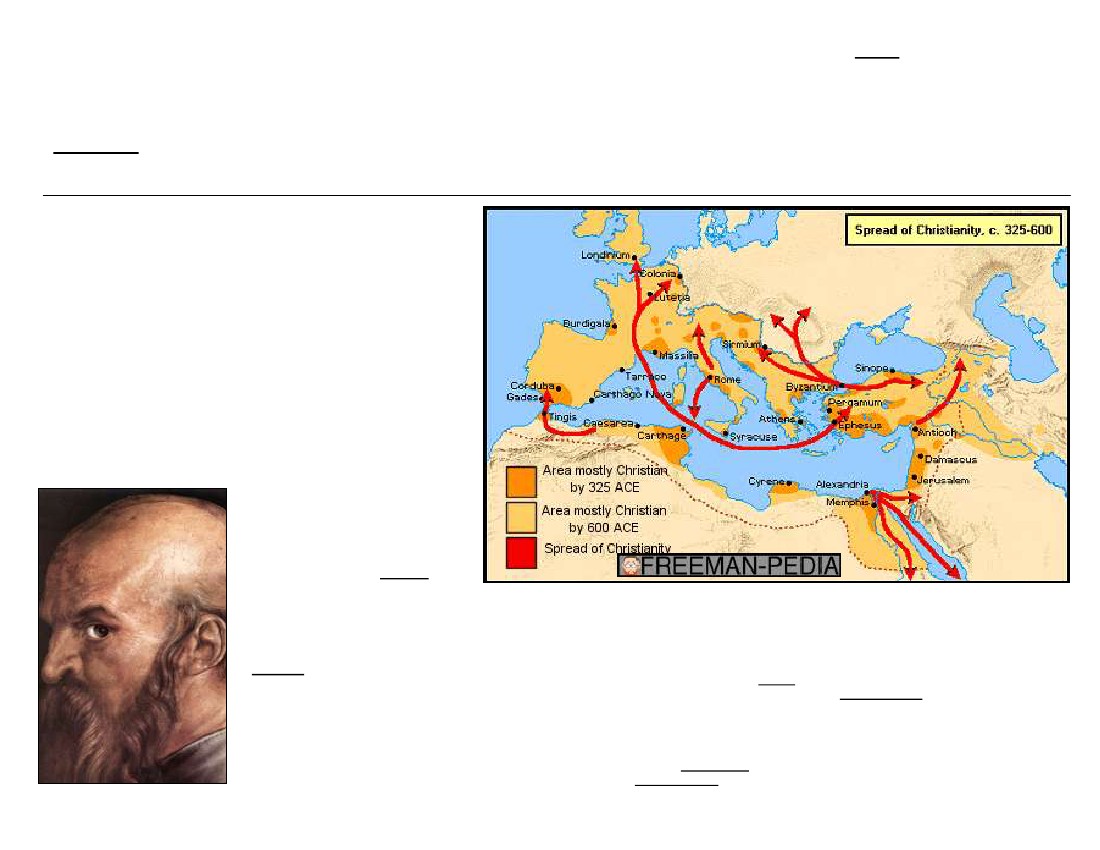
largest impact in Korea, Vietnam, and Japan.

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

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

PAUL of TARSUS

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

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

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 4th 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.