Christian soteriology is strongly built on the difference between Creator and the creation, and the authority of God as the Savior is based on his being the Creator of human beings. The distinction between God the Creator and created humanity is, however, a Western tradition and is strange for many Confucians. Such an issue deeply influences the Confucian-Christian dialogue in a problematic way.

In this chapter I am going to analyze the Confucian understanding of the object of salvation, i.e., humanity and its status of existence, which concerns mainly ontology, anthropology and the religious goals. The Confucian understanding of the Christian doctrine of creation will be analyzed mainly according to the thesis that the object of salvation is human beings who are created by God and who are an important part of the whole creation. Through such an analysis of creation I wish to discover how the Confucian ontology and anthropology influence the discussion of salvation in the Confucian-Christian dialogue. In the second part of this chapter I will explore the status of human beings in order to explain why human beings need to be saved and what is the religious goal of this salvation.

4.1 *Human beings as part of creation*

In order to analyze what attitude Confucians have assumed in respect to the theological concept of creation, it is necessary first to consider the conceptual content of creation in Christian theology. In addition, we must explore the concept of creation that was introduced into China by Western missionaries. I will then focus on the main aspects of the doctrine of creation as commented upon by Confucians.

The doctrine of creation, for example, according to Catholic Church, asserts that the world was created out of nothing by God. Within such a theological doctrine of creation the following points are important: 1) Reality exists as distinct from God. 2) This reality is not self-existent
(ontologically or epistemologically) but rather exists by dependence on
the antecedent the reality of God. 3) God created the world out of no-	hing (cæratione ex nihilo). 4) God sustains the world. 5) The world moves
towards its destination (telos) according to the purpose of God.

Such a doctrine of creation was foundational for Western cosmol-
ogy until the seventeenth century. Roman Catholic Christianity,
introduced by Matteo Ricci to China in the 16th century, belongs to
this theological tradition. Later Protestant missionaries also introduced
Christianity according to their own traditions. Till 1949 when the
People’s Republic of China was established, there were already over
one hundred Christian denominations in China. Later, in the begin-
ning of the 1950s, Western missionaries were forced to leave China,
and most Christians were organized into one church. In this study I
will not analyze each denomination but will focus on the five points
mentioned above, since they are the important issues in the encounter
between Christianity and Confucianism.

The history of the doctrine of creation in the modern era is largely
the breakdown of this framework. In the following I will scrutinize
Neo-Confucian responses to creation in the light of these five points

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1 Catechism of the Catholic Church 1997, 85–86 reads: “II. CREATION—WORK
OF THE HOLY TRINITY 290 “In the beginning God created the heavens and the
earth”: three things are affirmed in these first words of Scripture: the eternal God
gave a beginning to all that exists outside of himself; he alone is Creator (the verb
"create"—Hebrew bara—always has God for its subject). The totality of what exists
(expressed by the formula “the heavens and the earth”) depends on the One who gives
it being.” See also items 291–292.

2 Catechism of the Catholic Church 1997, 87 reads: “296 We believe that God needs
no pre-existent thing or any help in order to create, nor is creation any sort of necessary
emanation from the divine substance. God creates freely “out of nothing”: If God had
drawn the world from pre-existent matter, what would be so extraordinary in that? A
human artisan makes from a given material whatever he wants, while God shows his
power by starting from nothing to make all he wants.” See also items 297 and 298.

3 Catechism of the Catholic Church 1997, 89 reads: “302 Creation has its own good-
ness and proper perfection, but it did not spring forth complete from the hands of the
Creator. The universe was created “in a state of journeying” (in statu viae) toward an
ultimate perfection yet to be attained, to which God has destined it. We call “divine
providence” the dispositions by which God guides his creation toward this perfection:
By his providence God protects and governs all things which he has made, “reaching
mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and ordering all things well”. For
“all are open and laid bare to his eyes”, even those things which are yet to come into
existence through the free action of creatures.”

4 Cf., Webster 1993, 94–95.