



The Original Religion of China

John Ross

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In the popular mind Confucianism is looked upon as the religion of China—though it is in reality not a religion but a system of ethics. Dr. Ross treats of the early religion which prevailed in China centuries before Confucius and which forms the basis of their religious ideas. It is the most ancient religion of which there is any trace—The Chinese ruler Fu Hi antedating Noah and the flood by five centuries. The early religion, as it was developed three thousand years ago, gives the first clear idea of their religious beliefs. The people worshiped and offered sacrifice to the Lord of Heaven—the one and Supreme God. They believed in demons and spirits, subject to God, and trusted in the care of an intelligent, just, all-wise, benevolent and almighty providence. They used no idols or images in worship; there was one temple dedicated to the worship of ancestors, but none dedicated to the worship of God. An altar to God could be erected anywhere. There were no special priests, goodness was enjoined and wickedness denounced. Prayer was made not for pardon but for guidance and for future favors. There was a belief in future rewards and punishments, and a heavenly life in the presence of God.

Here is no evidence of an upward evolution of religion in China but rather a subsequent decay. The book is a distinct contribution to the study of comparative religion.

—*The Missionary Review of the World*, Vol. 15 [1919]

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