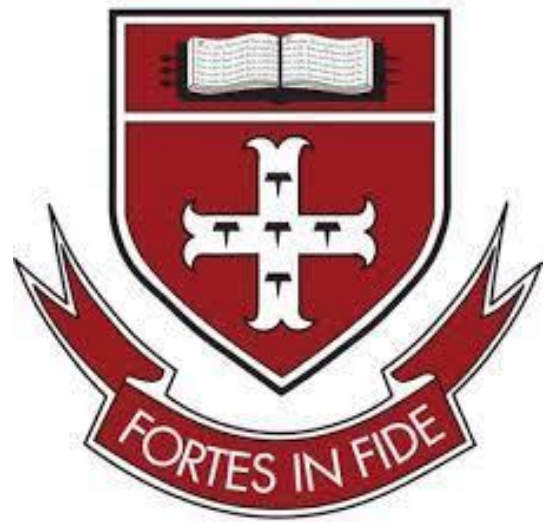


Taekwon do

태권도

vs



The Roman Catholic church

8th degree thesis by Master Anthony Mckenna

Taekwon do vs The Roman Catholic church

My hypotheses is "Does the moral guidance which is the backbone of Taekwon do fill the space left as a result of the decline in participation in Christian religions?"

I was born in a town called Consett in the North East Of England. My father was born in Newcastle upon Tyne. His Father is from Armagh in Northern Ireland. My father worked in the steelworks; my mother was a cleaner. There were 6 children in the family, 3 boys and 3 girls. This is a picture of the street I was born in



Consett has a strong Irish Community, as migrants came to England seeking work during the potato famine in the 19th century. It consequently has a large Roman catholic congregation. I was born into that community.

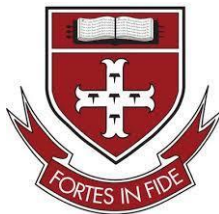
I was educated at St Mary's infant and junior school and was taught by nuns. Here are some of my teachers.



The nuns were all Irish as well. We went to the church of our lady of the immaculate conception, also known as St Mary's. Every Sunday we had mass, each week confession, every holy day of obligation to mass, strict observance of lent and fasting for 12 hours before receiving holy communion.

I have not received the sacrament of Holy orders...although I think my parents had that ambition for me, but I have received all the other 6 sacraments – Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Anointing of the sick and Matrimony. All within the Roman Catholic church.

My secondary education was at St Bede's Roman Catholic grammar school.



Its motto is "Fortes in Fide" which means "strength in faith" I learned Latin at St Bede's and many of the prayers we used were recited in Latin.

My first full time job was in a monastery – Minsteracres Monastery in Northumberland where I worked on the grounds. My dad helped build the monastery as did many volunteer Catholics in the 1950's. The monastery was run by the Passionist order and was used by St Bede's school as a retreat centre. I was married at Minsteracres, as were many of my friends. The priest who carried out the service, Father Martin was a personal friend of my Father's. Of his four best friends, two were priests. Father Kenny, the other priest who featured in my life was a Holy Ghost father, a missionary order that worked in Africa. Father Kenny arranged for me to work with the missionaries in Nigeria, but a civil war in that country prevented that from happening. My daughter was baptised by another priest friend of my fathers in the convent that the nuns who taught in the school ran.

I hope you get the picture. My entire childhood, adolescence and most of my adult life was steeped in the teaching and rituals of the Roman Catholic

church. I attended mass until my mid-forties, but now I have very little connection with the Roman Catholic church at all. Some of my siblings still attend, but their faith is waning. Why is this so?

Taekwon do is steeped in eastern philosophy – specifically Chinese philosophy. Philosophy – the search for truth, the study of wisdom and knowledge about human existence, values and reasons – the definition is quite broad but is generally accepted in the occident and the orient. Christian philosophy is essentially Latin in nature and has its roots in Judeo - Christianity. The fundamental difference in both sets of philosophy is that western philosophy is based on the individual and Eastern philosophy is oriented towards collectivism or community. Eastern philosophy is circular, there is a natural and eternal revolution of events such as reincarnation, whereas western philosophy is linear and logical – birth, life, death, afterlife. The common thread is high levels of personal values and virtues. The main difference between the two schools of thought in my opinion is that Christian theology the ultimate objective is to resolve the problem of sin and immorality and to get closer to God. Eastern philosophy is oriented towards dealing with ignorance and achieve enlightenment. This aspect intrigued me.

Something in the eastern philosophy in taekwon do subliminally attracted me and bent my life course.

I started Taekwon do at the age of 23 in 1983. When I started, there was very little information about the art. With no internet, and little written information and without the encyclopaedia, I had no notion of the philosophy of Taekwon do. I saw it simply as self-defence - physical training to make the body stronger. My moral and philosophical compass was guided entirely by the Catechism of the roman Catholic church. We had to learn the “penny catechism” by heart and recite it at Junior school. A very difficult task that I could not achieve as it has over 250 paragraphs. I can still remember the first few lines.

1. Who made you?

God made me.

2. Why did God make you?

God made me to know him, love him and serve him in this world, and to be happy with him for ever in the next.

3. To whose image and likeness did God make you?

God made me to his own image and likeness.

4. Is this likeness to God in your body, or in your soul?

This likeness to God is chiefly in my soul.

5. How is your soul like to God?

My soul is like to God because it is a spirit and is immortal.

6. What do you mean when you say that your soul is immortal?

When I say my soul is immortal, I mean that my soul can never die.

7. Of which must you take more care, of your body or of your soul?

I must take more care of my soul; for Christ has said, 'What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and suffers the loss of his own soul?'

(Matt. 16:26)



Broad and deep Ki (spirit)

Let's have a look at number 7. The catechism explains that the soul is more important than the body. The moral backbone, the philosophy that an individual adheres to is more important than corporeal matters. Now, along comes General Choi Hong Hi, his martial art and its philosophy. General Choi uses calligraphy to describe deep and broad spirit. The idea that the "do", the road, way or path has to be stronger than the body.

So, what is happening here? After studying for my first degree in 1989, I now have an alternative moral guide – the “do” of Taekwon do.

We all know that originally the art was written in three words “Tae – kwon – do”.

To be a true Taekwon do practitioner, there must be a balance between the physical aspect of the art and the mental aspect. General Choi spent his life making the martial art a truly devastating self defence system. He completed the connection between hand and foot. “Tae” and “kwon” were joined, and the art became known as “Taekwon-do” – two, not three separate words. General Choi’s mandate to the 21st century teachers of Taekwon do is to join the “Taekwon” with the “do”.

The Korean character “do” derives from the Chinese character “Doa” which means the road or the way. When you commence training you are part of a community travelling on the same road to Blackbelt and beyond. This means that as well as developing your physical self -defence skills you must cultivate your mind. The Tenets and oath give us a clue here. Use these very simple rules to live your life by – not just when you are in the training hall. Create your own personal philosophy based on high personal integrity, positive relationships, fairness, equity and being a friendly person. We all ultimately want to be healthy, happy people. “Taekwon” will help improve your physical health. “Do” will help improve your happiness.

The fundamental point here is that Taekwon do is not simply about punching blocking and kicking. It can be such a positive force in your personal development, but only if you connect your body and mind. In that way you can become a champion of freedom and justice and build a more peaceful world, as General Choi intended.

The Teachings of Jesus Christ give an incredibly strong moral guidance. His principal rules such as “do unto others as you would do to yourself” and “love one another as I have loved you” set a foundation for his more incisive explanations of what makes a good person, and how to help an individual

make ethical decisions based on justice and fairness. His sermon on the mount espoused his followers not to be angry; to turn the other cheek, to behave with integrity; not to seek status through prayer and fasting and to be charitable.

General Choi was a student of Confucius, who introduced his "Five Cardinal Virtues" over 2000 years ago. These virtues are the building blocks of oriental ethics, and are completely in synchronisation with the moral teachings of the Catholic Church, particularly in the development of the notion of "conscience" - using our powers of reason to make decisions that fit with our personal and societal moral conscience. The five cardinal virtues of Confucius are.

Ren The virtue of benevolence, charity, and humanity;

Yi The virtue of honesty and uprightness;

(Yi may be broken down into Zhong - doing one's best, conscientiousness, loyalty; and shù, reciprocity, altruism, consideration for others, and Confucius' early version of the Golden Rule, "what you don't want yourself, don't do to others.") Note how similar this sentence is to the teaching of Jesus in his sermon on the mount.

Zhi The virtue of knowledge;

Xin The virtue of faithfulness and integrity

Li The virtue of correct behaviour, or propriety, good manners, politeness, ceremony, worship

A recent study from Argentina has shown a dramatic decline in the Church in Pope Francis's homeland. The Conicet survey showed that 62.9 per cent of

the population identified as Catholic, next to 76.5 per cent in a comparable 2008 study. Belief in Christianity is waning throughout the world. Why? My opinion is that as people become more educated they are less likely to believe dogma and doctrine. They are less likely to have blind faith. The danger is that without organised religion and the philosophical and theological interpretation of its history, there is a vacuum in moral guidance. It becomes increasingly difficult to align one's own conscience with that of other parts of the world. The theory that there is Natural law as proposed by St Thomas Aquinas becomes undermined. The belief that all human beings have a common purpose such as preserving life, seeking the truth, creating a society is eroded.

Let's look at the short timeline of my life. The first third of my life was entirely Roman Catholic. The middle third introduced Taekwon do and there was a balance between religion and the physical practice of the martial art. The latest third of my life has seen me divest myself of any connection to religion and a focus on Taekwon do – not just in the physical practice but in consideration of the spirit behind Taekwon do – as General Choi encouraged my generation of Taekwon do instructors to do.

From General Choi, three pieces of wisdom:

From his moral guide book:

- "To be always faithful to one's principles. This is the basis of human morality; that is to forgive others and not to deceive your own conscience"
- From the Encyclopaedia, In his treatise on moral culture, there are two aspects that General Choi highlights that resonated with me. One is "know True happiness" – where Mencius states that to be happy, you should:

Have harmony within the family; Live with pride and honour through correct behaviour and to educate the young to become upright and useful members of society

- The other is “let your actions speak for yourself” which is what I aspire to do.

In conclusion, my fundamental point is that as society across the world turns away from organised religion, we are losing a framework of moral values and behaviours that make our society function properly. When there is no moral framework there is a danger of a dysfunctional society. This can range from temporary loss of moral direction – such as the problems observed in the USA at the end of Donald Trump’s presidency; or a long-term loss of moral value as is the case in Putin’s Russia.

The reduction in the influence of religion leaves a moral and philosophical vacuum. This can be filled – education subjects such as citizenship and religious studies at primary and secondary levels, and further education in subject such as theology, divinity and philosophy – but this avenue is only open to a relatively small portion of society. Good parenting and positive role models are instrumental if we are to fill the vacuum. My personal substitute has been the responsibility of being a Taekwon do master and the need to both understand and demonstrate the virtues of a true martial artist.

I have personally lost my faith in the Roman Catholic church. I’m not saying that I’ve found a new religion -Taekwon do is not a religion – but I do argue that I’ve gained a code of conduct to supplement the code which the Roman catholic church gave me. If the decline in organised religion continues across the world, there is an ever increasing need to fill this void.

It is my belief that Taekwon do instructors have a responsibility to fill the gaps left by organised religion.

And finally, advice from General Choi in his own calligraphy.....



The way is right in front of you

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