LEQ Prompt #4

In the period 600 B.C.E. to 600 C.E., different factors led to the emergence and spread of new religions and belief systems such as Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity.

***Develop an argument that evaluates how such factors led to the emergence or spread of one or more religions in this time period.***

I. Intro

Along with the many technological and political advancements that were made in the Classical Era, many new religions emerged in this period, some of which still persist to this day. Many religions existing before this point were quite simplistic and limited, thus creating a need for them to expand and change. These changes led to the evolution of religions so they could better meet their purpose of uniting people and answering their questions about life. These evolutions took place for a variety of factors; some changed in order to meet a growing unrest within a countries social structures, such as the case of Buddhism, while some were made to help unify people and bring in better social structures, as did Confucianism. Following their changes, these religions had to spread in one way or another. In the cases of Confucianism and Christianity, governmental support aided in the diffusion of their faiths, while Buddhism spread through the many trade routes of the Silk Roads.

II. Buddhism (Social Structure, Silk Road), Preferred over Hinduism

Founded in 500 BCE by Siddhartha Gautama, the enlightened Buddha that the religion is based around, Buddhism was developed originally as an offshoot of some of the ideas of Hinduism. It focused on the ideas of the 4 Noble Truths regarding suffering and desire, and the 8 Fold Path describing the correct way to live one’s life. It retained the Hindu ideas of karma, dharma, and reincarnation, the ideas that one’s past actions will determine how their future plays out, and that after death, one will live again. One of its primary differences, however, lied in the belief of Nirvana, the transcendent state of no suffering that everybody should work toward throughout their lifetime. For this reason, Buddhism greatly appealed to the masses of the lower classes in the caste system of India, as it rejected the idea that everyone was locked where they were for their life, and rather had an equality between its believers. It offered a monastic life of peace and reflection, something far lacking in the lives of those such as the Shudras. Beyond this individual appeal, Buddhism is a universalizing religion, seeking to spread its truth to any and all who would hear it. Buddhist missionaries spread along the classic trade routes of the Silk Roads and the Indian Ocean routes, bringing the edicts of Buddhism to China, Korea, and Japan. It even permeated the Mauryan Empire, as Emperor Asoka the Great was a devoted Buddhist convert, and brought the ideals of Buddhism to the Mauryan people.

III. Christianity (Constantine, Government spread)

Christianity was, and remains a major world religion that emerged during time period 2, and spread through governmental support. Although starting with opposition during its emergence, Constantine The Great named Christianity The Holy Roman Empire’s main religion. This was a turning point for Christianity in history, as it led to a large and influential empire becoming completely christian, because it showed how far Christianity had spread, and gave it the resources to spread even further. This led to more political and social unity, and support for the government, as ideas such as disposing of worldly values, and charity towards the church emerged and sustained. In fact governmental support from Christians led to many corruptions within the church, and eventually caused a division within Europe. This shows how influential the government made Christianity, relying and fulfilling corruption based only on a religion and charity for a “Ticket to Heaven.” Christianity, while emerging with opposition in the Roman Empire, eventually spread through its appeal to a widespread audience, and spread even further from the support of Constantine and The Holy Roman Empire, to create a whole nation unified under Christianity, and eventually spreading to other nations.

IV. Confucianism (Unification) Chinese Gov.

Confucianism is a political and social philosophy created by Confucius in China. It focuses on five relationships, being: ruler and subject, parent and child, husband and wife, eldest and youngest, and friend and friend. In these relationships, people are supposed to respect and obey those older or more powerful than them. People are expected live up to the standards set by Confucianism as it is supposed to create social order. This ideology was especially attractive to the Chinese government as its fundamental beliefs of respect and subservience would help China maintain its power. Due to this, Confucianism was set as the main religion for many dynasties. Since Confucianism was used by several dynasties, it easily spread. For example, the Han Dynasty established Confucianism. By using Confucianism, the Han Dynasty had an easier time controlling its citizens. Also, the citizens in the dynasty had better relations with one another. Overall, this led to greater political and social unity, as well as increased support and servitude for the government. However, after the second time period, Confucianism was combined with Buddhism and other religions to create Neo-Confucianism, which still exists today.

V. Conclusion

It is for a variety of reasons and factors the the religions existing prior to the Classical Era changed gave rise to the new ones the grew within this era. Some religions rose in order to combat or tear down established social structures, others grew because they gave people a sense of unity and belonging. Regardless of how these religions arose, they all came to play important roles in the ages to come. Within the next millennium, Christianity would grow to become the world’s largest Faith and play a key role in the development of States from this point onward. Buddhism and Confucianism would go on to become major factors in China’s social and political scenes, until it was uprooted by the communist ideals atheist ideology in the 20th century. While having emerged in this period, these faiths have survived to this day, for the most part, and continue to play a crucial role in modern life.