Abstract

To the modern mind, love is a very important virtue, and seems to be universally so. While the importance of love may be traced back to the Judaeo-Christian tradition in the West, in the Confucian tradition, love does not seem to be a particularly noteworthy idea. This Honours thesis aims to analyze the idea of love in Christianity and Confucian thought, using the Bible and the so-called Four Books in the Confucian canon as textual evidence.

Chapter one gives an introduction to the thesis. Chapter two explains the idea of love in Christianity. Chapter three classifies Christian love into four types based on a variety of interrelationships. Chapter four examines the idea of love in Confucianism. Finally, Chapter five compares the idea of love in the two traditions and draws some preliminary conclusions.

This study yields three findings. First, Christian love centers on God, and God is the central figure that is the source and justification of love itself. In contrast, Confucian love is focused on man and human relationships. Second, Christianity and Confucianism have different ways of approaching love. In Confucianism, love begins with family members and expands to others outside the family, whereas in Christianity, love is for all and the Bible never states that love should begin with the family and then extends to strangers. Third, love is given a different emphasis in the two traditions.
While Christianity emphasizes the common characteristics of love, which is universal, Confucianism highlights the unique characteristics of love that is differentiated for family members and non-family members.