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### **Biblical Responses to Animism in Asia**

Animistic practices run rampant throughout Asia, despite the fact that most people are also at least nominal adherents of the four major world religions, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and, to a lesser extent, Christianity or of some of the smaller, regional religions such as Jainism, Taoism, Confucianism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism. For example, Phil Parshall estimates that at least 70% of Muslims practice folk Islam.<sup>1</sup> Others place the percentage even higher.<sup>2</sup> The situation with the other religions is similar.

Gailyn Van Rheenen defines animism as “the belief that personal spiritual beings and impersonal spiritual forces have power over human affairs and, consequently, that human beings must discover what beings and forces are influencing them in order to determine future action and, frequently, to manipulate their power.”<sup>3</sup> He then goes on to raise the question as to how Christians should deal with these things when ministering in animistic contexts.<sup>4</sup> This volume is one small attempt to answer that question. Much, much more can and must be done to address this critical issue.

The first two articles call for understanding animism through the paradigm of the charismata. In the opening article, Vietnamese scholar Bee Huyen Nguyen notes that while the major religions and belief systems such as Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and Catholicism have been in Vietnam for centuries, animism continues to be prevalent.

She goes on to say that Pentecostalism shares some of the same beliefs as animistic cultures, namely, the spirit world. Both believe in the existence of spiritual beings and their activities, which influence human beings. She notes that “these worldview parallels have become factors contributing to the impressive growth of Pentecostalism in animistic contexts in the last decades.”<sup>5</sup> Vietnam is no exception.”

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<sup>1</sup>Phil Parshall, *Bridges to Islam*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 16.

<sup>2</sup>Rick Love, *Muslims, Magic and the Kingdom of God*, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2000), 22.

<sup>3</sup>Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1991), 20.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (California: University of California Press, 2007), 24.

In her paper, she specifically focuses on the concept of personal prophecy, which has strong parallels to the type of divination known as chresmology, fortunetelling by prophets and seers. Rooting this in the historical context of Vietnam, Nguyen notes that during the period of persecution, prophecy was often used to protect the church, but “soon veered toward abuse and misuse.” Digging deep into the culture and the Bible, she explores the issue and offers some help towards discipling believers on this vital issue.

In the second article, I take a look at how the concept of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit needs to be explained in the Filipino context, given the Filipino’s understanding of the spirit world and knowing that any teaching on the subject will be filtered through their worldview. The concept of supernatural power is nothing new in the Philippines. But the source and purpose of that power differs radically from the biblical portrayal of the power of the Holy Spirit. I discuss these differences in order to bring Filipinos into the truth about who the Holy Spirit is and that power that he can be in the lives of every believer.

Finally, in a two-part article, Chinese theologian Stephen Yao raises the question of using the Chinese concept of heaven, *Tian*, as an appropriate name for God when referring to divine revelation, giving special attention to Paul’s message on Mars Hill in Acts 17:23-31. In Part I, he reviews three traditional views on the subject, discussing the strengths and weaknesses of each view. In Part II, he engages in the controversy surrounding the use of *Tian*, noting the controversy can be good as it may lead us closer to the truth.

But if *Tian* is to be used as a name for the God of the Bible or to refer to him in any way, then the animistic concepts associated with *Tian* cannot be ignored. Yao deals with this issue squarely, offering biblical reflections on how the Chinese understanding of these issues can be changed to give the Chinese a clear understanding of who God is within their own cultural context.

Whether one agrees with our authors or not, we pray that this edition will spur further reflection on animism in Asia and the opportunities it offers for biblical contextualization, while also recognizing the danger of syncretism that animism poses to the cause of Christ.

With this edition, the *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* crosses a new threshold. For the first time in our 21-year history, one of our articles here is offered in a language other than English, in this case, Mandarin. Granted, it is only a translation of Yao’s article; nevertheless, it represents a small effort on our part to expand the reading audience of the Journal as part of our goal to provide theological reflection that will serve the Asian Church. Please join us in prayer that at least one article in an Asian language will become a regular part of our journal.

We are also pleased to announce our new website, [www.aptspress.org](http://www.aptspress.org). You are welcome to share your own thoughts and reflections on animism with me by contacting me through the website. I'd enjoy hearing from you.

Yours in Christ,

Dave Johnson, DMiss  
Managing Editor

## **Divination Versus Prophecy and Implications for Discipleship in the Vietnamese Context**

*Bee Huyen Nguyen*

### **Introduction**

The seeking nature of man is described adequately by Gary A. Wilburn:

Man's world is limited by its physical qualities and knowable traits. Or is it? What has always made man a unique specimen of physical life is his belief in, and search for, something beyond the visible world in which he lives. He dreams and has ideas. He investigates the realms which are outside of his sense perception. He is aware of Being or beings separate from himself who cavort and command attention of those who inhabit the earth.

He has profound interest in the stars, in witches, in magic. He wonders if spirits who have departed have not really departed.

He yearns to understand and comprehend what exists – if anything – beyond the curtain of physical death. He wants to know his future, and so he turns to tea leaves, cards, crystal balls and his own palm.

Man is a seeker.<sup>1</sup>

Because of man's seeking nature, animism has never disappeared as some have predicted; rather, it has reshaped itself and still coexists with world religions. Major religions and belief systems such as Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and Catholicism have come to Vietnam for many centuries, but animism continues to be prevalent.

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<sup>1</sup>Gary A Wilburn, *The Fortune Sellers* (Glendale, California: G/L Publications, 1972), 1-2.

Pentecostalism is said to share the same beliefs as animistic cultures, namely, the spirit world. Both believe in the existence of spiritual beings and their activities which influence human beings. In effect, both practice the casting out of demons, healing, and revelation or discerning the divine will (divination/prophecy). These worldview parallels have become factors contributing to the impressive growth of Pentecostalism in animistic contexts in the last decades.<sup>2</sup> Vietnam is no exception. These parallels, however, have posed some challenges for Pentecostal ministers helping new converts in animistic contexts to experience a transformation at the worldview level according to biblical teaching. During the persecution of the Vietnamese church in the past, the gift of prophecy was operated to protect the church from danger. It soon, however, veered towards abuse and misuse, turning it into predicting the future for daily life issues such as: dating, marriage, business or schooling. Therefore, in order to effectively minister in animistic contexts such as Vietnam, among these parallels I would like to examine in the following pages are the concepts of divination and prophecy. I will then present the implications of these concepts and biblical teaching for the discipleship process of new converts in the Vietnamese context.

### **Definition**

#### What is Divination?

Divination, in a general sense, is the attempt to discern the divine will or gain supernatural knowledge, especially knowledge of the future, through various devices.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes it is considered as “a pagan counterpart of prophecy.”<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, divination is “the practice of consulting beings (divine, human, or departed) or things (by observing objects or actions) in the attempt to gain information about the future and such other matters as are removed from normal knowledge.”<sup>5</sup> In this general definition, divination may range from obtaining wisdom for wisdom’s sake to practicing things detestable to God.

For a more specific definition, divination, which plays a critical role in folk religions, refers to “the foretelling of the future using such means as astrology, augury and auspice. In principle the future course of events

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<sup>2</sup>Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (California: University of California Press, 2007), 24.

<sup>3</sup>Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, ed., *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 2, *D-H* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2009), 143.

<sup>4</sup>Merrill F. Unger, ed., *The New UNGER’S Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, Moody Press, 1957), 312.

<sup>5</sup>Merrill C. Tenney, ed., *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 2, *D-G* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2009), 163.

is read from patterns found in the stars, the entrails of animals and such things as the way bones or sticks fall when thrown.”<sup>6</sup>

### What is Prophecy?

The word “prophecy” (προφητεία in Greek) derives from the verb “prophesy.” προφητεία occurs 19 times in the New Testament, has the meaning of “prophecy, prophesying; the gift of communicating and enforcing revealed truth.”<sup>7</sup>

The prophet is the person who performs the prophetic function. Nowadays, people tend to focus on the predictive aspect of prophetic word; a careful examination of the activities of the prophets informs that the nature of prophecy is not exclusively predictive. The prophet at times functions as God’s mediator proclaiming God’s (oral or written) words or acting God’s message; other times he functions as one whose mission is to keep watch over God’s people. In particular, apart from the Hebrew word נָבִי “nabi” (“prophet”), we have other alternative titles for a prophet in the Old Testament such as: seer (Samuel), man of God (Elisha), servant of God (Amos, Jesus), messenger of Yahweh (Haggai), and watchman (Habakkuk, Ezekiel).<sup>8</sup> Therefore, prophecy is God’s message, not the prophet’s message or general knowledge, which is often spontaneously given to the prophets—his spokesmen—through direct revelation. In this, prophecy is distinct from a minister’s sermon or teaching. Moreover, some prophecy is preserved for the future, which the prophets may not fully understand. Prophecy reflects a personal God who desires to communicate to his people about who he is, what his will is and what he expects from men.

### Historical and Biblical Background

“It is likely that through all levels of ancient society there was a brisk interest in obtaining knowledge of the immediate future,” states Harry A. Hoffner.<sup>9</sup> The interest in gaining divine knowledge was prevalent in the ancient world (for both royal and non-royal people) and is prevalent still today. While the God of the Bible chooses his own methods (prophets, dreams, the Urim/Thummim-Ephod) to communicate to his

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<sup>6</sup>Irving Hexham, *Concise Dictionary of Religion* (Downers Gove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 65.

<sup>7</sup>Biblehub, accessed October 9, 2017, <http://biblehub.com/greek/4394.htm>.

<sup>8</sup>Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Vol 4 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1997), 1068.

<sup>9</sup>Harry A. Hoffner, “Ancient Views of Prophecy and Fulfillment: Mesopotamia and Asia Minor,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30, no. 3 (September 1987), 258.

people and for his people to discern his will, people without the God of the Bible seek supernatural secrets through divination.

### Divination

Along with magic, divination was practiced in the early times of human history and plays an important role in the daily life of many cultures. In many countries in the ancient world, divination received both social and political support. The biblical writings testify to the presence of divination practices in the promised land and the Ancient Near East. Before his people possessed the land of the nations of Canaan, God warned His them of their divination: “the nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination” (Deuteronomy 18:14).

There are many occurrences of divination in the Bible, both within and outside Israel. One of the earliest instances of divination is recorded in Genesis when Laban claimed to use divination to find out why he was blessed (Genesis 30:27). Joseph’s ability to interpret dreams lifted him up to the position second to Pharaoh. Additionally, he may have learned to do divination by water with his silver cup in Egypt (Genesis 44:1-5).<sup>10</sup> Years later in Egypt, after seeing Moses and Aaron performing miracles, the Egyptian magicians tried to imitate the miracles with their magic (Exodus 7:8-13; 8:7-18) even though they could only imitate them up until the second plague.

Deuteronomy 18:9-12 makes it clear that practices such as divination, sorcery and omen interpretation are “detestable” before God. However, there are at least three methods of divination (though the Bible does not call them divination methods) acceptable before Him, which are dreams, prophets, and the Urim/Thummim—Ephod.

The attitude against divination, sorcery, etc. was repeated in the New Testament. The girl who had “the spirit of divination,” Simon the sorcerer, and Elymas the sorcerer are antagonists (Acts 8:9-13; 13: 8; 16:16-18).

### Prophecy

Prophecy in the Bible is not limited to the prophetic literature. Its root can be traced back to the beginning of God’s saving plan.<sup>11</sup> The Protevangel in Genesis 3:14-15 reveals His divine intention to bring about a Redeemer for the world. Enoch, Noah, and Moses all uttered divine messages.

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<sup>10</sup>Merrill C. Tenney, Vol. 2, 164.

<sup>11</sup>Merrill F. Unger, 1040.



The Israelites thought that they would die if God spoke directly to them in the wilderness. In other words, they dared not hear from God themselves (Exodus 20:19, Deuteronomy 18:16). As a result, God promised to speak to His people through the prophets whom He would raise up (Deuteronomy 18:17-22). This probably explains to some extent why prophecy is widely emphasized in the Bible. Later on, the literal form of prophecy reached its heights during the ministries of Isaiah and Jeremiah. The end of the Old Testament closes with Malachi's prophecy of the coming Elijah.

The continuation of prophecy in Israel during the first century provides a backdrop for the expectations of the coming Messiah: Jesus Christ, the greatest of all prophets. The term "prophet" was applied to Jesus in Matthew 13:57 and John 4:19. He was the spokesman of God and is God himself. His life and ministry exposed sin, bringing sinners to repentance and faith, revealing the nature of God, comforting those who came to Him, predicting future events (for example, the fall of Jerusalem, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the second coming, etc.) and assuring believers of their glorious future.

In the New Testament's new period of revelation, believers are now the children of God. The Holy Spirit, who permanently indwells in the life of the believers, testifies to this adoption of sonship (Romans 8:15) so believers do not live in fear, but in power and love (2 Timothy 1:7). Accordingly, God can speak directly to believers and believers can boldly hear from Him (Hebrews 4:16). In other words, it is possible for all believers to prophesy in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 14:1, 31). New Testament believers now operate with the gift of prophecy in the context of the church, in harmony with other gifts of the Spirit, to affirm the work of Christ on the cross, build up and edify the Body of Christ, and bring about the conversion of unbelievers (1 Corinthians 14:3-4, 24-25). Consequently, prophecy does not proclaim judgment in the Old Testament manner because "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

#### A Comparison and Contrast of Biblical Divination and Prophecy in the Bible and in Vietnamese Culture

As shown in the definition and the background of divination and prophecy, divination and prophecy have much in common in the sense that they are means of discerning the divine will, although in having access into supernatural knowledge to provide answers and solutions to human needs they are clearly distinct.

The first distinction lies in the divine origination of prophecy. Divination in general focuses on human techniques while prophecy

focuses on God's direct revelation.<sup>12</sup> Those who use divination are not concerned about the source as much as about the type of knowledge they get from it and how effective the divination method is. The source of divination derives from spiritual beings in the spirit world, who are willing to reveal secret knowledge to diviners with some conditions. Prophecy in the Bible, on the other hand, has great emphasis on its source—the Lord himself. God is the one who initiates the message. God can speak through dreams, visions, and signs or through the Urim/Thummim—Ephod. God can use godly and obedient people such as Moses, Joshua, Isaiah or Jeremiah; He can also use an erroneous, disobedient or stubborn person (Balaam, Jonah, even King Saul could prophesy in 1 Samuel 10:6) to speak forth truthfully His message as in the words of Balaam: “I can't say whatever I please. I must speak only what God puts in my mouth” (Numbers 22:38). Therefore, it is the source of prophecy—the Lord Himself—who authenticates prophets, the methods of communication and the entrusted messages.

Secondly, while the character of diviners is of little concern compared to the effectiveness of their skills, intermediaries between God and the people, the prophets, are notable because of their character traits and inner spirituality. Ernest B. Gentile gives five categories of the prophets' character traits, namely: devoted—loyal, committed—obedient—humble, holy—prayerful—compassionate, daring—bold—faith-filled, and studious—patriotic.<sup>13</sup> Although the character of the prophets can be diverse, one common trait is that they are Spirit-filled people. In the New Testament, when believers were filled with the Holy Spirit, they prophesied. In addition, they cherished their intimate relationship with God, who established and sent them out. Distinctively, their personality and consciousness remained intact when God gave them prophetic words, be it through a dream, a vision, or an audible voice. They might feel weak and afraid (Daniel, John), or unworthy (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zechariah) in His presence; yet, the fear was gone after God assured them. In the same way, people with the gift of prophecy are Spirit-filled and true worshippers of Jesus.

Furthermore, God can use any believer to prophesy for Him and thus prophecy is a gift at God's disposal. Diviners in Vietnam are regarded as wise and knowledgeable intermediaries, yet, they have to perform certain kinds of ritual or work themselves up to ecstatic states in order to receive an impartation of divine information. For example, fortune-tellers learn skills in reading and interpreting signs. Possession diviners are totally controlled by spirits, losing their consciousness in order to be mediums

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<sup>12</sup>Sakenfeld, Vol. 2, 143.

<sup>13</sup>Ernest B. Gentile, *Your Sons and Daughters Shall Prophesy: Prophetic Gifts in Ministry Today* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Chosen Books, 1999), 68.

through whom the spirits speak. Diviners also charge fees for their knowledge or expertise and may require sacrifices to appease spirits (as is the case of possession divination).

In addition, while diviners often claim to be all-knowing humans who know how to retrieve answers to human questions from the spiritual world, prophets never claim to understand the mind of God at any time. The Bible records incidents where prophets have made inaccurate guesses. For instance, at first Samuel did not expect David would replace Saul as King (1 Samuel 16:6-13) and Nathan supposed that David would be the builder of God's temple (2 Samuel 7:3-16).

Finally, the meaning and purpose of prophecy is not so much to give people what they want as it is to fulfill God's purpose, that is, to build up the church. During the persecution period, Vietnamese Christians experienced an outpouring of the Holy Spirit where the gift of prophecy was manifested through leaders and church members to protect the church. On occasion, God used the gift of prophecy to warn the church of the danger of persecution from the police and to send His people to another place before the police came to seize them. In contrast, divination is concerned about human will, giving people what they want, on many occasions, out of wrong motives.

### **Divination in the Vietnamese Context**

While Vietnamese divination beliefs include the whole range of practices found elsewhere, the most popular divination belief and practice is a combination of astrology and heremology (divining on the basis of the calendar). For example, a Catholic may consult a diviner to make sure he/she has the opening ceremony for his shop on a proper day and hour. A Buddhist, who believes that the year of the Rooster (2017) is not a favorable year may try to do more good works to eliminate or minimize the bad luck predicted by an unfavorable year. Consequently, he may participate in some Taoist rituals. Or, an atheist may believe that his relationship with his girlfriend cannot lead to a happy marriage because of the astrological-mystical disaffinity based on their birth years. These customs and beliefs apparently hinder Vietnamese Christian converts in their process of transformation by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Many Vietnamese believe that there are auspicious days/hours and un-auspicious days/hours on the lunar calendar, which was formulated based on regularly changing phases of the moon similar to Chinese calendar of "sexagenary cycle."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Anh Q. Tran, ed. and trans., *Gods, Heroes, And Ancestors: An Interreligious Encounter in Eighteen-Century Vietnam* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 261.

As a result, during the New Year Festival, a Catholic Vietnamese may go to church to pray to God for a good year ahead and also go to a diviner to try to deduce what is awaiting him or her in the new year. A middle-class Buddhist may invite a Buddhist monk to conduct Taoist rituals to ward off bad luck for the whole family in the new year. Meanwhile, Vietnamese from poorer families or from an ancestor worship background buy the “book of fate” for that year for each member in the family at any Buddhist temple or bookstore. Based on what is written, they plan and undertake significant events such as travelling, moving houses or getting married. If bad luck (sickness or a financial loss) is predicted, they would consult a diviner to undertake a certain kind of ritual to “relieve a bad luck.”

In summary, these practices in the Vietnamese context reflect level two of animism where “animism has significant effect on the religions practiced.”<sup>15</sup> Partly because of the religious syncretic background of Vietnam, Neil L. Jamieson commented: “Over many centuries, Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism had become intertwined, simplified, and Vietnamized to constitute—along with vestiges of earlier animistic beliefs—a Vietnamese folk religion shared to some extent by all Vietnamese.”<sup>16</sup>

As can be seen, Vietnamese worldview has been shaped by the blending of spiritual cults of venerating “creation” (such as sun, moon, mountains, rocks, rivers, ancestors, heroes, wandering souls, etc.) and Confucian ethics, the Buddhist view of life/afterlife, and magical practices of rites and rituals in Taoism.<sup>17</sup>

The abovementioned divination practices express, at the worldview level, the belief in the influence of the natural world and the spiritual world upon human life and fate. So, for example, the deceased (in the *yin* realm) act upon the living world (the *yang* realm), stars and changes of natural elements influence human characteristics and relationships and animal characteristics mirror human characteristics. These practices reveal a desire to live in harmony with the forces of the universe in order to minimize, through performing rites and rituals, the bad luck and suffering inherent in human life.

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<sup>15</sup>Philip Steyne, *Gods of Power: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Animists* (Columbia, South Carolina: Impact International Foundation, 1996), 46.

<sup>16</sup>Neil L. Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam* (London: University of California Press, 1993), 11.

<sup>17</sup>Anh Q. Tran, 2-3.

### **Implications for Discipleship**

When the Vietnamese accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ, their view on truth is challenged because “the teaching that one religion exclusively owns the ‘truth’ is a foreign and generally unaccepted concept to the Vietnamese.”<sup>18</sup> To the mixture of religions mentioned earlier, Vietnam has added communist ideology which holds to evolution theory. This added dimension to the traditional Vietnamese belief systems promotes the belief that there is no Supreme Being to whom human beings are accountable and must worship.

For this reason, it is possible that new Vietnamese converts may add and adapt biblical teachings into their current belief system. Specifically, a Vietnamese who had practiced divination (by astrological heremology) would give great attention to the biblical prophetic gift in the body of Christ as the answer for his or her future. Moreover, the inclination to power may prompt a new believer to focus on spiritual gifts (prophecy) rather than develop spiritual fruit (love) (1 Corinthians 13:2).

Because of the Vietnamese worldview issues for new converts outlined above, I would suggest that the process of discipling a new Vietnamese convert should highlight the theology of creation and the work of Christ as follows.

The theology of creation reveals that there is only one true God, the Supreme Being, who created angels, humans and the natural world with an order, in which human being was directly created in the image of God lower than the angels (Genesis 1:28, Psalm 8:5). God is the source of all good things; He is distinct from and yet involved in His creation.<sup>19</sup> Thus, human beings are responsible before God as His handiwork (to worship Him) and stewards (to manage God’s work). These responsibilities shape human destiny, not natural forces of the universe at the time of birth. Even the spirits (who are in fact, fallen angels) were created. Though higher than human beings (Psalms 8:5), they have limited power and will face judgment one day (1 Corinthians 6:3).<sup>20</sup> Moreover, after the Fall, the human race has stood condemned before God, except those who are redeemed by Christ. Vietnamese believers should no longer try to live in harmony with natural forces as a means to attract good luck and fortune. Instead, they need to be united with Christ, who is the reconciler between

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<sup>18</sup>Victor L. Oliver, *Caodai Spiritism: A Study of Religion in Vietnamese Society* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1976), 25.

<sup>19</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrines* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994), 267-271.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 412-415.

God and man and between man and man, who is the source of all blessings (Ephesians 1:3).

Now, believers have a new life and position in Christ, as children of God—the object of God’s love, not His wrath, since the Holy Spirit continually testifies to this adoption of sonship (Romans 8:15). This new life includes “the transfer of dominions,” “incorporation into Christ,” “access to divine power,” “living an ethical life” and “mission.”<sup>21</sup>

Being transferred to a new dominion, the Kingdom of God, believers are now under the rule and reign of Christ—the King who appeared “to destroy the devil’s work” (1 John 3:8) while in the kingdom of the world, Satan has blinded people’s minds (Ephesians 2:2; 2 Corinthians 4:4). Believers must choose which side they belong to. If believers accept Christ’s reign and rule, they have to acknowledge His supremacy in all things, even their lives, and live accordingly. Believers no longer try to manipulate the divine to serve human needs as in their old animistic practices. They are not expected to know everything in the future, but to know Christ, who holds their future and trust His plan for their lives. It is true that sometimes God chooses to reveal to believers a glimpse into the future through the gift of prophecy. His total dealings with the believers’ life not only works through prophecy because all prophecy “reveals only part of the whole picture” (1 Corinthians 13:9). Chasing after prophecy for guidance or looking to a prophet more than focusing on the Bible are signs of divination. Saul’s mistake should be a solemn warning for such practice (1 Samuel 28: 3-25).

Moreover, although believers have access to the power of the Holy Spirit, the new life in Christ calls believers to live a life of righteousness, imitating Christ and remaining in Him since they are held accountable before God for their thoughts/deeds and for what has been entrusted to them. This responsibility in handling spiritual gifts (especially the gift of prophecy) needs to be emphasized in the Vietnamese context in order to build up others and the church as a whole (1 Corinthians 14:12). Spiritual gifts should not be abused: “anything God has placed at man’s disposal is subject to misuse.”<sup>22</sup> The purpose of the Holy Spirit’s power is to both empower Christian service and bring about “internal transformation” in the lives of believers.<sup>23</sup> In other words, the power encounter must be

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<sup>21</sup>Clinton E. Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concepts of Power in Ephesians* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1989), 134-145.

<sup>22</sup>Glenn Foster, *The Purpose and Use of Prophecy: A New Testament Perspective* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1988), 77.

<sup>23</sup>Wonsuk Ma, “Tragedy of Spirit-Empowered Heroes: A Close Look at Samson and Saul,” *Spiritus* 2 (2017), 23, accessed November 03, 2017, <https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1009&context=spiritus>.

followed by encounters of truth and love for Vietnamese believers to give full allegiance to Christ.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, Buddhism, which points to the reality of human suffering, has no clear explanation or solution for it. In order to minimize their suffering, Vietnamese people accumulate good deeds and practice divination to control their future. Believers with a new life in Christ need to have a new perspective on suffering. The Bible explains human suffering and death as consequences of sin and lack of “the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). The work of Christ does not eliminate suffering from human life in this age; this will happen in Christ’s second coming. Rather, the work of Christ has given suffering a new meaning and purpose: “if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” and “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:17, 28). Vietnamese believers need not to be afraid of suffering but look at it as an opportunity to identify with Christ and live a triumphant life. As Paul says:

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.<sup>25</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the Great Commission calls for Christ’s witnesses at the worldview level, not just at the behavioral level. A Vietnamese may attend church regularly, praying and reading the Bible every day and yet consult diviners at the New Year festival. A true conversion must take place at the three levels of culture: “behavior and rituals, beliefs, and worldview.”<sup>26</sup> Pentecostal ministers must aim at bringing people back to the embrace of Jesus, witnessing their transformation by the Spirit and the Word at the worldview level.

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<sup>24</sup>Dave Johnson, *Theology in Context: A Case Study in the Philippines* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 176.

<sup>25</sup>Romans 8:31-32, 37-39.

<sup>26</sup>Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2009), 315.

Vietnam is an animistic culture, where Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism are being practiced on the foundation of animistic beliefs. In order for Pentecostalism to win over the heart and mind of the Vietnamese, instead of being another “vener” coming to terms with animistic thinking,<sup>27</sup> the discipleship process should be designed in ways that deal with worldview issues. In particular, while encouraging believers to desire and practice the gift of prophecy (and other spiritual gifts), Pentecostal ministers should give room for error and address misuses and abuses in a manner that does not deter people to practice.

This means that given their animistic background, new Vietnamese believers may be open and eager to practice spiritual gifts, but they may manipulate them rather than use them for the edification and exhortation of the church. This highlights the importance of new converts experiencing an encounter of God’s truth and love after a power encounter. Only when people are transformed at the worldview level do they give their full allegiance to God and, in turn, become the transforming agents in their communities and beyond for the implementation of the Great Commission.

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<sup>27</sup>Huu Ngoc, *Wandering through Vietnamese Culture* (Ha Noi: The Gioi Publishers, 2006), 948.



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## **Baptism in the Holy Spirit vs Spirit Possession in the Lowland Philippines: Some Considerations for Discipleship<sup>1</sup>**

by Dave Johnson

### **Introduction**

If I ask the Lord to baptize me in the Holy Spirit, is it possible that a demon might possess me instead?" This is the question I have heard asked on more than one occasion by Filipinos seeking the Spirit's infilling, highlighting the need for a careful analysis of the Philippine animism as it relates to biblical teaching on the baptism in the Holy Spirit. But what is the Filipino worldview that drives this and other related questions and what are the implications of this worldview for discipleship and teaching regarding Spirit baptism?

Numerous writers have indicated that the Pentecostal/ Charismatic sector of the Body of Christ is the fastest growing, with researchers like Peter Wagner attributing at least some of the growth to the fact that Pentecostalism, with its emphasis on power encounter, is the part of Christianity that best deals with the animistic worldviews that are prevalent throughout the Majority World.<sup>2</sup> This fact further underscores the need for clear biblical teaching that addresses these worldview issues within the cultural framework of animists.

This article will focus on how Filipinos understand the baptism in the Holy Spirit within their cultural framework. It will also include an attempt to contextualize biblical teaching regarding Holy Spirit baptism. To do this, I will attempt to fulfill two components so necessary for contextualization: faithfulness to the biblical text and an accurate

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<sup>1</sup>This article was originally published in *A Theology of the Spirit in Doctrine and Demonstration: Essays in Honor of Wonsuk and Julie Ma*, (Baguio City, Philippines: APTS Press, 2014), and is reprinted with permission.

<sup>2</sup>C. Peter Wagner, "A Church Growth Perspective on Pentecostal Missions," in *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective* ed. Murray A. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus and Douglas Petersen, 265-284, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 271-272.

exegesis of Filipino culture. Dean Gilliland writes that “contextualization declares that truth, however absolute, cannot be abstracted from the particularity of the context.”<sup>3</sup> The understanding here is that the message of the gospel, including Spirit baptism, must be relevant and understandable within the cultural framework of the receptor because, regardless of how the message is communicated, the receptors will interpret it according to their worldview. If the Gospel message is not conceptualized within that framework, the distortion of the message and the resultant syncretism and heresy are virtually guaranteed.

### **Research Questions**

This study will attempt to answer two simple questions. First, when Filipinos from an animistic background hear about the Spirit baptism, how do they understand it within their worldview? Second, what does the Bible say about the baptism of the Holy Spirit that answers the concerns of Filipinos?

### **Scope and Limitations**

Virtually all writers in the field agree that the similarities between the lowland cultures of the Philippines greatly outweigh the dissimilarities, mainly due to nearly 450 years of Roman Catholicism that has deeply impacted the lowlands. Also, the author’s nearly twenty years of missionary experience in the lowlands confirms that although this field research is limited to the Waray people of Leyte and Samar, this essay is relevant throughout the lowlands.

Much research is available on the Filipino’s view of the spirit world and the activities of the spirit beings that occupy it. Likewise, the literature available on a Pentecostal understanding of the Holy Spirit is numerous. This essay will focus primarily on issues related to Holy Spirit Baptism, which is defined here as subsequent to salvation and is evidenced by speaking in unknown tongues and with the purpose of empowering the believer to live a sanctified life and be an effective witness for Christ.

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<sup>3</sup>Dean Gilliland, ed., *The Word Among Us: Contextualizing Theology for Mission Today*. (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1988), 59.

## **The Filipino Religious Worldview in Relation to Spirit Baptism<sup>4</sup>**

A brief survey of the Filipino religious worldview brings into focus how Filipinos may view Holy Spirit baptism. While most Filipinos are Roman Catholic, the Filipino worldview is heavily animistic, leading one scholar to describe it as “split-level Christianity.”<sup>5</sup> For Melba Maggay, a Filipino social anthropologist, this syncretized Catholicism is mainly a “transaction of powers, between the various spirit beings and humans.”<sup>6</sup> Like animism the world over, Filipinos view gaining, using, channeling and maintaining supernatural power as the primary reason for participation in animistic practices.

### **The Three-Tier Occupants of the Spirit World**

A brief worldview sketch is in order here to give some backdrop to the problems Filipinos may face when they try to understand Spirit baptism biblically. Using Paul Hiebert’s organic, three-tier analogy,<sup>7</sup> Filipinos perceive God alone as at the top, but he is often seen as unapproachable, at least in a direct way. The middle tier is comprised of the Virgin Mary and the Catholic saints who are perceived as much closer to people, attentive to their needs and prayers and interceding before God on their behalf. Virtually every town in the lowlands has an annual fiesta with special masses said in honor of the saints. These fiestas are often accompanied by a religious procession where images of saints are carried in the backs of open vehicles such as pickup trucks and carts. In January, 2014, for example, the annual fiesta and procession of the image of the Black Nazarene in Quiapo drew an estimated crowd of twelve million, according to at least one newscaster. Many surged around the image trying to touch it in belief that it would bring healing or other kinds of blessings. By comparison, the estimated crowd at the World Youth Day in the same area of Manila featuring Pope John Paul II in 1995 drew an estimated international crowd of only four million. This example serves to confirm that the appeal of animism remains strong even after 450 years of Catholicism and must be reckoned with in

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<sup>4</sup>Because of the similarities of the lowland cultures’ worldview, they will be referred to as a singular whole as a simple writing convention.

<sup>5</sup>Jaime Bulatao, S.J., *Split-Level Christianity* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila Press, 1956), n.p.

<sup>6</sup>Melba Maggay, 1999, “Towards Sensitive Engagement with Filipino Indigenous Consciousness.” *International Review of Missions* 87 (346): 362.

<sup>7</sup>Paul Hiebert, “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 4th ed. 407-414, (William Carey Library: Pasadena, CA, 2009), 410.

matters of discipleship of believers regarding the Holy Spirit and the spirits.

Besides Mary and the saints, this second tier is also occupied by an army of spirits, including ancestors, whose names and classifications vary from region to region. Some are regarded as always good and others are always perceived to be evil. The vast majority, however, are perceived as amoral and capricious and can be manipulated through sacrifices, incantations and rituals to do either good or evil, depending on the mood of the spirit or the desire of human trying to engage the spirit's attention. *For our study, the most significant issue regarding this second tier is that the Waray people among whom I conducted field research placed the Holy Spirit in this category.*<sup>8</sup> Hiebert's bottom or third tier is occupied by humans, animals and plants.

While these categories can be neatly drawn for descriptive purposes for outsiders, the lines are almost purely academic and are often blurred or non-existent in the minds of the local people. Therefore, one must be careful in drawing the lines too sharply. However, the fact that the Holy Spirit may not be considered to be in the same category as God may be significant to many Filipinos.

#### Spiritual Practitioners and their Spiritual Power

Some understanding of Filipino spiritual practitioners may shed light on how Filipinos might view ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit. There are a multitude of classifications and subclassifications of spirit world practitioners that range from fortunetellers to faith healers and everything in between, most of whom fall outside of the parameters of this study. Yet the primary purpose of all of them is to maintain contact with the spirit world and try to manipulate the spirits through sacrifices, incantations and other rituals to benefit mankind.

One of the ways spiritual practitioners channel spiritual power is through spirit possession, suggesting that when someone speaks of the baptism of the Holy Spirit as an enduement of power, Filipinos easily associate power with spirit possession. In Philippine animistic practice, the first purpose of spirit possession is to bring healing; the second is for the purpose of trans channeling messages from the spirit world and is often associated with divination. A third instance of spirit possession is also common—when people become spirit possessed without intending to do so.

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<sup>8</sup>Dave Johnson, *A Study of the Animistic Practices of the Waray People of the Leyte-Samar Region of the Philippines*. (M.A. thesis, Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, 2000), 27.

### *Intentional Spirit Possession*

In doing the field work for my master's thesis, several spiritists spoke of going into an altered state of consciousness (ASC) where they would become spirit possessed in order to heal their patients.<sup>9</sup> My assistants and I were able to observe this phenomenon on two separate occasions. One of the spiritists was a medium, who was using a Bible to trans channel messages from the spirit world in a healing meeting and the other was known as a psychic healer. Psychic healers are a sub classification of spiritists that are able to place their hands inside the body of the patient and perform "surgery" without the aid of any medical instrument, but that can only be done in an ASC. Jaime Bulatao reflects the non-dualistic Filipino worldview when he suggests that the ability to go into a trance is a divine gift, allowing the person to step into the spirit world, which really isn't separated from the natural one.<sup>10</sup> Leonardo Mercado adds that after the medium returns to a normal state of consciousness, he or she cannot remember what they said while they were in the ASC, and my research bore this out.<sup>11</sup>

Several spiritists to whom I spoke during my research claimed that a spirit takes possession of them in order to heal people. When the healing session is done, the spirit leaves. All of this raises critical issues related to a theology of the Holy Spirit in the Philippine context. Where these spirits come from and who they work for are questions seldom asked by the Waray, but are critical in light of Scripture.

### *Unintentional Spirit Possession*

As mentioned earlier, spirit possession is not only pursued with purpose, but it also may be unintentional. When asked if people could be controlled by an evil spirit, 79.9 percent (369 out of 462 respondents) of the ordinary Waray people responded affirmatively and 85.4 percent (420 out of 492 respondents) of the AG sample population agreed with them.<sup>12</sup> The difference between the two groups here was not significant, ( $\chi^2=3.09 < F_{crit}. 3.84$ ). What is clear in the responses here is that the belief that demons can possess people is widespread among ordinary

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<sup>9</sup>Johnson, 2000, 88.

<sup>10</sup>Jaime Bulatao, *Phenomena and Their Interpretation: Land Mark Essays, 1597-1989*, (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1992), 67.

<sup>11</sup>Leonardo Mercado, *Inculturation and Theology*. Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1992, 110.

<sup>12</sup>Dave Johnson, *An Analysis of the Worldview and Religious Beliefs of the Waray People of the Philippine and the Factors Leading to the Growth of the Assemblies of God in the Region With Implications For the Development of a Contextual Theology for the Waray*, D.Miss Dissertation, Asian Graduate School of Theology, 2004, 180.

people and believers alike. However, when interviewed about the Waray's opinion of evil spirits, 88.1 percent of the general population and 98.6 percent of the AG said it was bad.<sup>13</sup> When asked why this was so, over 98 percent of the respondents said it was because it gave control of one's body and mind to demons and because it would involve losing one's consciousness and not knowing what was going on while the spirit was in control.<sup>14</sup> Many respondents said that the demon possessed walk and talk differently, describing such things as removing their clothes, talking incoherently with bad words, becoming stronger than normal, mental derangement, loss of consciousness, and going crazy. I personally witnessed this kind of behavior once when a lady at an evangelistic rally we were conducting came up to me, started tugging on my shirt and continually repeating John 14:6 in flawless English. I sensed that there was demonic activity going on, but felt I should wait until later in the evening to deal with it. Later a pastor and I went to her house, but were not allowed inside because she was ranting and raving—which we could clearly hear from outside. We were told that she owed someone a considerable amount of money and when she was unable to pay, the person went to a sorcerer and had a curse put on her. We prayed for her deliverance, but could do nothing more. The next morning the pastor went back to visit and was told that she was delivered from the demon, but had left town.

Fear then, of evil spirits, is widespread and, given the Philippine worldview, understandable. Many Filipinos respond to this fear by wearing an amulet which, in many cases, is seen as more effective if blessed by the local Catholic priest. Others go to the priest or pastor for special prayer, believing that the one who claims to represent God has greater spiritual power than ordinary laymen.<sup>15</sup>

#### How Filipinos View the Holy Spirit and Spirit Baptism

In my master's thesis research, I discovered that the Waray spiritual practitioners regarded the Holy Spirit as one of a number of spirits (in the second tier) that could be used for healing and did not regard him as the Spirit of God who is *sui generis*, wholly other.<sup>16</sup> In my doctoral research I asked members or adherents (known as sympathizers in the Philippines) what they knew about the Holy Spirit before they came to Christ and what they know now.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 181.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 182.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 177.

<sup>16</sup>Johnson, 2000, 27.



**TABLE 1<sup>17</sup>**  
**BELIEFS ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT**

	Before Christ (477 Resp.)		After Christ (478 Resp.)	
	YES	NO	YES	NO
1. I knew little or nothing about the Holy Spirit.	397 (83.2%)	80 (16.8%)	124 (25.9%)	354 (74.1%)
2. That the Holy Spirit is just like the other spirits in that he can heal people through the spiritist.	203 (42.9%)	270 (52.1%)	57 (11.9%)	421 (88.1%)
3. That the Holy Spirit is God.	359 (75.7%)	115 (24.3%)	463 (97.5%)	12 (2.5%)
4. That the Holy Spirit possesses all who trust in God and abides with them forever.	290 (60.8%)	187 (39.2%)	461 (96.6%)	16 (3.4%)
5. That every believer can be baptized in the Holy Spirit and speak in unknown tongues.	133 (27.9%)	344 (72.1%)	438 (91.6%)	40 (8.4%)

Chi-square analysis reveals differences are significant here on questions one through five ( $\chi^2=336.16, p <.001$ ), ( $\chi^2=115.04, p <.001$ ), ( $\chi^2=96.8, p <.001$ ), ( $\chi^2=182.98, p <.001$ ), and ( $\chi^2=403.57, p <.001$ ), respectively. The results are hardly surprising and, again, give evidence of a real paradigm shift in the thinking of the AG people since they became followers of Jesus Christ. How and why this happened will be noted later. It can be noted here that 24.3 percent of non-Christians do not believe that the Holy Spirit is God, but only 2.5 percent of Christians believe the same.

Most of the respondents indicated that they knew little or nothing about the Holy Spirit before coming to Christ and what they did know does not appear to follow any pattern of consistency. The one statistic that is a bit surprising is that so many said that they knew that people could be filled with the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues *before* the respondents themselves became believers. This percentage is higher than in the first question where they indicated that they were not familiar with

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<sup>17</sup>Johnson, 2004, 207.

the person and work of the Holy Spirit before they became believers. How can this be? One explanation may be that witchdoctors and other spiritual practitioners use *orasyons*, prayers that are believed to be in Latin. Maggay holds that this practice may have stemmed from the time when the mass was said in that language and, therefore, unintelligible to the hearer.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps some may confuse this with speaking in other tongues. A second explanation is that these respondents may have had friends and relatives who preceded them into the Assemblies of God who may have related their experience with the Holy Spirit to them.

### **Biblical Teaching on the Holy Spirit, Spirit Baptism and Spirit Possession**

Having looked at several key elements of the Filipino Religious Worldview, one of the critical questions to consider is what enters the mind of the Filipinos when they are taught that the Holy Spirit will come upon them (Ac. 1:8)? When the Holy Spirit comes, does He leave again just like the other spirits? If not, in what ways is he different? A true contextual theology of Spirit baptism will answer these questions and challenge the gospel messengers themselves to live lives “full of the Holy Ghost and of power.” With a basic understanding of cultural issues in mind, these issues can now be looked at in biblical perspective.

#### **What Happens When the Holy Spirit Comes on People?: The OT Prophets and the Day of Pentecost**

Understanding the similarities and differences between Filipino spiritual practitioners and biblical prophets is important to informing any contextualized theology of the Spirit in doctrine for the Philippines. Any number of approaches to understanding the Spirit’s work might be undertaken, however, the focus here will be on how the Spirit of God moved upon people and how they reacted. This will enable us to compare what the Bible teaches about this activity of the Holy Spirit and how it might be perceived by ordinary Filipinos. Even here, however, space constraints do not allow an exhaustive treatment of the subject.

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<sup>18</sup>Melba Maggay, *A Clash of Cultures: Early American Protestant Missions and Filipino*, (Anvil Publishing, 2011), *n.p.*

### *The OT Prophets*

While the instances of the Spirit of God moving on people in the OT are more sporadic than in the NT, they are instructive here. One similarity between Philippine spiritual practitioners and the OT prophets was the apparent impermanence of the Spirit. The Spirit of the Lord would come upon the OT prophets for a purpose and depart when his work was done.

But some drastic differences contrast with this similarity. First, the prophets never lost consciousness, although there may have been cases (i.e. Saul in I Sam. 10:9-11) where they temporarily lost control of the mental faculties. Also, as Roger Stronstad notes, the activity of the Spirit in the OT was mainly prophetic in nature,<sup>19</sup> whereas demonic spirits possess Filipino spiritual practitioners mainly for healing and divination.

More importantly, there was a substantial difference in the Holy Spirit's purpose through the prophets, as opposed to the spirits' purpose through the spiritists. The activities of the spiritists are always anthropocentric, with the devil's motive being to deceive people. On the other hand, the activities of the biblical prophets were always theocentric—focused on God and his purposes, which are diametrically opposed to that of the spiritists and the demons that possess them.

### *The Day Of Pentecost*

Roger Stronstad draws a direct connection between the activity of the Holy Spirit in the OT and Intertestamental period to Lukan pneumatology:

In general terms, Old Testament and Jewish Hellenistic historiography furnished Luke with the model for writing his two-volume history of the origin and spread of Christianity. Moreover, the Charismatic motifs of the Hebrew and Greek Bibles, such as the transfer, sign, and vocational motifs, influence Luke's theology of the Holy Spirit. In addition to the influence of these Charismatic motifs, the Septuagint furnishes Luke with the terminology to describe the activity of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Jesus and His disciples. Finally, Luke-Acts contrasts with the intertestamental belief in the cessation prophetic inspiration; rather, it reports the restoration of prophetic activity after four centuries of silence.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984), 14.

<sup>20</sup>Stronstad, 31-32.

Here, I will examine Lukan pneumatology in general and the Day of Pentecost in specific. Two respected Pentecostal scholars, Roger Stronstad and Robert Menzies, have done some excellent work in this area. For Stronstad, the Holy Spirit is the Charismatic Spirit that endows believers with gifts, specifically the vocal gifts of prophecy and *glossolalia*, or speaking in tongues, for speaking in God's name and for his glory.<sup>21</sup> Menzies essentially agrees, rooting Lukan pneumatology in Joel's prophecy of a great outpouring of the Spirit in the last days. In doing so he makes a compelling argument that speaking in tongues is the initial, physical evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and should be normative to every believer.<sup>22</sup>

Lukan pneumatology, for Menzies, is also clear in texts such as Luke 11:11-13.<sup>23</sup> I certainly agree with Menzies, but take a slightly different tack when it comes to this particular passage. What is critical to note here is the underlying assumption of God's omnipotence and providence. This promise to receive exactly what is requested is good news to people coming out of an animistic background, who fear that if they ask God for the Holy Spirit they may instead become demon possessed.

Most Pentecostals believe that the baptism of the Holy Spirit empowers the believer to be Christ's witness. Menzies presents a compelling argument that this empowerment is a key reason for the explosive growth of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement around the world, much of which is taking place among people whose worldviews are heavily animistic. In comparing this to the situation in the Philippines, most Filipinos easily understand the connection between spirit possession and spiritual power. What is not always obvious to them, mainly because they seldom question it, is the source of that spiritual power. This is where Pentecostals rightly part company with animistic spiritual practitioners.

Since the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 provides the most complete story in the NT of the outpouring of the Spirit we will look at it here through the lens of Filipino culture to see parallels and contrasts with the Filipino view of spirit possession. First, the Holy Spirit came upon the believers *en masse*, an experience that was also repeated in Acts 10:44-47 and 19:1-6. I am not arguing that this group experience should be normative, although it is common in Pentecostal circles. By contrast, I simply note that in the animistic practices of which I am aware, only one person at a time becomes possessed.

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<sup>21</sup>Stronstad, 24.

<sup>22</sup>Robert Menzies, *Pentecost: This is Our Story*, (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2013), 35.

<sup>23</sup>Menzies, 91-96.

Second, when the Holy Spirit came on believers they never lost consciousness, whereas animistic practitioners do lose consciousness. While it cannot be said that the believers on the day of Pentecost necessarily understood all that was going on inside of them, they were well aware of their surroundings and knew they were experiencing the arrival of the Holy Spirit as both Joel and Jesus had prophesied (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 1:4-8). They were also well aware of the impact their experience was having on unbelievers outside their door (2:7-14). Furthermore, it is assumed that Luke was writing this somewhere around AD 60-64 and that his information likely came from some of the apostles themselves. Their ability to recall the event in vivid detail thirty years after the fact attests to their clear awareness of what happened that day, although it is possible that Luke may have also had access to those who merely witnessed the disciples speaking in tongues but did not necessarily participate. Nevertheless, the clear awareness of Peter immediately after being baptized in the Spirit, as well as the way Luke writes about the Day of Pentecost sharply contrasts with the experience of Filipino spiritual practitioners. All of my interviews in this regard and all the literature I have reviewed are in agreement that the practitioners *always* go into an altered state of consciousness and do not personally recall what happened while they were spirit possessed. Furthermore, there is nothing in the Acts 2 account that suggests any of the disciples lost consciousness.

Third, not only were the believers mentally cognizant of their surroundings, Acts 2:4 suggests that they remained in control of their physical faculties, moving their own mouths in speaking as the Spirit gave the utterance. While one must be careful to press this too far as some believers, myself included, have testified to losing control of their mouths when baptized in the Spirit, this is in contradistinction to the spiritists who always surrender control of their entire bodies to the spirits to perform healing or deliver oracles through them.

Fourth and most important is the issue of speaking in tongues. When doing my doctoral research, I was surprised to discover that nearly twenty-six AG respondents said they understood that the infilling of the Spirit involved speaking in tongues *before* they became Christians. Unfortunately, the research questionnaire was not designed to ask why this was. I have long pondered how this could be and have come up with two possibilities. One, it's possible, maybe even probable that a family member or friend preceded them into the Pentecostal movement, was baptized in the Holy Spirit and testified about their experience to family members and friends. But another possibility cannot be ignored. Filipino spiritual practitioners across the spectrum use mantras known as *orasyons*, drawn from the Spanish word for prayer, in innumerable

situations. These may be written or spoken and are also known as “Latin prayers.” While I have made no effort to establish their etymology, Melba Maggay, as mentioned earlier, may be correct when she speculates that these unintelligible “prayers” may have come from the time when the Catholic mass was said in Latin.

The function and the use of *orasyons* must be critically assessed here as they function as incantations and are an integral part of numerous animistic rituals. Filipinos believe that if these incantations are said with precise accuracy, the ritual will successfully give the devotee whatever they want or need. The meaning of the actual words is irrelevant because the words themselves are believed to have magical power. If the incantation fails to bring the desired result, it is believed that it was not done correctly.

Setting aside the discussion of *glossolalia* and *xenolalia*, under which these “Latin” prayers might be anthropologically classified, the idea of speaking in an unknown tongue being connected to supernatural power is not difficult for Filipinos to grasp. I must hasten to add, however, that using *orasyons* does normally not require spirit possession and that *orasyons* can be written as well as spoken. The critical difference between the baptism in the Holy Spirit is in the location of the spiritual power and in its purpose or function. For an animist the power is in the words themselves but for the follower of Jesus, the power is in a person, the Holy Spirit. For the animist the incantation itself is an impersonal and amoral spiritual force called magic, but for the believer, the source of power is God himself.

Regarding function, the focus of using incantations is to do the will of the individual, be it good or bad. On the other hand, the purpose of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is to empower believers to do the will of God. One can easily see how Filipinos might be confused on this issue. The need to bring clarity regarding the source and purpose of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is abundantly clear and the implications for discipleship are enormous.

### **Key Teachings Related to the Baptism in the Holy Spirit**

The fulfillment of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20 calls for making disciples. While there are many components involved in do this, most of which are well beyond the confines of this essay, teaching a sound theology in both demonstration and doctrine within the Filipino cultural matrix is vital key to helping people follow Christ.

### Power Encounter: Deliverance and the Purpose of Holy Spirit Baptism

One of the research questions focused on the key components that brought people to Christ. Over forty percent of the of the respondents, who were given the opportunity to say yes or no to each category, indicated that they came to Christ because they were delivered from demons.<sup>24</sup> The baptism in the Holy Spirit is essential and desperately needed by people coming from an animistic background. Former animists need power encounters. The first power encounter they need, however, may be deliverance from evil spirits. The New Testament is replete with examples, both in teaching (i.e. Eph. 1:18-21; Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 1:15-19) and in deed (i.e. Matt. 9:32-33; 17:14-21; Mark 5:1-17; Luke 4:33-37; Acts 5:16; 8:5-8; 16:16-18; 19:11-12) regarding the supremacy of Christ over demonic power and this victory needs to be proclaimed both through study of the Word and through demonstration. People that have been involved in animistic practices, especially if they have experienced actual demon possession, need to be set free. Amulets, talismans and other animistic paraphernalia need to be destroyed by the user (Acts 19:18-19).

But the second encounter, Spirit baptism, is needed to draw experience oriented people into an experience with God which alters their life purpose. This Spirit baptism is a power encounter that enables believers to be witnesses for Christ (Acts 1:8), a reality that Luke consistently demonstrates in the book of Acts (see Acts 2:1-41; 8:14-25; 10:44-48; 19:1-7). My own life was revolutionized by the Spirit's empowering, drawing me out of the evangelical church in which I had been raised and into the Pentecostal movement. I have now served as an Assemblies of God minister for more than thirty years, most of them in evangelistic ministry in the Philippines that, through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, has resulted in numerous churches being planted.

#### The Power of the Holy Spirit to Protect Christians from Demons

While former animists need teaching on the power to deliver people from demons and the power and purpose of Spirit baptism, they also need assurance regarding God's protection of Christians against demonic spirits. Questions like "Does God have the power to protect people from demon possession when they are seeking the baptism in the Holy Spirit?" are vitally important. Scriptures like Psalms 91:1-4 and Luke 11:9-13 are

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<sup>24</sup>Johnson, 2004, 211.

incredibly good news and help people deal with their fear of the spirit world. Doctrines like the providence of God and the supremacy of Christ over the powers of darkness (i.e. Col. 2:14-15) are critical to bringing people out of the bondage of animism and into God's glorious light. Even teaching on the Trinity can be helpful, an explanation of the fact that the Holy Spirit is on the same level (Hiebert's first tier) as the Father and the Son, far exceeding power level of the spirits.

#### The Differences Between the Baptism in the Holy Spirit and Demonic Power

Disciples of Christ must be made aware of the critical differences between the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the power used by spiritists for healing and fortunetelling, etc. First, they are different in source. People must be taught about the different sources of supernatural power. Filipinos seldom ask about the spiritists' source of power, but knowing the true power source is critical to understanding the true gospel. The power that possesses the spiritists is from Satan while the power of God is the source of the Holy Spirit baptism.

Second, as mentioned earlier, Spirit baptism and demonic power are diametrically different in purpose. Animists seek spiritual power for anthropocentric reasons such as healing, cursing enemies and especially, through fortunetelling and divination, to control their future. Satan's motives are to draw people away from God through deception. But the purpose of the Holy Spirit is to empower believers to be his witnesses, to walk under the anointing of the Spirit in preaching the gospel, healing the sick, casting out demons, setting the captive free and declaring the arrival of the Kingdom (Matt 10:5, 8; Lk 4:16-18; Ac 1:8). In short, the Spirit empowers us to see men and women drawn to Jesus Christ, the Author and Finisher of our faith. A study of Spirit baptism and the resulting missionary work through Spirit empowered disciples in the book of Acts may help believers to clearly see the passion of God for the lost and the plan and purpose of God for churches and individuals.

Third, the experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the power of the demonic are different. In Filipino animism, only specialists have access to demonic power for healing, divination, etc. But Joel 2:28-29 is clear that the power of the Holy Spirit is available to *every* believer. Bob Menzies brilliantly connects Joel's motif here to Lukan pneumatology, citing passages such as Acts 2:1-4, 16-18, and 2:38-39, making clear that this outpouring is for every believer in every generation.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Menzies, 77-80.



Another difference in experience relates to falling down or “falling under the power.” For years I wondered why some pastors in the Philippines believe that the evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is being slain in the Spirit. Only recently has it dawned on me that this falling to the floor is what often happens when spiritual practitioners become demon possessed. Apparently these pastors assume that the physical reaction is the same when people become filled with the Holy Spirit. While I have heard accounts of people being slain in Spirit and speaking in tongues at the same time, people need to be taught that being slain in the Spirit is not necessary for and not the same thing as receiving Holy Spirit baptism.

Fourth, another critical difference between Spirit baptism and demonic power is the dynamic of love. Romans 5:5 says, “. . . God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” The Apostle Paul exhorts believers to be encouraged by the comfort of God’s love, the fellowship of the Spirit and the Lord’s tenderness and compassion in order to love one another and be one in spirit and purpose (Phil. 2:1-2). Jesus taught the great commandments—to love God and others (i.e. Lk 10:27 et al).

One day I asked a spiritist if he loved God. He responded by saying that he loved the people in his community that came to him for healing. After affirming his feelings for the people, I restated my question. He had no answer. Indeed. Not only was he missing the love of God, there is also no love between the spiritists and the spirits that empower them. The relationship is purely utilitarian. Once the spirit has completed his work, it leaves the spiritist. The Spirit of God, however, not only pours the love of God in our hearts, he also abides with the believer forever (Jn 14:16). In other words, the Holy Spirit is *sui generis*, wholly other than the demons that possess the spiritists.

The horizontal love relationships with other believers is just as critical, in part because most animists come from group focused cultures. The fellowship of the Spirit, as mentioned above, encourages a loving unity among believers. When they come to Christ, the animists’ social group of family and friends may turn against them. Incorporating them into the Body of Christ, where they can be nurtured, cared for and be held accountable, is essential to their walk with God.

The final difference between the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the power encounters animists have with the spirits is the issue of allegiance. The allegiance of the spiritist is to his or her possessing spirit. The allegiance of the ordinary people is to the spiritists or spirit that gives them what they want. But the work of the Holy Spirit in general, and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit in particular, points to an allegiance to Jesus Christ whether or not the Lord gives us what we want. This, more than

anything else that has been written here, is where Spirit filled believers part company with animistic spiritual practitioners. The Holy Spirit leads the believer into allegiance to Christ and no other. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is abundantly clear that our allegiance to Christ must be absolute. God will tolerate no rivals (i.e. Ex. 20:1-6; Isaiah 45:22, et al), although one must not expect new believers to grasp this immediately as this will likely take some time. People from animistic backgrounds must make a clean break from the past at some point, destroying all animistic paraphernalia and trusting Christ to meet their needs.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper has been to demonstrate a theology of Holy Spirit baptism in doctrine as it relates the Philippine animistic context. Looking through the portal of Filipino culture, the concept of spiritual power is well known as is the concept of giving utterances while in contact with the spirit realm. The purposes, however, are vastly different and these differences must be clearly understood in light of God's word.

Teaching regarding deliverance, and the differences regarding sources of power, purpose, experience, love dynamics and allegiance are only some of the many issues that must be dealt with in training believers regarding Holy Spirit baptism. The concepts articulated here call for experiencing the power of God in one's life as well as encountering the truth through diligent study of God's word in the company of other believers with the ultimate goal of giving one's allegiance to Christ alone.

## The Chinese Concept of *Tian* (Heaven): Part 1

by Yao Jiugang (Stephen)

### Introduction

In the 1990s, a Chinese young man, an undergraduate, indulged in sex during his final year of college. One night, after sinning again, he felt such guilt that he knelt down on the ground in a corner and called upon *Tian* 天 (Heaven)<sup>1</sup> in desperation: “Oh, *Tian*! If I sin one more time, strike me by a lightning!” Then, he stood up and went back to the study room. For the first time, his Christian roommate started to share the gospel with him, and he became a Christian.

In Romans 1:16, the Apostle Paul declares that the gospel is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jews first and also to the Greek” (NASB). From then on, salvation has been coming upon other Gentiles, including this Chinese college student. Thus, it is clear that his salvation resulted from the power of the gospel, not from the concept of *Tian* in his heart, although he got saved right after he had cried out to *Tian*. Nevertheless, the affinity of his salvation and his calling upon *Tian* may still make one wonder—What is the Chinese concept of *Tian*? And did that contribute in any way to this young man’s salvation?

These two questions are in relation to the Chinese concept of *Tian*. An understanding of general revelation is of great significance in understanding the exact meaning and function of *Tian*. General revelation indicates that God, as an absolute existence seemingly far distanced from humanity, is actually accessible to each person (cf. Acts 17:27). In addition, general revelation usually provides essential elements for special revelation to operate. For instance, Paul used the concept of “an unknown god” to introduce the knowable God and Jesus’ resurrection to the Athenians (cf. Acts 17:23-31). Likewise, the concept of *Tian* functioned in helping this Chinese young man realize and admit

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<sup>1</sup>All terms are in Mandarin (Chinese Pinyin), not the transliteration by foreigners or the Cantonese.

his sinfulness.<sup>2</sup> It provided an opportunity for the gospel, especially the message about the cleansing of sins by Jesus' blood, to touch and grab his heart. Thus, this paper will first explore the relationship between *Tian* and God based on general revelation and then will present the different views of *Tian*.

There are mainly three views of the Chinese concept of *Tian*. First, some people take *Tian* simply as a god in Chinese religions who is superior, equal, or inferior to other gods. Those who hold this view usually pay no attention to God's general revelation. Second, some identify *Tian* as the indifferent Creator who has no interest in caring about His creation, including humanity. Those who hold this view recognize God's general revelation but see no accessibility to Him through His general revelation. The "indifferent God" concept is popular among animists. Although China is under a communist government, animism is still prevalent. Hence, while interacting with the second view of *Tian*, this paper will focus on Gailyn Van Rheenen's description of how animists view God.<sup>3</sup> Third, many claim *Tian* as the Judeo-Christian God who is eager to reconcile the whole world to Himself. Those who hold this view emphasize God's approachability and accessibility through general revelation.

All three of these views of *Tian* have their advocates. This paper aims to examine the evidences for each one, then to argue that *Tian* is the *Yahweh* revealed by the Bible, who desires to have intimate relationship with all Chinese throughout Chinese history. Before presenting these three views, the issue of *Tian*'s relationship with God through the lens of God's general revelation, especially in human history, must be addressed first.

### The Relationship Between *Tian* and God

Human history is like a code that contains God's mysteries for people to uncover. Although human beings are finite, it is not impossible for them to discover certain mysteries of an infinite God, because He enjoys helping them to find out things about Him—e.g., His eternal existence, His divine attributes, His elaborate plans. What God desires is that people will not come to just know things about Him but will eventually have an intimate relationship with Him.

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<sup>2</sup>It is difficult for Chinese people to realize and admit their sinfulness, for the Chinese culture seldom differentiates between the concepts of sin and crime. Thus, when called a sinner, Chinese people are often offended because they do not see the difference between sinner and criminal. One needs to pay much attention to this when sharing the gospel with a Chinese person.

<sup>3</sup>Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1991), 243.

People should not have difficulty in approaching God, for He is active in guiding them to find Him. In Acts 17:26-27, the Apostle Paul testifies how God takes the initiative to make Himself known to all humanity. There Paul tells us that God is not only approachable but accessible, which also applies to *Tian* (to be discussed in the following section).

### The Accessibility of God

While waiting for Silas and Timothy in Athens, Paul started preaching to the Athenians about the Creator God (cf. Acts 17:22-31). As to God's existence, Paul declared that God exists beyond the created universe as the Lord of heaven and earth who does not dwell in any place designed or constructed by humans (cf. v. 24). As to God's plans, Paul announced the final judgment through Christ (cf. v. 31). He also talked about several of God's attributes, such as His providence (v. 25), His mercy (v. 30), and His accessibility (vv. 26-27).

In Acts 17:26-27, Paul told the Athenians how God is accessible, saying, "And He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us" (NASB). Thus, one may conclude from this that people from each nation, at appointed times in their history, could seek and find God, for He never conceals Himself.

But how is it that God is not far from people? How does He reveal Himself to people? By what means could they seek and find Him? Unfortunately, Paul did not tell the Athenians how God is approachable and accessible. He did not provide any further explanation but simply directed his preaching to the main theme—the resurrection of Christ. It seems that the Athenians had no problem understanding Paul's points until it came to the concept of resurrection. Then, one may wonder, how did they understand the concepts about the Creator God that Paul introduced?

Don Richardson asks the same question in another way: "But where could Paul—born a Jew, reborn a Christian—find an eye-opener for the truth about the supreme God in idol-infested Athens?"<sup>4</sup> Richardson realized that the eye-opener Paul found and used was Epimenides—a famous Cretan prophet, whom Christians should be familiar with, for Paul had quoted his saying in Titus 1:12.<sup>5</sup> Epimenides was also the one

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<sup>4</sup>Don Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, rev. ed. (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984), 20.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 21-23.

who left behind altars with the inscription “To an Unknown God” for the Athenians who had suffered a serious plague caused by this unknown god.<sup>6</sup> Fortunately, one of those altars just happened to be preserved until Paul visited Athens.<sup>7</sup> Thus, he was able to begin his sermon from the concept of the unknown god.

Richardson also identifies Epimenides’ unknown God as a deity, but not a deity who has no name and is pleased when people admit their ignorance.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, to know the true God, people have to forsake their own wisdom (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-25). The Stoic and Epicurean philosophers with whom Paul debated certainly were familiar with Plato, Aristotle, and Epimenides and their works. Evidences also show that both Plato and Aristotle had acknowledged Epimenides.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the Athenians to whom Paul spoke were probably also aware of the story about Epimenides and his concept of the Unknown God, not of an unknown god.

However, although agreeing with the existence of such an altar with the inscription “To an Unknown God,” I. Howard Marshall does not seem to believe there’s a real connection between “an unknown god” and the true God.<sup>10</sup> He comments, “Paul hardly meant that his audience were unconscious worshippers of the true God. Rather, he is drawing their attention to the true God who was ultimately responsible for the phenomena which they attributed to an unknown god.”<sup>11</sup>

There are at least three flaws in Marshall’s comment. First, he supposes that the Athenians had to be worshipers of the true God if they believed in the existence of an unknown God. Many people believe there is a God but never worship Him. Second, Marshall does not explain what the Athenians attributed to an unknown god and why. On the contrary, after reading Richardson’s logical argument, one understands the Athenian’s what and why attributions. Epimenides is the key that relates the Athenians, Paul, and Plato/Aristotle to the unknown God. Third, Marshall introduces a mission strategy Paul used to reach the Athenians, that being the concept that God is ultimately responsible for all phenomena in the world. However, the ancient Greeks never thought that the Ultimate Spiritual Being was responsible for things in the material world. Had Paul spoken of God’s responsibility for creation, they would have scoffed at him, which is why some mocked him when he spoke of

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 9-15.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>10</sup>I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary* The Tyndale New International Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 286.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

the resurrection (cf. Acts 17:32). For Paul, to bring out the truth of resurrection was a must, but to raise the issue of God's ultimate responsibility for creation was unnecessary.

Therefore, a real connection between an unknown god and the true God is of tremendous importance if one agrees with Richardson's theory that Epimenides was the eye-opener for the truth about a Creator God revealed to the Athenians. That being so, Richardson is able to declare with confidence, "By Paul's reasoning, *Yahweh*, the Judeo-Christian God, was anticipated by Epimenides' altar. He was therefore a God who had already intervened in the history of Athens."<sup>12</sup> God's intervention in human history is what Richardson calls "the Melchizedek factor"—God's general revelation.<sup>13</sup>

### God's General Revelation

Millard J. Erickson defines general revelation as "God's communication of himself to all persons at all times and in all places."<sup>14</sup> And He is always eager to do so. For instance, Richardson verifies that Paul has adopted *Theos*, which Xenophanes, Plato, and Aristotle used to denote as the Supreme God in their writings, and as the Judeo-Christian God in his own writings.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps all Cretans during Epimenides' time knew the existence of this unknown God. Richardson has insightfully illustrated how the Athenians were familiar with the concept of the unknown God inscribed on the altar through God's general revelation; and as did Epimenides, Xenophanes, Plato, and Aristotle.

Erickson points out three traditional loci of general revelation through which people may seek and find God: nature, history, and human constitution.<sup>16</sup> Chan Kei Thong also presents three ways of general revelation but a bit differently—nature, God's providence and intervention in human history, and conscience.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, what we are sure of is that we are not sure in which way(s) Epimenides, Plato, and Aristotle came up with the concept of the Supreme God or even encountered Him.<sup>18</sup>

We are also sure that not many would develop a sincere relationship

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<sup>12</sup>Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, 22.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>14</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 178.

<sup>15</sup>Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, 19-20.

<sup>16</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 179.

<sup>17</sup>Kei Thong Chan, *Faith of Our Fathers: Discovering God in Ancient China* (Singapore, China: Campus Crusade Asia Limited, 2007), 35-37.

<sup>18</sup>Further research on writings about them or written by them may help achieve a deeper understanding of this topic, but that is beyond the scope of this paper.

with God through general revelation. Chan affirms that nature is “the most vivid demonstration of God’s general revelation to mankind.”<sup>19</sup> Erickson also comments, “There is a knowledge of God available through the created physical order.”<sup>20</sup> Hence, in Psalm 19:1, King David praises the Lord saying, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands (NIV).” And Paul declares in Romans 1:20, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse (NASB).” Nevertheless, despite no excuse, few people truly seek and find God through nature. Even many literary writers praise nature rather than God in their writings.

Human history and constitution function more effectively than does nature, perhaps because God’s judgment is more involved in these two loci. Both are interwoven in reality, for elements of human nature influence, or even decide, the progress of the history of human society.

As to the locus of the constitution of humanity, Erickson precisely claims that God is best perceived in the moral and spiritual qualities of humankind rather than in the physical structure and mental capacities of humans.<sup>21</sup> On the one hand, Chan notices degrees of moral awareness that people possess and identifies this phenomenon as conscience.<sup>22</sup> Erickson summarizes that this conscience is for Immanuel Kant the moral imperative, and for C. S. Lewis the moral impulse.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, the spiritual or religious nature of human beings is the key to their moral awareness because it answers why, and to whom, people should be morally responsible. Thus, a universal phenomenon in all cultures is no longer an enigma. Erickson describes this phenomenon as follows: “In all cultures, at all times and places, humans have believed in the existence of a higher reality than themselves, and even of something higher than the human race collectively.”<sup>24</sup> This is true, for Ecclesiastes 3:11 tells us that God has set eternity in the hearts of all human beings. After having studied evidences of belief in the One True God in hundreds of cultures, Richardson proves this phenomenon and declares that God even prepares the Gentiles to receive the gospel.<sup>25</sup>

As to the locus of history, Erickson points out that the destinies of nations, and the preservation of Israel, clearly demonstrate how God

<sup>19</sup>Chan, *Faith of Our Fathers*, 35.

<sup>20</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 179.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>22</sup>Chan, *Faith of Our Fathers*, 37.

<sup>23</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 180.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>25</sup>Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, 33.



moves the course of human history.<sup>26</sup> Chan also assures divine intervention in the rise and fall of the kingdoms or dynasties in China's history.<sup>27</sup> Just as the unknown God intervened in the history of Athens, the Chinese also believe that a deity intervened in the history of China. But who is this deity? Does He still intervene in modern China? And if so, how did/does He intervene?

### *Tian* and God

The answers to the above questions mostly lie in the Chinese concept of *Tian*. God as *Tian* appears to the *Han* 汉 Chinese<sup>28</sup> and intervenes in the history of China through the concept of *Tianming* 天命 (the Mandate of Heaven, which will be discussed in the next section).

### The Meaning of *Tian*

Although the Chinese term *Tian* denotes both Heaven and the sky, almost every Chinese understands *Tian* as Heaven—the Great One God in a religious sense. As Chan states, “As for the name 天 (*Tian*), or Heaven, few would dispute that it can be used to refer to God.”<sup>29</sup> He goes on to explain, “Such a meaning is reflected in the original pictograph of the character *Tian*, which is comprised of ‘one’, 一, who is over or above ‘great’ 大. In other words, *Tian* is the One above the greatest of all.”<sup>30</sup>

The concept of Heaven as the Great One is not unique to the Chinese but prevails in many cultures in both the Eastern and Western worlds. For instance, in the East, God's chosen people—the Israelites—occasionally call God “Heaven”; as Erickson verifies, “‘Heaven’ is a virtual synonym for God.”<sup>31</sup> Craig S. Keener also states, “Jewish people often used ‘heaven’ as a respectful way of saying ‘God.’”<sup>32</sup> Examples are common in the Bible. In the Old Testament, Daniel 4:26 says that the kingdom would be restored to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, only when he recognized that Heaven rules. During the New Testament period, Jesus spoke a parable in which the prodigal son confesses sinning

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<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>27</sup>Chan, *Faith of Our Fathers*, 36.

<sup>28</sup>*Han* Chinese is the majority group in China, with over ninety percent of the population. In this paper, whenever the term “Chinese” is used, it refers to the *Han* Chinese only.

<sup>29</sup>Chan, *Faith of Our Fathers*, 84.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1234.

<sup>32</sup>Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993), 233.

against Heaven (cf. Lk. 15:18, 21). In the West, it is common for English-speaking people to express helplessness by exclaiming, “Oh, Heaven help me!” Joseph A. Adler confirms that in English the word “Heaven” “can be used in a personal sense to refer metonymically to God.”<sup>33</sup>

In China, the concept of *Tian* as the Heaven (the Great One) has been rooted in almost everyone’s heart from ancient to modern times. For example, the famous Confucian Mengzi 孟子 (Mencius) said more than 2,000 years ago, “For a man to give full realization to his heart is for him to understand his own nature, and a man who knows his own nature will know Heaven. The retention of his heart and the nurturing of his nature are the means by which he serves Heaven.”<sup>34</sup> And in its introduction, this paper mentions the Chinese young man who in the 1990s, also cried out in desperation for *Tian*’s help.

### The Origin of *Tian* in Relation to *Di*

Except for a small group of people who regard *Tian* as a more powerful god presiding over other gods in Chinese religions (to be discussed later), that *Tian* denotes Heaven or the Great One is quite clear, as was described above. Nevertheless, the origin of the concept of *Tian* is still highly debated.

On the one hand, some Christian scholars, such as Chan, tend to support an early origin of *Tian*. He writes, “According to *The Great Chinese Electronic Encyclopedia*, the use of *Tian* to refer to the sovereign Ruler of the Universe goes as far back as the Xia Dynasty 夏朝 (c. 2207-c. 1766 B.C.), China’s very first dynasty!”<sup>35</sup> In fact, the concept of *Tian* might have emerged much earlier than the Xia 夏 Dynasty, possibly having derived from the beginning of the Chinese language or shortly after the Babel event (cf. Gen. 11:1-9).

On the other hand, most secular scholars suggest a later origin of *Tian*. Western scholar Daniel L. Overmyer, while providing definitions for *Tian* and *Di* 帝,<sup>36</sup> comments, “*Tian*, ‘Heaven,’ was the supreme god

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<sup>33</sup>Joseph A. Adler, *Chinese Religions* (London, UK: Laurence King Publishing Ltd, 2012), 27.

<sup>34</sup>Mencius, *Mencius*. trans. by. D. C. Lau (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2003), 145.

<sup>35</sup>Chan, *Faith of Our Fathers*, 84.

<sup>36</sup>Both the Chinese words *Tian* (or *Shangtian* 上天, Heaven) and *Di* 帝 (or *Shangdi* 上帝, king/emperor/lord) can mean Heaven, the Lord on High, the Supreme Being, etc. All of these words denote the Great One, who exists above all and rules over all, including human beings. The word *shang* 上 carries the connotation of “above all,” so that it is often added as a prefix to *Tian* and *Di*. However, without the prefix of *shang*,

of the early Zhou people, superior to ancestors and other gods. Heaven's approval was necessary for rulers, who could lose it and their position if they were cruel or unjust."<sup>37</sup> The Zhou 周 (1121-249 B.C.) was the third dynasty in Chinese history, following the Shang 商 (1765-1122 B.C.) the second dynasty. The first king (Tang 汤) of the Shang Dynasty took over the Xia Dynasty when its last king (Jie 桀) became immoral; in the same way, the first king (Ji Fa 姬发) of the Zhou Dynasty took over the Shang Dynasty, when its last king (Zhou 纣) became wicked.

More radically, Mu-chou Poo presents how *Tian* of the Zhou people replaced *Di* of the Shang Dynasty:

In order to legitimize religiously as well as politically the displacement of the Shang, the Chou (Zhou) ruling class transformed the Shang idea of Shang-ti (*Shangdi*) 上帝, or Ti (*Di*) 帝, who, although considered as the Supreme Lord, was actually more of a figurehead than one who commanded great reverence, into a supreme deity, known as *t'ien* (*Tian*) 天, "Heaven." The deity exercised arbitration over the fate of the people, not whimsically but according to a moral standard. The Chou replaced the Shang precisely because the Shang had violated the moral standard of T'ien, so that the Mandate of Heaven (*t'ien-ming* 天命) was transferred to the Chou.<sup>38</sup>

Hence, Poo declares that there was a gradual "change in the conception of heaven from amoral natural entity to a moral deity."<sup>39</sup>

Poo obviously believes in the secular social development theory, which holds that human society is a gradual development (from primitive to feudal to capitalist to socialist to communist). Several reasons prove Poo's theory to be incorrect. First, although the Zhou Dynasty overtook the Shang Dynasty, the concept of *Tian* did not have to emerge later than that of *Di*. Second, in the Shang Dynasty, *Di* was neither a figurehead nor an amoral natural deity. Xinzhong Yao and Yanxia Zhao identify *Di* as "the ultimate power over all natural and human affairs, from which issued commandments for human behaviour concerning right and

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*Tian* or *Di* is never weakened to denote the concept of the Great One, which has been firmly rooted in almost every Chinese heart.

<sup>37</sup>Daniel L. Overmyer, *Religions of China: The World as a Living System* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1998), 123.

<sup>38</sup>Mu-chou Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare: A View of Ancient Chinese Religion* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 29-30.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 30.

wrong.”<sup>40</sup> The concept of an ultimate power, or the Great One, has been prevailing in people’s hearts throughout the history of China. Third, the Zhou rulers did not need to create a new concept, *Tianming*, to legitimize their governing over the Shang people. They simply told the Shang people that they had violated *Diming* 帝命 (the Mandate of *Di*). Moreover, the Zhou never abandoned the concept of *Di*. In the earliest Chinese classics, *Di* was still popularly addressed. As Hellmut Wilhelm verifies, “During classical times the two concepts were frequently used interchangeably, the one serving just as well as the other.”<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, this paper supports the view of an early origin of *Tian*, especially because *Tian*, as Heaven or the Great One, contains the concept of eternity. Eternity has been set in the hearts of all human beings from the beginning of creation. Desiring eternity never vanishes along with the fall of humanity. The dream of *Tian ren he yi* 天人合一 (to be one with *Tian*) expresses this desire of many Chinese.

### Seeking *Tian* and God

To be one with God is the goal for Christians. That goal can be fulfilled, for Jesus encourages us “Seek and you will find” (Matt. 7:7). Mencius also encourages, “Seek and you will get it; let go and you will lose it. If this is the case, then seeking is of help to getting, and what is sought is within yourself.”<sup>42</sup> When the Pharisees asked when the kingdom of God was coming, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God is within you” (cf. Lk. 17:20-22).

The concept of *Tian* is within many Chinese. If they seek *Tian*, they will find him. As Epimenides’ unknown God and Aristotle’s *Theos* are the God revealed by the Bible, Mencius’ *Tian* is also the Eternal God. Hence, if a Chinese sincerely seeks *Tian*, then he or she will find God! *Tian* for the Chinese is such a precious concept given as a gift by God. Nevertheless, not all believe that *Tian* is God.

In the Introduction, we have mentioned three major ways the Chinese view *Tian*. Those who take the first view see *Tian* simply as one god in relation to other gods. Others regard *Tian* as an indifferent Creator who is disinterested in humanity. Finally, there are those who regard *Tian* as the Judeo-Christian God who is very much interested in reconciliation with mankind. This paper takes the view that *Tian* is the God of the Bible.

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<sup>40</sup>Xinzhong Yao and Yanxia Zhao, *Chinese Religion: A Contextual Approach* (New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 54.

<sup>41</sup>Hellmut Wilhelm, *Heaven, Earth, and Man in the Book of Changes* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1997), 40.

<sup>42</sup>Mencius, *Mencius*, 145.

### Summary of Part 1

The author discussed some of the important attributes of God. God preserved Epimendes' inscription, "To an Unknown God" which Paul used to open his sermon to the Athenians. Thus, the inscription served as an eye-opener connecting an unknown god to *Yahweh*. God reveals Himself to mankind using nature, history and people's spiritual nature; all cultures have an awareness of a higher being. This paper further examined the highly debated origin of the concept of *Tian*. We support the early origin of *Tian* since *Tian* contains the concept of eternity.

In Part 2 of this paper, the author will consider the controversy over *Tian*. Is *Tian* an idol, an indifferent God, or the Eternal God? Each of these views will be examined, with important truths brought to light.

## **The Chinese Concept of *Tian* (Heaven): Part 2**

by Yao Jiugang (Stephen)

In Part 1 of this paper, we mentioned three differing ways of viewing *Tian*: as one god among many, as an indifferent creator, or as the approachable God of the Bible. The paper reviewed God's accessibility, and how He reveals Himself to mankind. In the following pages we will consider the controversy over *Tian* in depth.

On the one hand, both Communism and some Christians posit that *Tian* is a god/an idol. The author observes that some Christians take *Tian* as a grandpa god, but neglect the fact that there are no images of *Tian*. In this part, we will investigate how some communist scholars take *Tian* as a god who is either superior or inferior to other gods.

On the other hand, influenced by animism, some people view *Tian* as a distant Being from humankind, yet many Christian scholars believe that *Tian* is the God revealed by the Bible, approachable and accessible. Is *Tian* distant from humankind or is *Tian* the Eternal God, approachable and accessible? The author makes his case for a correct understanding of God point-by-point using evidence regarding God's lordship.

### **The Controversy Over *Tian***

Controversy is not always harmful, for through controversy we may come closer to truth. Thus, by exploring different views of the Chinese concept of *Tian*, this paper aims to know deeper about *Tian* as God, rather than as a god, or an indifferent God. Presented first is an overview of the three views of *Tian* to be followed by a detailed explanation of each one.

*Tian*: An Idol, an Indifferent God, or the Eternal God?

A number of Christians, including some Chinese Christian scholars, such as Chan and Yuan Zhiming 远志明<sup>1</sup>, argue that *Tian* is a remembrance of Jehovah inherited from the ancient Chinese, who either had a sincere relationship with God or a valid memory of God. No matter which view one holds, *Tian* is the Eternal God that the Bible reveals. Chan even identifies the ancient Chinese civilization as “a God-fearing race that desired to worship God appropriately.”<sup>2</sup>

Then there are others who hold that *Tian* is nothing more than a god (an idol). After taking over mainland China in 1949, the communist party somehow succeeded in making people treat all religions as superstition, but it could not sweep away animism—the root of superstition. Gailyn Van Rheenen testifies to the adamancy of animism, saying, “As long as Satan maintains his grip on the world, animism as a belief system will not die but will simply change with changing times.”<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, one might wonder whether the concept of *Tian* fits into the animistic belief system in China. If so, is *Tian* a god among other gods in the Chinese animistic belief system or an indifferent Creator God who does not care about the world?

No Image: Not as an Idol

Chinese religions are full of gods created by the hands of people. In Romans 1:21-25, Paul describes how the true God hates people’s turning from Him to gods created by their own hands:

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged

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<sup>1</sup>Most of Yuan Zhiming’s thoughts are expressed in his videos, *Shen zhou* 神州 (China’s Confession). These videos are still illegal inside mainland China. To purchase them, visit: [www.chinasoul.org/index.php?option=com\\_virtuemart&page=shop.browse\\_cg&category\\_id=5&Itemid=52&lang=zh-cn&redirected=1&Itemid=5](http://www.chinasoul.org/index.php?option=com_virtuemart&page=shop.browse_cg&category_id=5&Itemid=52&lang=zh-cn&redirected=1&Itemid=5). (accessed 14 November 2017).

<sup>2</sup>Kei Thong Chan, *Faith of Our Fathers: Discovering God in Ancient China* (Singapore, China: Campus Crusade Asia Limited, 2007), 10.

<sup>3</sup>Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1991), 25.

the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen (NIV).

While considering *Tian* as a god, people disagree whether *Tian* is superior or inferior to other gods.

#### *Not as a God Superior to Other Gods*

A few scholars, as well as some Christians, claim that *Tian* is a god superior to other gods for several reasons. First, among the common people in China, *Tian* is often called *Laotianye* 老天爷. The literal translation is “old grandpa in heaven,” because one of the meanings of the suffix *ye* 爷 is grandpa. Therefore, some preachers declare, “Chinese Christians have become the children of God, no longer the grandchildren of *Tian*! Surely *Tian* is not our God, for God does not have grandchildren!”<sup>4</sup> Hence, for them *Tian* is the god of the sky or heaven among numerous gods in the Chinese religious system. *Tian* was created to explain the natural existence of the sky or to describe the more abstract heaven. The only difference is that *Tian* as the god of the sky or heaven is superior to other gods.

However, these people have ignored two important things. One is the fact that ‘*ye*’ does not mean grandpa only; it can also mean master. Therefore, *ye* is often added as a suffix to certain gods, such as *foye* 佛爷 (the Buddha), *yanwangye* 阎王爷 (the Yama), *tudiye* 土地爷 (a local god of land), etc. It functions to demonstrate the power or lordship of these gods. In the same way, *ye* as a suffix can also modify *Tian* to emphasize the lordship of *Tian*. The other thing that they neglect is that *Tian* never appears as an image of an old grandpa with a long beard. Neither does *Tian* appear as an image of heaven nor the sky. Actually, neither heaven nor the sky can be expressed with any image. In other words, people have difficulty in choosing or making something to represent the sky/heaven/Heaven. To summarize, those who take *Tian* as an idol in such a way are mostly illiterate.

Second, some religious groups, such as the Taoists, struggle with the fact that *Tian* has no images. Therefore, they choose to combine it with names of other gods or persons. Lihui Yang and Deming An describe how the highest god, *Yudi* 玉帝 (the Jade Emperor) in Taoism, emerged:

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<sup>4</sup>I myself have heard such a sermon during a Christmas gathering in a house church in Awati farm, Korla City, Xinjiang Province in 2014.



Tian Di (the Supreme Heaven or the God of Heaven) or Shang Di (the Supreme God or the Supreme Divinity) sometimes assumes the position as the highest leader of the random pantheon of the gods. During the Tang or Song dynasty, the disorderly pantheon became systemized and Yu Di, the Jade Emperor who came into being when Taoism and beliefs of the Supreme God were merged together, turned out to be the supreme ruler of the comparative ordered pantheon of gods.<sup>5</sup>

Based on Yang and An's historical research, one can easily notice the Taoists' intention of combining *Tian* or *Di* with the Jade Emperor, so that few people will truly have difficulty in differentiating *Tian* from the Jade Emperor, though each is taken as a supreme God/god superior to other gods.

#### *Not as a God Inferior to Other Gods*

The Marxist scholar Chao Fulin 晁福林<sup>6</sup> argues that during the Shang Dynasty the concept of *Tian* was expressed by *Di*; and *Di* was a celestial god developed by the Shang people from their worship of natural heaven.<sup>7</sup> Chao's theory is a combination of the first and second views but expressed in a scholarly way. The difference is that Chao argues that *Di*, as a half natural-half celestial god, was even inferior to ancestor spirits;<sup>8</sup> whereas most scholars (both Christian and secular) view *Tian* or *Di* as God or as a god superior to other gods.

Chao builds his radical theory mainly on the analysis of unearthed bone inscriptions that date back to the Shang Dynasty. His main argument can be summarized as follows: Because most of the oracle inscriptions shown on tortoise shells or animal bones prove that many significant sacrifices were not addressed to natural gods or ancestors instead of *Di*. This indicates that *Di*, in the Shang people's religious world, must not be capable of bringing blessings/victories or of getting rid of disaster/misfortunes for people.<sup>9</sup> (Note: Since dealing with oracle inscriptions is beyond the author's ability due to his lack of knowledge of archaeology and archaic Chinese, this paper endeavors to refute

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<sup>5</sup>Lihui Yang and Deming An, *Handbook of Chinese Mythology* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 63.

<sup>6</sup>If the Chinese characters of an author's name are given, it means the resources that quoted in this paper are written in Chinese. If they're not given, it means the resources are written in English.

<sup>7</sup>Fulin Chao, "Remarks on the Theocracy in the Yin Dynasty 论殷代神权," *China Social Science* 中国社会科学 1 (1999): 112. Note. Yin 殷 is another word for Shang.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 107-12.

Chao's theory from aspects other than analyzing contents of those unearthed oracle inscriptions.)

First, the fact that many sacrifices recorded in the oracle inscriptions were not offered to *Di* does not nullify *Di*'s highest position in the spiritual realm during the Shang Dynasty. As Poo points out, "The oracle-bone inscriptions yield only part of the religious beliefs of the Shang people; we have no evidence concerning other religious activities, wherein different aspects of piety might be expressed. There is, moreover, no evidence as to whether, or how, people would react when the oracles failed."<sup>10</sup> Moreover, *Di* did appear in some cases, Lian Shaoming 连劭名 providing the evidence. He writes, "In the Shang Dynasty, the Heaven's revelations were also offered with Baiji, as well as military actions for victory."<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Chan testifies that the most important sacrifice ceremony is the Ceremony of Sacrifice to Heaven.<sup>12</sup>

Second, Chao is a follower of Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx. Therefore, he quotes what Engels wrote to Marx in 1846 to support his belief—i.e., the impossibility for the concept of the Supreme God to appear in the Shang Dynasty.<sup>13</sup> In fact, while writing to Marx, Engels was commenting on Feuerbach:

With the domination of the world by intelligence and will, supernaturalism makes its appearance, creation from nothing, and monotheism, which is further specifically elucidated in terms of the "unity of the human consciousness." Feuerbach deemed it superfluous to point out that without the *One King*, the One God could never have come into being, that the Oneness of the God controlling the multifarious natural phenomena and holding together the conflicting forces of Nature is only the image of the One, the Oriental Despot who apparently or in fact holds together conflicting individuals whose interests clash.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Mu-chou Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare: A View of Ancient Chinese Religion* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 29.

<sup>11</sup>Shaoming Lian, "Baiji and Yuji in the Shang Dynasty 商代的拜祭与御祭," *Acta Archaeologica Sinica* 考古学报 1 (2011): 56. Note. Baiji was held to pray for blessings, while Yuji was for getting rid of misfortunes.

<sup>12</sup>Chan, *Faith of Our Fathers*, 115.

<sup>13</sup>Chao, "Remarks on the Theocracy in the Yin Dynasty," 112.

<sup>14</sup>Friedrich Engels, "Engels to Marx in Brussels," in *Letters of Marx and Engels, 1846*; available from [www.marxistsfr.org/archive/marx/works/1846/letters/46\\_10\\_18.htm](http://www.marxistsfr.org/archive/marx/works/1846/letters/46_10_18.htm); (accessed 28 September 2017).

Thus, applying Feuerbach's nonsense, Chao declares that the concept of *Di* as the One God was not created until a real despot appeared after the Shang Dynasty.<sup>15</sup>

Accordingly, Chao does not only place *Di* as inferior to other gods, but also makes *Di* become something fictional. In other words, in the Shang Dynasty, *Di* as a natural/celestial god was created by people to fool themselves; and after the Shang Dynasty, *Di (Tian)* as an illusory Supreme God was created by the first human despot through his intelligence and will to fool his people. Hence, the concept of the Supreme God in communism is no longer the One God or is not even a god, but rather a tool invented by the ruling classes to control people. This kind of theory has no place in Christian theology.

To summarize this section, *Tian* is neither a superior god, nor a tool, nor an inferior god. On the contrary, *Tian* is the Eternal God who has no images and desires to have intimate relationship with human beings.

#### No Indifference: *Tian* Not as a Distant God

Chan confirms, "In many cultures, even those that are polytheistic, this Creator God—referred to in some cultures as the High God—is regarded as utterly remote and transcendent, removed from the world and the affairs of men."<sup>16</sup> This concept of the indifferent God is common in animism. For instance, Aylward Shorter describes how the Tanzanian Kimbu identify the Creator God as the ultimate begetter (the Life-Giver), while they worship ancestors and water-spirits.<sup>17</sup>

Because the communist government did not sweep animism away from China, one may wonder whether the Chinese concept of *Tian* falls into at least one of the ways in which animists view God. Van Rheenen presents three such ways:

Animists view God in different ways. He is understood to be (1) a distant, unapproachable Creator; (2) the Supreme Being who reflects his nature in lower spiritual beings; (3) the impersonal power that permeates all of nature. In each viewpoint the biblical view of God, the Creator who desires a personal, intimate relationship with his creation, is lost.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Chao, "Remarks on the Theocracy in the Yin Dynasty," 112.

<sup>16</sup>Chan, *Faith of Our Fathers*, 34.

<sup>17</sup>Aylward Shorter, *Jesus and the Witchdoctor: An Approach to Healing and Wholeness* (London, UK: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985), 50, 175.

<sup>18</sup>Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, 242.

The Chinese do not view *Tian* in any of these three ways. First, *Tian* is not distant and unapproachable. Yao and Zhao affirm that for the Shang people, *Di* determined human affairs in at least four ways: “He sent the rain down to the earth; he might hold the rain in check and send down famine instead; he brought victory to the army; and he brought fortune as well as misfortune to the world.”<sup>19</sup> And the Zhou people “believed that *Tian* determined their fate, that the Mandate of Heaven (*Tian ming*) provided justification for their dynasty, and that *Tian* would bless the good and punish the evil.”<sup>20</sup> Belief in *Tian*’s morality still exists in people’s hearts today, although it is not as strong as faith.

Second, *Tian* does not reflect His nature in lower spiritual beings. In Romans 1:20, Paul declares that people may and should notice God’s eternal power and divine nature by perceiving His creation, not by observing lesser spiritual beings. Psalm 135:15-18 says, “The idols of the nations are but silver and gold, the work of man’s hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; they have eyes, but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear, nor is there any breath at all in their mouths. Those who make them will be like them, yes, everyone who trusts in them” (NASB). Indeed, those who observe the blunt and stupid gods (idols) become likewise. Thus, God never allows His nature to be reflected in lower gods.

Third, *Tian* is not impersonal, but personal. In the Bible, it is obvious that God desires a personal and intimate relationship with the Israelites and desires the same relationship with Gentiles, too. Job, Rahab, Ruth, and many other non-Israelites all demonstrate this. *Tian*, as a moral God, desires to have a personal relationship with the Chinese. Thus, the highest dream of a righteous Chinese is to be one with *Tian*, as previously discussed.

Nevertheless, that God is moral does not mean He allows no suffering. Instead, God often disciplines people or nations by uprooting and tearing down in order to plant and build, so that they may take root downward and bear fruit upward (cf. Jer. 1:10 and Isa. 37:31). *Tian* does the same. For instance, Mengzi 孟子 (Mencius) writes,

Shun rose from the fields; Fu Yüeh was raised to office from amongst the builders; Chiao Ke from amidst fish and salt; Kuan Chung from the hands of the prison officer; Sun Shu-ao from the sea and Po-li His from the market. That is why Heaven, when it is about to place a great burden on a man, always first tests his resolution, exhausts his frame and makes him suffer

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<sup>19</sup>Xinzhong Yao and Yanxia Zhao, *Chinese Religion: A Contextual Approach* (New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 54.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 55.

starvation and hardship, frustrates his efforts so as to shake him from his mental lassitude, toughen his nature and make good his deficiencies.<sup>21</sup>

The people mentioned by Mencius were kings or ministers who came to this world in humility but finally became noble through suffering. Similarly, in the Old Testament when God was about to use Joseph and David, He first gave them hardships to build them up—Joseph was sold as a slave; David was chased and nearly killed by Saul.

The New Testament confirms suffering for believers. Jesus tells His disciples that in this world they will have tribulations (cf. Jn. 16:33). In Acts 14:22, Paul and Barnabas strengthened the believers by affirming, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (NIV). To the Philippians, Paul writes, “For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Phil. 1:29, NASB). Peter also confirms, “For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps” (1 Pet. 2:21, NASB).

To summarize, *Tian* is not indifferent, but rather is approachable and accessible. As Christians will enter the kingdom of God through suffering, so will many Chinese enter the kingdom of *Tian* through *Tian*’s trials. The Christian scholar Chan amply analyzes both the natural and moral attributes of *Tian*,<sup>22</sup> and all indicate that *Tian* is the Christian God.

#### Lordship: *Tian* as the Eternal God

Secular scholars Yao and Zhao also summarize several attributes or characteristics of *Tian*, writing, “Belief in the supreme high authority above, who was infinite, all-encompassing, all-knowing, and universal, became the centre of religious life in early China.”<sup>23</sup> All these descriptions of *Tian*’s characteristics point to *Tian*’s lordship.

Indeed, of these characteristics the most significant is lordship, which echoes the Apostle Paul’s description of God’s invisible attributes. In Romans 1:18-20, Paul wrote to the church in Rome declaring that no residents in Rome could have any excuse for their ungodly behavior:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is

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<sup>21</sup>Mencius, *Mencius*, trans. by D. C. Lau (London. UK: Penguin Books, 2003), 143.

<sup>22</sup>Chan, *Faith of Our Fathers*, 88-104.

<sup>23</sup>Yao and Zhao, *Chinese Religion*, 55.

evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened (NASB).

Here Paul tells us that God's eternal power and divine nature, although invisible, are nonetheless perceptible and understandable through His creation. Elsewhere, Paul also declares that, even during times of ignorance, if people seek the Lord, they will find Him, for He is not far from humanity (cf. Acts 17:27, 30). God's eternal power and divine nature indicate His lordship because those who know Him but do not honor Him deserve His wrath. God overlooks the ignorant but does not ignore those who have noticed His lordship. In addition, Paul's teachings (inspired by God through the Holy Spirit) apply to all human groups, including the Chinese.

For instance, the modern Chinese young man (mentioned at the beginning of Part I of this paper) realized *Tian*'s divine nature of holiness and eternal power for offering help, because they were deeply located in his conscience. Thus, for him, only *Tian* could handle his struggle with sin, which was incredibly painful. In Romans 7:15-24, Paul vividly describes how despairing the process of struggling with sin actually is—i.e., doing what one knows he ought not to do and not doing what one knows he ought to do! It's a struggle that leads to a cry of deep desperation: "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" (v. 24, NASB). Fortunately, Paul provides the solution in verse 25—Jesus Christ!

But not knowing Jesus at that point, the young man could only pray to *Tian* for help. Although he asked *Tian*, who is of divine holiness, to kill him by sending lightening if he sinned again, he intended to seek *Tian*'s help to not sin any more. In desperation, to whom could a human being pray? Certainly God, for He is the only One that people could pray to in times of desperation. Wilhelm confirms that *Tian* "was God and was prayed to as such."<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, in the Song 宋 Dynasty (960-1279 A.D.), while commenting on the Book of Changes, Confucian scholar Cheng Yi explains the concept of *Tian* thusly—in terms of abode, as *Tian*; and in

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<sup>24</sup>Hellmut Wilhelm, *Heaven, Earth, and Man in the Book of Changes* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1997), 40.

terms of lordship, as *Di*.<sup>25</sup> In other words, the lordship of *Tian* is more expressed by the parallel concept of *Di*, for *Di* is more personal than *Tian*. Wilhelm states, “*T’ien*, too, was a personal god, but *Di* was even more personal; he was a god who would draw close to man and could be exceedingly awesome.”<sup>26</sup>

Thus, we can see that “*Tian*” carries almost the same meaning as “*Di*”, with both bearing the lordship of God. However, while translating the Bible for the Chinese, none of the foreign missionaries chose the word *Tian* for God. Li Tang summarizes this as follows:

As for the word God, in modern Chinese, there are three words to render it, *Shen* (神) which is used to describe spiritual beings, *Shangdi* (上帝) which literally means “the heavenly emperor”, or *Tianzhu* (天主), the heavenly lord, which was adopted by the Catholics in China. *Shangdi* is a more contextualized word. The Nestorian documents used the word *Shen* for God.<sup>27</sup>

The Nestorians were highly over-contextualized, while picturing Jesus like a Buddha and placing a lotus under the Cross. They chose *Shen* instead of *Tian* or *Di* for the word God because it is a generic word that refers to all deities. However, this can easily cause people to misunderstand; they may think that *Shen* (God) is just a *shen* among gods. The Protestant missionaries followed the first Catholics to use *Shangdi* for the word God. The word *Shangdi* is much better than *Shen*, for *Shangdi* shares more similarities with *Tian*.

Unfortunately, Christianity was considered as a tool that Western countries used to invade China. Accordingly, hatred has been developed toward both Christianity and the term *Shangdi*. Thus, some Chinese Christians try to avoid using the term *Shangdi* when sharing the gospel. Fortunately, the concept of *Tian* is identical with that of *Shangdi*, and no Chinese would hate the word *Tian*. Therefore, this paper has endeavored to illuminate the concept of *Tian* as Heaven in relation with God.

### Conclusion

God is a missionary God who desires men and women to enter the kingdom of Heaven (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4, 2 Pet. 3:9). God is also a loving God who desires all human beings to have intimate relationship with Him.

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<sup>25</sup>Yi Cheng, *Cheng’s Commentary on the Book of Changes*. Vol. 1. My own translation.

<sup>26</sup>Wilhelm, *Heaven, Earth, and Man in the Book of Changes*, 40.

<sup>27</sup>Tang Li, *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and Its Literature in Chinese* (Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften: Peter Lang, 2002), 129.

As Psalm 14:2 tells us, “The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God” (NASB). Thus, to achieve His desires, God intervenes in human history through general revelation.

As we have seen, God has intervened in the history of Athens through the inscription “To an Unknown God” and in Chinese history by the concept of *Tian* and *Tianming*. On the one hand, this paper has demonstrated how the concept of *Tian* is the most significant general revelation that God uses to communicate with the Chinese. Moreover, the lordship of *Tian* indicates that *Tian* is the eternal God revealed by the Bible. In addition, sometimes *Tian* purposely wills to develop certain people’s characters through suffering.

On one hand, this paper has proved that those who take *Tian* to be an idol or a god have neglected or denied general revelation due to illiteracy or blindness, while those who consider *Tian* to be an indifferent God have fallen into the animist view of the Creator God. This paper has also argued that *Tian* does not fit into any of the three ways in which animists view God. *Tian* is approachable, accessible, and personal, as opposed to being distant, indifferent, and impersonal.

In summary, throughout this paper, enough evidence indicates that *Tian* is *Yahweh*, the Jewish-Christian God who does care about human affairs and intervenes in human history. This paper has studied evidence in the areas of general revelation and lordship. Other evidence, such as *Tian*’s holiness and the ancient Chinese sacrificial system to *Tian*, deserves further exploration.

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## 华人天观与基督教上帝观之比较: 第一部分

么久刚

### 前 言

在上世纪九十年代的中国，有一位年轻的大学生，于大学期间的最后一年，在情欲中泥足深陷、不能自拔。一天晚上，再一次犯罪后他感到无比罪咎，于是在一个角落处跪于地上向天呼求：“天（*Tian, Heaven*）啊，如果我再犯这罪，就打个雷劈死我吧！”然后，他起身回到自习室。那晚，同在自习室学习的基督徒同学第一次向他分享福音；于是他成为了一个基督徒。

在罗马书一章 16 节，使徒保罗宣告说，“我不以福音为耻；这福音本是神的大能，要救一切相信的，先是犹太人，后是希腊人。”（《新标点和合本》）于是从希腊人起，福音不断临到其他的外邦人；到了上世纪 90 年代，也临到了文中提及的这位年轻的中国小伙子。<sup>1</sup> 依保罗所宣告的，我们清楚知道这位年轻人的救恩源于福音的大能，并非因着他心中所存的天观，尽管他刚好在向天呼求之后，就听到了福音，便得到了上帝的拯救。然而，他得救与他向天呼求这两件事如此紧密关联，难免令人心生好奇：天，对于中国人来说，究竟是怎样的观念？这位年轻人对天的观念，会不会在某种意义上有助于他得蒙上帝拯救？

这两个问题都涉及到华人的天观——天的意义及其职能（*function*）；对上帝的普遍启示的了解对准确理解天的意义与职能至关重要。依照普遍启示我们可以知道，作为一个绝对存在，表面上上帝似乎远离人类，实际上却是人人可以接近的（参徒 17:27）。另外，普遍启示常常为特殊启示能发挥其功用提供必要因素。例如，保罗曾使用“未识之神”这一观念向雅典人介绍“可识

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<sup>1</sup>有人解释保罗所说的希腊人是泛指外邦人。当时至少希腊人和罗马人都是在犹太人之后接着听到福音的，而希腊人和罗马人难分先后，所以严格来讲不一定只是“从希腊人起”。

之上帝”以及耶稣的复活（参徒 17:23-31）。无独有偶，对天的敬畏也可能帮助这位中国年轻人意识并且承认自己的罪性（*sinfulness*）。<sup>2</sup>这样，便为福音（尤其是有关耶稣的血洗净人的罪的信息）能够触摸到他的心灵提供了机会。因此，本文将在普遍启示的基础上首先探讨天与上帝之间的关系，然后再介绍几种不同的华人天观。

华人天观主要有三种。第一种，一些人简单地认为天不外乎中国宗教里的一个普通神祇，与其他神相比地位或高、或低、或相当。持此观点的人通常不理会上帝的普遍启示。第二种，一些人视天为冷漠的创造主。这位造物主对其所造之物包括人类漠不关心。持此观点的人承认上帝的普遍启示，但不认为经由普遍启示人类可以就近上帝。在万物有灵论者（*animist*）之中，冷漠的上帝观相当普遍。尽管中国处于以共产主义和无神论为官方意识形态之下，万物有灵论依旧盛行。因此，探讨第二种天观之时，本文将倚重 Gailyn Van Rheenen 有关万物有灵论者如何看待上帝的描述。<sup>3</sup>第三种，很多人声称天就是犹太人和基督徒的上帝（*the Judeo-Christian God*）——一位渴望让全世界与祂自己和好的上帝。持此观点的人强调藉着普遍启示上帝不但可接近（*approachable*），并且易接近（*accessible*）。

以上三种观点都有其拥护者。本文旨在通过查考每种观点的多样证据，尝试论证天即是耶和华——圣经所启示、渴望在中国历史中与所有中国人建立亲密关系的上帝。在本文的第一章，笔者将着重从人类历史中上帝普遍启示的角度探讨天与上帝之间的关系；在第二章笔者将对这三种天观进行深入的探讨。

## 第一章 天与上帝的关系

人类历史就像一个包含着上帝奥秘的密码，等着人们去解开。对有限的人类来说，解开无限之上帝的某些奥秘并非绝无可能，因为上帝乐于帮助人类去发现有关祂的一些事物，诸如祂的永恒存在、神圣属性、及精妙计划。上帝不仅希望人们能够认识和祂有关的事物，还盼望人类最终能够建立和祂亲密的关系。

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<sup>2</sup>笔者在此将基督教罪的教义理解为基督这一特殊启示的一个方面；令一位中国人承认自己是个罪人是不容易的，因为在中国文化和文字里并不区分 *sin* 与 *crime*。因此，罪人（*sinner*）常常被理解为罪犯（*criminal*），因此被称为罪人是令中国人难以接受的。

<sup>3</sup>Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1991), 243.

人们本不该难于就近上帝，因为上帝积极主动地引导人们来认识祂。在使徒行传十七章 26-27 节，使徒保罗证实上帝如何主动地向人类彰显祂自己。在这里保罗告诉我们，上帝不仅可接近、而且易接近。这一点也适用于天，我们下面就来讨论。

### 第一节 上帝的可接近性

当保罗在雅典等候西拉和提摩太时，他向雅典人进行了一篇绝妙的关于创造之主上帝的布道（参徒 17:22-31）。布道的重点大概有三方面。第一，是关于上帝的存在，保罗宣称上帝这位“创造宇宙和其中万物的神，既是天地的主，就不住人手所造的殿”（徒 17:24）。第二，是有关上帝的计划，保罗宣告了上帝藉着基督的末后审判（参徒 17:31）。第三，是有关上帝的属性，诸如祂的供应（25 节）、怜悯（30 节）、易接近（26-27 节），等等。

在使徒行传十七章 26-27 节，保罗告诉雅典人上帝是如何可接近的：“祂从一本造出万族的人，住在全地上，并且预先定准他们的年限和所住的疆界，要叫他们寻求神，或者可以揣摩而得，其实祂离我们各人不远。”这样，我们可以得出结论：万族的人，在其历史中的特定时刻，皆可寻求并且找到上帝，因为上帝从来不隐藏祂自己。

然而，对人类来说，上帝如何并不遥远呢？换句话说，祂如何向人类彰显自己呢？也就是说，用什么方法人才能够寻求并且找到上帝呢？保罗并没有告诉雅典人上帝是如何可接近、易接近的。保罗也没有给出进一步地解释，只是简单地将布道导向其主题——基督的复活。除了复活这个概念，似乎去理解保罗布道的其他要点对雅典人来说不成问题。那么，我们不禁要问：雅典人如何能够做到很自然地去理解保罗所介绍的有关造物主上帝的相关观念的呢？

多恩·理查森（Don Richardson）以另一种方式发问：“但保罗生来就是犹太人、后来又重生成为基督徒，这样的一个人从哪里可以找到一个开人眼界的事物（the eye-opener），令沉迷于偶像崇拜的雅典人得以认识唯上帝至高无上这一真理呢？”<sup>4</sup> 理查森发现，保罗所找到并且使用的这一开人眼界的事物，便是著名的克里特先知——埃庇米尼得斯（Epimenides）。基督徒对其并不陌

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<sup>4</sup>Don Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, rev. ed. (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984), 20. 在本文中，若没有与英文书籍相应的中文版，或不可得，则直接引用皆为笔者翻译。

生，因为保罗在提多书一章 12 节所引述克里特本地先知的話，便出自他之口。<sup>5</sup> 同时，埃庇米尼得斯也正是那位为雅典人留下写着“未识之神”的祭坛的人；那个时候，雅典人正忍受着瘟疫的折磨——来自一位“未识之神”的惩罚。<sup>6</sup> 幸运的是，其中一座祭坛恰好一直被保存到保罗到访雅典。<sup>7</sup> 这样，保罗才得以在布道中使用“未识之神”这个概念。

此外，理查森还断定埃庇米尼得斯的“未识之神”是一位至高的神 (Deity)，不是一个普通的神 (deity)，并且这位“未识之神”喜悦人承认自己的无知。<sup>8</sup> 确实如此，想要认识真神，人先要放弃自己的聪明 (参林前 1:18-25)。和保罗辩论的斯多葛学派 (Stoic) 和伊壁鸠鲁学派 (Epicurean) 的哲人肯定熟悉这三位著名的古希腊哲学家及其著作：色诺芬尼 (Xenophanes)、柏拉图 (Plato)、和亚里士多德 (Aristotle)。而且，有证据显示柏拉图和亚里士多德知晓埃庇米尼得斯。<sup>9</sup> 因此，保罗所面对的那些雅典人很可能同样知悉埃庇米尼得斯和“未识之神”，并且知道“未识之神”指的是未识之上帝，而不是随便一位神祇。

然而，尽管认同刻有“未识之神”这样一座祭坛的存在，I·霍华德·马歇尔 (I Howard Marshall) 却很难相信“未识之神”与真神上帝之间有实际的联系。”<sup>10</sup> 他指出，“保罗没有指明他的听众在潜意识中崇拜真神上帝。相反，保罗只是在努力令听众的注意力转向真神上帝。当然，这位上帝对他们敬拜一位‘未识之神’这一现象负有终极责任。”<sup>11</sup> (斜体字为笔者添加)

马歇尔的评论中存在几处瑕疵。首先，马歇尔错误地认为，雅典人如果相信一位“未识之神”的存在，就必定是真神上帝的崇拜者。而在现实中，很多人即便相信上帝的存在，也不敬拜祂。

其次，马歇尔并没有解释雅典人如何、为何敬拜一位“未识之神”。相反，阅读理查森的说明之后，我们能够清楚地了解雅典人如何、为何敬拜一位“未识之神”。埃庇米尼得斯是将雅典人、保罗、柏拉图/亚里士多德与“未识之神”联系在一起的关键。

<sup>5</sup>同上，21-23。

<sup>6</sup>同上，9-15。

<sup>7</sup>同上，15-16。

<sup>8</sup>同上，14。

<sup>9</sup>同上，21。

<sup>10</sup>I Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale New International Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 286.

<sup>11</sup>同上。

第三，马歇尔提出一个保罗为得着雅典人所使用的宣教策略，即保罗使用了上帝对世界上所有现象都负有终极责任这一观念。然而，古希腊人从不认为灵界的终极存在（the Ultimate Spiritual Being）对物质界的事物负有任何责任。假如保罗谈及上帝对受造物负有责任，雅典人将对保罗嗤之以鼻。我们知道，一些雅典人的确嘲笑保罗所介绍的身体复活这个概念（参徒 17:32）。对保罗来说，引入身体复活这一真理是必要的；而在那个时刻提及上帝对受造物负有终极责任，则不是必须的。

所以，如果我们认同理查森有关通过开人眼界的事物令人得以认识真理的理论，就会意识到“未识之神”与真神上帝之间存有实际联系是有极大的可能性的。因着这种可能性，理查森自信地宣称，“依保罗的推论，耶和華——犹太教、基督教的上帝，正是埃庇米尼得斯的祭坛所指向的对象。因此，耶和華就是那位曾介入雅典历史的上帝。”<sup>12</sup> 理查森将上帝介入人类历史这一现象称之为“麦基洗德要素”（“the Melchizedek factor”），即上帝的普遍启示。<sup>13</sup>

## 第二节 上帝的普遍启示

米拉德·J. 艾利克森（Millard J. Erickson）将普遍启示定义为“上帝在所有时间、所有地点将关乎他自己的信息向所有人所做的传达。”<sup>14</sup> 即，上帝总是在所有时间、所有地点渴望跟所有人进行沟通。例如，理查森指出，保罗在自己的写作中，借用了色诺芬尼、柏拉图和亚里士多德等人作品中用来所指至高无上的上帝的 *Theos* 这一希腊用词，用来指代犹太教、基督教的上帝。<sup>15</sup> 另外，也许所有埃庇米尼得斯时代的克里特人都知道“未识之神”的存在。理查森颇富洞察力地说明了，透过上帝的普遍启示，雅典人熟悉刻在祭坛之上的“未识之神”这一概念。埃庇米尼得斯、色诺芬尼、柏拉图和亚里士多德等人也是如此。

艾利克森指出普遍启示的三种传统方式：自然界、历史和人类自身机制（the constitution of the human being）。<sup>16</sup> 通过这些方

<sup>12</sup>Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, 22.

<sup>13</sup>同上，36。

<sup>14</sup>米拉德·J. 艾利克森（Millard J. Erickson），《基督教神学导论（第二版）》（*Christian Theology*, 2d ed.），陈知纲译（上海：上海人民出版社，2012），42。

<sup>15</sup>Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, 19-20.

<sup>16</sup>艾利克森，《基督教神学导论》，43。中文版中，人类自身机制（the constitution of the human being）被改为人性（humanity）。

式，人们可以寻求并找到上帝。唐尧（Chan Kei Thong）也指出普遍启示的三种方式，与艾利克森略有不同：自然、历史的演变、人的良知。<sup>17</sup>然而，我们目前所能确定的，就是我们并不能确定埃庇米尼得斯、柏拉图和亚里士多德是以什么方式发现至高上帝的观念、甚或与上帝相遇的。<sup>18</sup>

我们还可以确定：不会有太多人藉普遍启示与上帝建立真诚的关系。唐尧声称，“大自然是上帝普遍启示中最生动的表现。”<sup>19</sup>艾利克森也说到，“有一种关于上帝的认识，是人们可以通过有形受造界的秩序来获得的。”<sup>20</sup>因此，大卫在诗篇十九篇 1 节里这样赞美主：“诸天述说神的荣耀，穹苍传扬祂的手段。”保罗在罗马书一章 20 节也宣称，“自从造天地以来，神的永能和神性是明明可知的，虽是眼不能见，但藉着所造之物就可以晓得，叫人无可推诿。”然而，尽管无可推诿，还是很少有人会藉着大自然寻求、并找到上帝。文学家们大多在作品中对大自然而不是上帝赞美有加。

在引导人类认识上帝这方面，人类历史和自身机制比大自然更起作用，也许是因为上帝的审判大多涉及这两方面。在现实中这两方面相互交织，因为人性的诸多因素时常影响甚至决定人类社会的历史进程。

在人类自身机制方面，艾利克森精确地断言，“最能发现上帝属性的地方”不是在“这个有形世界中和人的天赋能力中”，“却是在人的道德和灵性物质里面。”<sup>21</sup>一方面，正如唐尧所留意到的，“所有人都有一定程度的道德标准”；这种现象被唐尧称为“人内心的良知”。<sup>22</sup>艾利克森也对人的良知做了这样的概括：康德（Immanuel Kant）将其称作“道德律令”（the moral imperative）；而对 C·S·路易斯（C. S. Lewis）来说，是“道德冲动”（the moral impulse）。<sup>23</sup>

另一方面，人类的灵性或宗教性是人类道德意识的关键，因为它解答了道德责任的原因及对象。这样，几乎存在于全世界所有

<sup>17</sup>唐尧，《先贤之信》（上海：东方出版中心，2005），29。

<sup>18</sup>进深阅读这些哲人的著作或有关他们的书籍，对加深了解本文的主题大有裨益；然而，这些研究在目前超出了本文的范畴。

<sup>19</sup>唐尧，《先贤之信》，29。

<sup>20</sup>艾利克森，《基督教神学导论》，43。

<sup>21</sup>同上。

<sup>22</sup>唐尧，《先贤之信》，31。

<sup>23</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 1998), 178. (中文版无此处内容。)

文化中的一个普遍现象便不再像一个谜。关于这个现象，艾利克森描写到：“在所有文化中，在所有时间和地点，人们一直相信，有一种比他们自己更崇高的实在，甚至是某种比人类整体更崇高的实在存在。”<sup>24</sup> 确实如此，因为传道书三章 11 节告诉我们上帝将永生的概念放在所有人的心中。理查森研究了几百个文化，发现在每个文化中人们几乎都相信一位真神的存在，从而证实了这一现象的普遍性；因此，理查森声称上帝乐于预备外邦人接受福音。<sup>25</sup>

在历史方面，艾利克森指出万国的命运和以色列得蒙保守都显示出上帝如何掌管人类历史。<sup>26</sup> 唐尧也确信在中国的历史朝代中，“冥冥中有创造主的引领之手。”<sup>27</sup> 正好比上帝以“未识之神”介入了雅典的历史，有人相信上帝也以某一位神祇（Deity）介入了中国的历史。然而，这位神祇究竟是怎样的呢？在今天的中国，祂依然介入吗？祂曾经怎样介入中国历史？现今又如何介入呢？

### 第三节 天与上帝

很大程度上，以上问题的答案都在于中国人对天的观念。上帝以“天”的形式向中国人（尤其是汉族<sup>28</sup>）显现；并以“天命”（the Mandate of Heaven，下文将作讨论）这一概念介入中国历史。

#### 1. 天的宗教意义

尽管汉字的“天”既可以指皇天（Heaven）又可以指天空（sky），但很多中国人都了解天的宗教意义——独一至高的上帝（the Great One God）。就如唐尧所证实的：“至于‘天’的使用，毫无疑问是用来指上帝的。”<sup>29</sup> 他还解释到：“据《词源》，中国的第一本字典《说文解字》把‘天’列为‘头’。按同一个思路，原始的象形字‘天’是表示把‘一’放在‘大’的上面。换句话说，天是在最伟大者上面的那一位。”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>24</sup> 艾利克森，《基督教神学导论》，43-44。

<sup>25</sup> Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, 33.

<sup>26</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 179.

<sup>27</sup> 唐尧，《先贤之信》，30。

<sup>28</sup> 汉族占中国全部人口的90%以上，是中国的多数民族。在本文中谈及中国人，都指的是汉族。

<sup>29</sup> 唐尧，《先贤之信》，69。

<sup>30</sup> 同上。



作为至高者的天的观念并不是中国人所独有的，而是盛行于东西方许多文化之中。在东方，上帝的选民以色列有时候就将上帝称呼为天，如艾利克森所说：“‘天’实际上是‘上帝’的同义词。”<sup>31</sup>季纳（Craig S. Keener）也声称：“犹太人通常会恭敬地用‘天’来代表‘神’。”<sup>32</sup>圣经中的例子不胜枚举。在旧约但以理书四章 26 节提到只有等巴比伦王尼布甲尼撒知道是天<sup>33</sup>在掌权，上帝才会将国归还给他。在新约路加福音浪子的比喻中，那小儿子忏悔的时候说他得罪了天（参路 15:18, 21）。

众所周知，在西方英语世界中常以这种方式表达无助：“哦，天哪！（Oh! Heaven!）请帮助我！”约瑟夫·阿德勒（Joseph A. Adler）确信英文字“天”能以转喻的方式指代具有人格的上帝。<sup>34</sup>

在东方的中国，从古到今，天作为独一至高者的观念几乎扎根在每个人的心中。举例来说，著名儒家学者孟子在二千年前就说过：“尽其心者，知其性也。知其性，则知天矣。存其心，养其性，所以事天也。”<sup>35</sup>另外，本文前言中所提及的上世纪 90 年代那位年轻人，也是在绝望中从心底向天发出求助的呼喊。

## 2. 天的起源以及天与帝的关系

除了少数人坚持将天视为统辖诸神的、能力更大的神，如前所述，视天为独一至高者被大多数人接受。然而，有关天的起源，却众说纷纭。一方面，诸如唐尧这样的基督徒学者倾向于支持天观早起源说。唐尧写到：“《中国大百科全书》中提到远在夏朝（约公元前 2070—前 1600），‘天’就用来指神圣的统治者。”<sup>36</sup>实际上，笔者认为很可能天这一观念的起源要远早于夏朝，因为在巴别塔事件（参创 11:1-9）之后汉语言形成之初，中国人的祖先便开始以天来称呼上帝。

另一方面，世俗学者建议天观的起源要稍晚。西方学者丹尼尔·L·奥弗米尔（Daniel L. Overmyer）在为“天”和“帝”提供定义时

<sup>31</sup>艾利克森，《基督教神学导论》，563。

<sup>32</sup>季纳（Craig S. Keener），《新约圣经背景注释》（*The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*），刘良淑译（北京：中央编译出版社，2013），225。

<sup>33</sup>在和合本圣经中译作“诸天”，笔者认为应当译作“天”，因为“诸天”在汉语中不用来指上帝。

<sup>34</sup>Joseph A. Adler, *Chinese Religions* (London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd, 2012), 27.

<sup>35</sup>《孟子·尽心上》。

<sup>36</sup>唐尧，《先贤之信》，69。

指出：“‘天’是周朝早期的至高神，比祖先神和其他神更大。统治者必须获得天的认可；如若变得残暴或不公，统治者将失去其统治地位。”<sup>37</sup> 周朝（公元前 1121—前 249）是中国历史上第三个朝代，在商朝（公元前 1765—前 1121）之后。当夏朝最后一位王（桀）道德堕落之后，汤起义并建立商朝；同样，当商朝最后一位王（纣）变得残暴无道之后，武王姬发起义并建立周朝。

蒲慕州（Mu-chou Poo）更加激进地认为，是周朝人民所信奉的天取代了商朝人民所信奉的帝：

商王室所信仰的上帝或帝的主要性格为一自然之天，似乎并不为殷人所信仰的诸神祇中最重要的一员，但是周人在克商之后为了要给周人代商在宗教上求一解释，逐渐将天或上帝的地位，提升到一个具有道德判断意志的对人间世事的最高仲裁者，因而有所谓“天命靡常”的说法，上帝不再是无目的的降灾赐福，而是有选择的，有目的的施行其大能力。<sup>38</sup>

由上述文字我们发现，蒲慕州相信周人将天的观念做了一个转变：从无道德判断意志的自然之天转变为道德性的天。

很明显，蒲慕州是社会发展史这一世俗理论的追随者。该理论认为人类社会是一个渐近的发展过程（原始社会→奴隶社会→封建社会→资本主义社会→社会主义/共产主义社会）。以下几点足以说明蒲慕州的理论站不住脚。第一，虽然周朝取代了商朝，但周人的天的观念不必然比商人的帝的观念出现要晚。

第二，在商朝帝并非徒有虚名，也不是一个无道德判断意志的自然神祇。姚新中和赵艳霞（Xinzhong Yao and Yanxia Zhao）认定帝“具有超越自然和人类一切事物的终极能力，并以此能力发布诫命规范人类行为的是非曲直。”<sup>39</sup> 由此可见，纵观整个中国历史，至高者（天/帝）具有终极力量这一观念深入很多人的内心。

第三，周王室统治者没有必要靠发明“天命”这一新理论来为他们统治曾经的商朝人民进行合理化辩护。他们可以简单地告诉商朝人民，商朝灭亡完全是因为商朝统治者违犯了“帝命”（the

<sup>37</sup> Daniel L. Overmyer, *Religions of China: the World as a Living System* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1998), 123.

<sup>38</sup> 蒲慕州，《追寻一己之福——中国古代的信仰世界》（台北：允晨文化，1995），49。

<sup>39</sup> Xinzhong Yao and Yanxia Zhao, *Chinese Religion: A Contextual Approach* (New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 54.

Mandate of Di)。而且，周朝君民从没有抛弃帝的概念。周之后的汉文学经典仍时常提及帝，如卫德明（Hellmut Wilhelm）所证实：“在古典时代，这两个概念（即天与帝，笔者注）水乳交融，没有一个凌驾于另一个之上。”<sup>40</sup>

所以，本文支持天观早起源说，尤其因为天，作为独一至高者，含有永恒的概念。与天同寿、寿与天齐等一些常用的祝福语都说明了这一点。早在创世之初，上帝便将永恒这一概念放在人的心中。人类虽然在伊甸园中堕落，却从未失去对永恒的盼望。并且，古往今来“天人合一”成为许多中国人的梦想。

### 3. 寻求天即是寻求上帝

同样，与上帝合而为一也是基督徒的目标（参徒17:20-26）。耶稣鼓励的话语更让人确信这个目标是可以实现的；祂说到：“寻找的，就寻见。”（参太7:7）孟子也曾说过相似的话：“求则得之，舍则失之，是求有益于得也，求在我者也（What is sought is **within yourself**）。”<sup>41</sup> 当法利赛人问耶稣，“神的国几时来到？”耶稣回答说：“……神的国就在你们心里（The kingdom of God is **within you**）。”（参路17:20-22）<sup>42</sup>

实际上，在许多中国人的心里，天不是完全不可接近的。相反，寻求天的，就会找到。正如埃庇米尼得斯的“未识之神”和亚里士多德的 *Theos* 就是圣经所启示的上帝，孟子的天也是这位永恒的上帝。因此，如果一个中国人真诚地寻求天，就应该可以找到上帝！这样的天观非常宝贵，是上帝赐予中国人的一份礼物。然而，并不是所有人都相信中国人的天就是犹太人的上帝。

在前言中我们已经简单提到了三种不同的华人天观。第一种，将天视为众神之一。第二种，认为天高高在上，不理人间事物。第三种，相信天就是犹太教、基督教的那位渴望与全人类和好的上帝。本文支持第三种天观，即天是圣经所启示的上帝。

前文中笔者还讨论了一些有关上帝的重要属性，尤其是祂的至高无上。上帝保存了埃庇米尼得斯“未识之神”这一祭坛上的碑铭，令日后保罗用以向雅典人开口传道。这样一来，这一碑铭竟令雅典人眼界大开，从一位“未识之神”被直接引向上帝。上帝藉

<sup>40</sup>Hellmut Wilhelm, *Heaven, Earth, and Man in the Book of Changes* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1997), 40.

<sup>41</sup>《孟子·尽心上》。

<sup>42</sup> 此处英文原作中包含一个文字游戏（word play），即黑体的within yourself/within you；在中文翻译中，看不出这一文字游戏。

着自然、历史、人的灵性启示祂自己；所有文化中几乎都有至高存在这一观念。此外，本文还分析了天的起源的不同观点，并支持天观早起源说，因着天含有永恒的概念，因为是上帝将永恒的观念放在人的心中。

在下一部分，本文将详细来看不同的天观。天究竟仅是偶像之一？还是冷漠的上帝？还是圣经所启示的永恒的上帝？期待对每种观点的分析之后，真相能够浮现。

## 华人天观与基督教上帝观之比较: 第二部分

么久刚

在上一部分, 笔者探讨了上帝的可接近性, 并祂如何向人类彰显自己。此外, 笔者还提到了三种不同的华人天观: 天为众神之一; 天为冷漠的造物主; 天为圣经所启示的可接近的上帝。在接下来的文字中, 我们将深入探讨这三种不同的观点。

一方面, 共产主义者, 甚至一些基督徒, 都认为天不过是一个偶像/普通的神祇。笔者留意到一些基督徒因着“老天爷”这一称呼而将天视为偶像, 是因为他们忽略了一个事实, 即天没有具体的形象。此外, 笔者将着重探讨为何一些共产主义学者将天视作一位普通的神祇, 无论其地位是高于还是低于其他的神灵。

另一方面, 受万物有灵论的影响, 一些人认为天是一个遥不可及、不食人间烟火的至高存在, 而很多基督徒学者却视天为圣经所启示的那位可接近、易接近的上帝。那么, 天究竟是高高在上、冷眼旁观的一位至高存在, 还是可接近、易接近的那位永恒的上帝呢? 笔者将从天主宰一切这个角度寻求证据, 来力求对天的恰当理解。

### 第二章 不同天观之比较

争议并不总是有害的; 相反, 透过争议我们可以更加接近真理。所以, 藉着探讨不同的天观, 本文旨在在进一步理解为何天就是圣经所启示的上帝, 不是偶像、也不冷漠。本文将首先对三种不同的天观作一概述, 然后再一一详加讨论。

#### 第一节 天: 偶像, 冷漠的造物主, 还是永恒的上帝?

一方面, 许多的基督徒, 尤其是一些基督徒学者如唐尧和远志

明<sup>1</sup>，竭力主张“天”是中国古人对耶和華上帝的相关留痕。这种痕迹要么源自和上帝的亲密关系，要么源自对上帝的有效记忆。无论持哪种观点，都认为天就是圣经所启示的永恒的上帝。例如，唐尧曾这样形容中国的远古文明中人与上帝的关系：“远古的中华民族的祖先是认识上帝、敬畏上帝的一群人，而且按照圣经中上帝规定的方式一直敬拜他。”<sup>2</sup>

另一方面，一些人断言天不外乎是一个普通神祇，即一个偶像。1949年统治中国大陆之后，共产党似乎已经成功地让人相信所有宗教都是迷信，但却不能消除迷信的根源——万物有灵论。关于万物有灵论的顽固性，Gailyn Van Rheenen 写到：“只要撒旦继续管辖这个世界，万物有灵论作为一个信仰体系就不会瓦解，不过是随着时间的推移而作相应地变化。”<sup>3</sup>因此，有人认为中国人的天观可能也是万物有灵论这一信仰体系中的一部分。如果真是这样，那么在中国的万物有灵论体系中，天是众多神祇中的一个，还是对世事毫不关心、冷漠的创造主呢？

## 第二节 天非偶像（众多神祇之一）

中国宗教满天神佛，皆为人手所造。在罗马书一章 21-25 节，保罗描述了真神上帝是何等憎恶人们离弃祂转而敬拜人手所造的假神：

因为，他们虽然知道神，却不当作神荣耀祂，也不感谢祂。他们的思念变为虚妄，无知的心就昏暗了。自称为聪明，反成了愚拙；将不能朽坏之神的荣耀变为偶像，仿佛必朽坏的人和飞禽、走兽、昆虫的样式。所以，神任凭他们逞着心里在的情欲行污秽的事，以致彼此玷辱自己的身体。他们将神的真实变为虚谎，去敬拜侍奉受造之物，不敬奉那造物之主。主乃是可称颂的，直到永远。阿们！

人所崇拜的受造之物有大有小；因此，把天当作普通神祇的人对于天的地位便产生了不同意见。有人认为天比其他神灵地位高；

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<sup>1</sup>远志明的思想主要表现在系列片《神州》里面，有兴趣的读者可以在网上搜索、观看。

<sup>2</sup>唐尧，《先贤之信》（上海：东方出版中心，2005），7。

<sup>3</sup>Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1991), 25.

有人却认为天比其他神灵地位低。<sup>4</sup>

### 1. 天非神祇之首

一些学者,甚至一些基督徒,声称天只不过是众神中的一位;只不过,天是超越其他神祇的神。原因有两点。其一,中国民众常将天称作“老天爷”。因此,一些基督教传道人大声疾呼:“中国基督徒是上帝的儿女,不是老天爷的孙子孙女!天不是我们的上帝,因为上帝只有儿女,没有孙子孙女!”<sup>5</sup>因此,对这些人来说,天只是在中国宗教众多神祇中一位掌管天或天空的神,是人发明出来对有形的天空或抽象的天堂<sup>6</sup>加以解释。唯一的区别,就是天比其他神更大。

然而,这些人忽略了两件重要的事情。第一,在汉语中“爷”不单指“爷爷”;还可以指“主”。所以,“爷”常被当作后缀加在一些神祇的名称之后,如“佛爷”、“阎王爷”、“土地爷”等等,用以强调这些神的权威或能力。同样地,“爷”作为后缀加在天之后,也是用来强调天的权柄。第二,这些人忽略了一个事实:天从来没有以一位“长胡子老爷爷”的形象出现过。天也没有以天空或天堂的形象出现过。当然,无论天堂还是天空都难于用具体的形象来呈现。换句话说,人们很难选择或制造出什么具体的东西来表现天(heaven)、天空(sky)、天堂(Heaven)。概括说来,因天被唤作老天爷就将天当成偶像,这样的结论未免让人觉得肤浅和仓促。

其二,天没有形象这一事实令诸如道教之类的一些宗教群体很纠结,所以他们选择将天与其他神祇甚至人的名字结合在一起。杨利慧与安德明(Lihui Yang and Deming An)研究了道教中最高神祇玉帝(the Jade Emperor)的起源:“天帝(上天)或上帝时常攫取众神的最高领导地位。唐宋时期,有序的神仙系统逐渐形成,玉帝(产生于道教与上帝信仰互相融合)成为这一系统中凌驾于万神之上的最高统领。”<sup>7</sup>根据杨利慧与安德明相关历史的研究,我们不难发现道教将天或帝与玉帝相融合的意图。所以,很

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<sup>4</sup> 可能也有人认为天与其他神祇地位相当,这种观点讨论价值不大。因此,本文不作详细讨论。

<sup>5</sup> 笔者于2014年圣诞节在新疆库尔勒一家庭聚会时亲耳听到传道如此说。

<sup>6</sup> 对中国人来说,抽象的天概念类似于天堂,不同于简单的天空。据说分九重天,是众神的居所。

<sup>7</sup> Lihui Yang and Deming An, *Handbook of Chinese Mythology* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 63.

少有人会真正将天与玉帝混为一谈，尽管在地位上二者皆凌驾于众神之上。然而，并不是所有将天视为偶像的人都认为天比其他神祇能力更大。

## 2. 天非低级神祇

马克思主义学者晁福林主张：“殷代‘天’的概念是以帝来表达的，……就殷代的帝而言，它实质上是自然之天与人格化的神灵的混合体。”<sup>8</sup>更有甚者，一般学者都认为天或帝皆具有超越众神的地位，而晁福林则声称：“居于殷代神权崇拜显赫地位的是殷人的祖先神，而帝则只不过是小心翼翼地偏坐于神灵殿堂的一隅而已。”<sup>9</sup>

晁福林的理论依据主要源于对御祭卜辞的分析：“殷代祭典中习见的御祭，一般认为是禳除灾祸之祭。御祭的对象是包括诸母妣、诸兄、诸高祖等在内的以历代先王为主体的祖先神，以及土（社）、河等自然神。御祭卜辞多达千余例，但却无一例是御祭于帝者。”<sup>10</sup>在此基础上，晁福林得出了激进的结论：“显然，殷人并不认为帝具有免除灾祸的神力。就降祸或赐福而言，帝的影响比之于祖先神，甚至河、岳等，都要小得多。”<sup>11</sup>（有关御祭卜辞的研究超出本文的范畴，因笔者不具备相关的考古或古汉语专业知识。故此，本文只能从其他角度来反驳晁福林的理论。）

第一，即便很多御祭的对象不是帝（天），也不能完全否定帝在商朝时期超越诸神的最高地位。蒲慕州指出，“无论如何，甲骨文材料只能代表商人的信仰的一部分，而商人除此之外尚有那（哪）些宗教活动，就不得而知了。”<sup>12</sup>而且，祭拜帝（天）在其他情况下也有出现。连劭名总结到：“在商朝，拜祭为人民提供天启，也为保障军事行动的胜利。”<sup>13</sup>此外，唐尧在研究郊祭时也证实：“所谓的郊祭，也称为祭天大典，这个最重要的祭天仪式的地点，通常选在皇城的南郊，由皇帝亲自主礼。这种仪式可以追溯到中国最远在的帝王。”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup>晁福林，“论殷代神权”，《中国社会科学》1（1999）：111-12。

<sup>9</sup>同上，112。

<sup>10</sup>同上，108。

<sup>11</sup>同上。

<sup>12</sup>蒲慕州，《追寻一己之福——中国古代的信仰世界》（台北：允晨文化，1995），48。

<sup>13</sup>连劭名，“商代的拜祭与御祭”，《考古学报》1（2011）：56。

<sup>14</sup>唐尧，《先贤之信》，102。



第二，晁福林是马克思和恩格斯的追随者。1846年，恩格斯在信中对马克思说，“一个上帝，如果没有一个君主，便永不会出现。支配许多自然现象，并结合各种互相冲突的自然力的上帝的统一，只是外表上或实际上结合着各个利害冲突互相抗争的个人的东洋专制君主的反映。”<sup>15</sup>由此，晁福林断然得出结论：“正由于殷代，特别是其前期，还没有出现至高无上的王权，所以在天上也就没有一个至高无上的神。”<sup>16</sup>

故此，晁福林不仅将帝置于祖先神之下，还甚至使帝成为一个杜撰品。换句话说，对晁福林此类学者来说，在商代，帝作为一个自然的和人格化的神祇的混合体，不过是人民想象出来的众多神灵中的一位而已；而到了商朝之后，天，这位虚幻的至高神，则是被一位聪明的东方专制君主将商代的帝进行改头换面，为了对其人民加以愚弄。因此，对共产主义者来说，上天这一概念不仅不再是独一上帝，更沦为统治阶级所发明用来掌控人民的工具。这样的理论显然与基督教的神学大相径庭。

概括说来，天绝不仅仅是一位相对卓越的神祇，更不是一位次等小神甚至或一个政治工具。相反，天就是那位没有任何形象、渴望与人类建立亲密关系、永恒的上帝。然而，还有一些人，虽然没有将天贬低为偶像，也相信天就是造物主，但认为这位造物主是冷漠的，对其所造置若罔闻。

### 第三节 天非冷漠的造物主上帝

唐尧证实：“在许多文化中，即便是在多神论的文化中，这位造物主上帝——在某些文化中被称为至高上帝——是遥远和超越的，完全与世界以及人间事物有分别。”<sup>17</sup>这种冷漠的上帝观在万物有灵论中相当普遍。例如，Aylward Shorter 就曾描述非洲坦桑尼亚的 Kimbu 人如何将造物主上帝视为给予生命的万物之父（the ultimate begetter—the Life-Giver），同时也敬拜祖先和众水之灵（water-spirits）。<sup>18</sup>

如前所述，因为共产政府没能将万物有灵论完全清除，让人有理由怀疑中国人的天的观念是否与万物有灵论者对于上帝的观念

<sup>15</sup>恩格斯，《1846年10月致马克思的信》（上海：三联书店，1957），53。

<sup>16</sup>晁福林，“论殷代神权”，112。

<sup>17</sup>唐尧，《先贤之信》，29。

<sup>18</sup>Aylward Shorter, *Jesus and the Witchdoctor: An Approach to Healing and Wholeness* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985), 50, 175.

有相通之处。对于万物有灵论者如何看待上帝，Van Rheezen 提出三种观念：第一，视上帝为遥不可及的造物主（a distant, unapproachable Creator）；第二，视上帝为一位至高的存在，并藉由低级灵物（lower spiritual beings）将其属性表明出来；第三，视上帝为一个非人格的力量（impersonal power），弥漫于天地之间。<sup>19</sup> Van Rheezen 并且总结到：“在任何一种观念之中，圣经所启示的上帝观，即造物主渴望与受造物建立个人的、亲密的关系，消失殆尽。”<sup>20</sup>

很多中国人不曾以上述任何一种观念来看待天（帝）。第一，天并非遥不可及。姚新中和赵艳霞确信对于商朝人民，帝至少在四个方面决定人间事物：“祂降雨到地上；祂也会阻止雨临到地上从而导致饥荒；祂会给军队带来胜利；祂赐福也降祸。”<sup>21</sup> 同样地，周朝人民也“相信天决定人的命运、定周朝符合天命。天还要赏善罚恶。”<sup>22</sup> 今天，道德性的天这一信念仍然存在于人们心中，尽管对很多人来说并没有上升到信仰的高度。

第二，中国的天不曾藉低级别灵物彰显其独有属性。在罗马书一章 20 节，保罗曾宣告，人藉着上帝的创造通过揣摩可以晓得上帝的永能和神性，而不是藉着观察低级别的神灵来参透上帝的伟大，因为没有任何神灵具备上帝独有的属性。在中国所有宗教信仰中，几乎没有任何一个神祇具备天的独有属性，诸如至高、至上、至仁、至义，且喜悦人追求天人合一的境界。

第三，天是有人格的。圣经告诉我们上帝不仅渴望与选民以色列建立个人的、亲密的关系，对待外邦人也是如此。约伯、妓女喇合、路得以及其他许多非以色列人的故事都说明了这一点。天作为一个具有道德性的神，也渴望与中国人建立个人的关系。前面提到过，很多正直的中国人的最高梦想就是能够与天合而为一。

然而，上帝具有道德性并不意味着上帝不容许苦难的存在。相反，上帝时常藉着苦难管教列国列民，好使他们能够被建立、栽植、扎根、结果（参耶 1:10、赛 37:31）。天亦行是。例如，孟子曾说，“舜发于畎亩之中，傅说举于版筑之中，胶鬲举于鱼盐之中，管夷吾举于士，孙叔敖举于海，百里奚举于市。故天将降大任于是人也，必先苦其心志，劳其筋骨，饿其体肤，空乏其身，

<sup>19</sup>Van Rheezen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, 242.

<sup>20</sup>同上。

<sup>21</sup>Xinzhong Yao and Yanxia Zhao, *Chinese Religion: A Contextual Approach* (New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 54.

<sup>22</sup>同上。

行拂乱其所为，所以动心忍性，曾益其所不能。”<sup>23</sup> 孟子这里所提到的这些名人都出身卑微，可后来却透过苦难最终成为国王或大臣。同样地，在旧约圣经中，在上帝要使用约瑟和大卫之前，也都先让他们先经历苦难：约瑟被卖为奴隶；大卫遭到扫罗疯狂地追杀。

新约圣经同样肯定苦难对信徒的意义。例如，耶稣告诉祂的门徒在这世上有苦难（参约 16:33）。在使徒行传十四章 22 节，保罗和巴拿巴坚固门徒时说，“我们进入神的国，必须经历许多艰难。”对腓立比信徒保罗也曾写到，“因为你们蒙恩，不但得以信服基督，并要为祂受苦。”（腓 1:29）还有彼得也曾证实，“你们蒙召原是为祂，因基督也为你们受过苦，给你们留下榜样，叫你们跟随祂的脚踪行。”（彼前 2:21）

概括说来，天不是冷漠的天，却是可接近、易接近的天。正如基督徒要经历许多苦难才得以进上帝的国，中国人想要进入天国也要经历天所给的试炼。唐尧在详细地分析了天的自然属性与道德属性之后，证实天就是圣经所启示的那位永恒的上帝：“在大量查考古籍之后，我们确知中国人认知的上帝或天，与圣经中唯一的真神上帝是一致的，和基督徒崇拜的上帝是同一位。”<sup>24</sup>

#### 第四节 天即主宰一切的上帝

非基督徒学者姚新中和赵艳霞也总结了天的属性和特征：“天具有至高无上的权威：无限、全知、无所不包、无处不在。这样的信仰在远古中国成为宗教生活的中心。”<sup>25</sup> 我们可以看出，以上对天的特征的描述都指向天的主宰。

确实如此，天最重要的特征就是冥冥之中，主宰一切。天能主宰一切的特性，与保罗所描写的上帝的永能和神性相呼应。在罗马书一章 18-20 节，使徒保罗曾这样描述上帝的属性：

原来，神的忿怒，从天上显明在一切不虔不义的人身上，就是那些行不义阻挡真理的人。神的事情，人所能知道的，原显明在人心里，因为神已经给他们显明。自从造天地以来，神的永能和神性是明明可知的，虽是眼不能见，但藉着所造之物就可以晓得，叫人无可推诿。

<sup>23</sup> 《孟子·告子下》。

<sup>24</sup> 唐尧，《先贤之信》，95。

<sup>25</sup> Yao and Zhao, *Chinese Religion*, 55.

这里保罗告诉我们，人虽然用肉眼看不见上帝的永能和神性，但藉着上帝的创造还是可以晓得。在其他场合保罗还曾说到，虽然世人蒙昧无知，但只要人们愿意寻求上帝就可以通过揣摩而得到，因为上帝离人类并不遥远（参徒 17:27, 30）。神的永能和神性显明祂主宰一切，因此任何人没有任何借口可以为自己不义的行为加以辩护。同样地，在中国也有句话说，“人在做，天在看。”意思是说，任何一个中国人没有任何借口为自己不义的行为辩解。上帝的永能和神性显示出祂完全的主权；天察看每个中国人的一切行为，这样的主权显明天具有和上帝一样的永能和神性。由此我们可以看到，作为主宰，天与上帝果真遥相呼应。

再者，在圣经中，当人经历磨难、懊悔已过的时候，会向上帝呼求；在中国也有句话说，“穷则呼天，痛则呼娘。”的确，人到了走投无路的时候，自然只能向天呼求，就好比前言中所提及陷在罪中、无法自拔的那个年轻人。在他无法胜过罪、与罪挣扎的时候，他自然而然地向圣洁的、永恒的、大能的天求助。与罪相争是痛苦的。保罗曾生动地描绘这种痛苦：“我也知道在我里头，就是我肉体之中，没有良善。因为立志行善由得我，只是行出来由不得我。故此，我所愿意的善，我反不作；我所不愿意的恶，我倒去作。……我真是苦啊！谁能救我脱离这取死的身体呢？”（罗 7:18-19, 24）对于保罗，耶稣基督能救他（罗 7:25）；对于这位非基督徒年轻人，他只能向天求救。表面上他在求死，实则求生；表面上他祈求天杀死他，实际上他在求天帮助他不再犯罪。绝望之中，人能向谁求救呢？当然是上帝，因为唯有上帝给人盼望。中国人向天呼求，说明天就是上帝。国外学者卫德明也证实天就是上帝，是人们可以祈求的对象。<sup>26</sup>

还有，中国古代文人更是以文学的形式描述天的主权，表达对天的敬畏。例如，宋朝的儒家学者程颐在为《易经》作注时写到，“夫天，专言之则道也，天且弗违是也；分而言之，则以形体谓之天，以主宰谓之帝，……”<sup>27</sup>换言之，帝这个称谓更能彰显天主宰一切的权威，且帝是比天更具人格化的称谓。卫德明证实到：“天，是人格化的上帝，而帝人格化更强。祂虽与人接近，但仍大而可畏。”<sup>28</sup>

因此，我们看到天具有和帝几乎完全相同的意义；如上帝，二者皆主宰一切。然而，当宣教士为中国人翻译圣经的时候，没有

<sup>26</sup>Hellmut Wilhelm, *Heaven, Earth, and Man in the Book of Changes* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1997), 40.

<sup>27</sup>程颐，《易传》，卷一。

<sup>28</sup>Wilhelm, *Heaven, Earth, and Man in the Book of Changes*, 40.

一个人选择用天来代指上帝。关于上帝的汉语称谓，李唐（Li Tang）总结到：“在现代中文里，有三个词来代指上帝。神，通常用来形容诸神灵；上帝，照字义可翻译为‘天帝’；天主，即天之主，为天主教所采纳。上帝是更加处境化的称谓，然而景教文献却使用神这个词来指上帝。”<sup>29</sup> 景教（the Nestorians）过于处境化，将耶稣描绘成佛的形象，并放在莲花上。景教选择用神而不是天或帝来指代上帝，因为“神”这个词比较大众化。然而，这却容易误导人以为神（上帝）不过是诸多神祇中的一位。和天主教传教士一样，新教传教士使用“上帝”一词。“上帝”这个词比“神”要好，因为“上帝”这个词与天有更多相类似的地方。

可惜的是，目前在中国基督教被不少人认为是西方列强侵略中国的工具。因此，中国人普遍不喜欢甚至仇视基督教以及基督教的上帝。所以，一些基督徒在传福音的时候，尽量避免使用上帝一词。令人欣慰的是，没有中国人讨厌天这个词。天的观念与上帝是一致的，本文正是通过探讨天与上帝的关系力图证实这一点。

## 结 论

上帝是宣教的上帝，渴望人人都能进入天国（参提前 2:4；彼后 3:9）；上帝也是慈爱的上帝，渴望人人与祂关系亲密。诗篇十四篇 2 节告诉我们，“耶和华从天上垂看世人，要看有明白的没有，有寻求神的没有。”上帝不仅从天上垂看，祂还藉着普遍启示介入人类历史，让那寻求的可以找到祂。

如前所述，上帝曾藉着祭坛上的碑铭“未识之神”介入雅典人的历史，也以天和天命等概念介入中国历史。一方面，本文已经阐明天观何以是上帝与中国人进行沟通的最重要的普遍启示。这位天主宰着一切，并有意藉苦难塑造某些人的品格。因此，很多基督徒相信天就是圣经所启示的那一位上帝。

另一方面，前文已经证实，一些人出于无知或偏见，忽略或否认了上帝的普遍启示，所以将天视为偶像；还有一些人认为天是冷漠的造物主，其观念与万物有灵论者对上帝的认识相似。本文还论证了中国人的天观与任一种万物有灵者论的上帝观都不相符。天是具有人格的天，是可接近、易接近的，并不遥远、冷漠、不具人格。

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<sup>29</sup> Tang Li, *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and Its Literature in Chinese* (Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften: Peter Lang, 2002), 129.

概括说来，本文通篇旨在以充分的证据来说明天即是耶和  
华，即犹太教和基督教所信仰的那一位关心人间事物并介入人类  
历史的上帝。本文还对普遍启示的各个方面以及天的主宰性作了  
探讨。然而，很多范畴如天的圣洁属性、远古中国的祭天系统等  
等，本文皆未曾涉及，这些都值得进一步的探索和研究。

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Gerald H. Anderson, ed., *Witness to World Christianity: The International Association for Mission Studies, 1972-2012* (New Haven, CN: OMSC, 2012). xi + 227 pp.

This history of the International Association of Mission Studies (IAMS) encompasses essential developments and issues in contemporary Christian world missions. Promoting the scholarly study of practical topics related to missions and intercultural theology, the organization stands on the cutting edge of global missiological research. The IAMS is an interdenominational and interdisciplinary society with a worldwide network including 400 scholars and an executive committee with members from countries across every continent. Gerald Anderson is a Methodist minister and director Emeritus of the Overseas Ministries Study Center in New Haven, Connecticut. Anderson served as president of the American Society of Missiology (1973-75) and the IAMS (1982-85).

The first part of this work uncovers the origin and development of the IAMS. Anderson brings the reader along a journey beginning with the inaugural conference in Driebergen, Netherlands in 1972. Subsequent conferences have been held around the globe, including Germany, Costa Rica, the United States, India, Zimbabwe, Italy, Argentina, South Africa, Malaysia, Hungary and Canada. Since its founding, the IAMS has been devoted to a variety of missiological themes, among them being the issues of secularization, pluralism, political and economic order, spirituality, and migration. It has transformed from a largely Eurocentric, white, male organization, to what is today a multicultural association with a strong membership of women and a formidable reach to regions of the Global South.

The book includes three addenda from respected scholars in the field of world missions studies. The first is by John Roxborough, convener of the IAMS Documentation, Archives, and Bibliography study group (1992-2005). Roxborough's contribution centers on the archival history and resource credentials of the organization. The second addendum is by John M. Prior, coordinator of the Biblical Studies and Mission project since 2004. Prior concentrates on the relationship between biblical and intercultural scholarship. The final addendum by Christoffer H. Grundmann examines the IAMS Healing/Pneumatology study group. His assessment concludes that the nonacademic character of practices, such as healing and the discernment of spirits, has contributed to a new way of "nonpartisan" missiology, one that overcomes particular theological and cultural preferences.

IAMS owes its success to the strength, dedication, and creativity of the association's leadership. Although structural



weaknesses exist, including shifting allegiances among host communities and some academic institutions, there is an optimistic future for the organization. This is due in large part to the reach of the IAMS by virtue of its *Mission Studies Journal*, newsletter, and study groups, each committed to the critical study of world missions. The IAMS remains devoted to the task of “recording the present and recovering the past” (135). The result is an organization fit to exceed the expectations of contemporary missions and evangelistic initiatives. The IAMS can look forward to new opportunities as it advances global missions’ scholarship on both the local and international level.

*Witness to World Christianity* provides a window into the heart of an organization that is changing the course of missiological studies for the twenty-first century. The strength of this work is Anderson’s succinct, yet detailed overview, which draws on a host of first-hand periodical and archival sources. This book will appeal to scholars, students, and interested laypersons alike seeking a perspicacious, informed treatment of an organization on the frontlines of world mission’s research today.

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Samuel Lee, *A New Kind of Pentecostalism: Promoting Dialogue for Change* (Amsterdam: Foundation University Press, 2016). vi + 127pp. \$16.99 paperback.

Dr. Samuel Lee fulfills many roles. He is a pastor, sociologist, human rights activist, author and public speaker. In this informative and practical book, Lee is also manifestly and unashamedly, Pentecostal. In his Pentecostal zeal, however, he observed that some things were out of balance. He notes that the miraculous draws a lot of attention in contrast to education and integrity. Lee's concern is that Pentecostalism "needs new ways to approach the intriguing, perplexing, and multidimensional complexity of our world" (iv), hence his purpose for writing. In 127 pages, he writes for "everyone who has a passion for Pentecostalism and who are concerned about the current day condition of Pentecostalism" (vi).

Lee's book is divided into three parts as follows: Part One: The Desire for Balance, Part Two: Rethinking Theology and Part Three: Promoting Change.

There are fourteen chapters with each beginning with a quotation from a well-known figure. Lee observes how many in Pentecostalism have shifted into the area of experience and feeling. Such a shift has led many sincere believers to fall prey to being manipulated by a preacher and even passing judgment on a church service. He states that the 1906 Pentecostal revival was mainly experiential as opposed to theological and as Peter concluded the day of Pentecost with a strong, sound theological sermon, so a deeper understanding of the Scriptures combined with the experience of the Holy Spirit is necessary to counteract the growing emotionalism in the church.

The trait of exaggerating is a characteristic with particular reference to numbers and claims of miracles and healings. Lee rightly states that an exaggeration is a form of lying and therefore violates one of the Ten Commandments, namely not bearing false witness. It might have been helpful though if, additionally, he cited the appropriate Scripture reference.

Following on from exaggerated claims, Lee observes that a "performance-virus" has infected Western Pentecostalism whose symptoms are church membership counts, the size of church buildings and the preacher's performance and tithing (13). Again the author's honesty shines through together with his insightfulness in reminding the reader that Christians need to remember that they are first and foremost, human beings.

Surprisingly, the author devotes just four pages to chapter four, which addresses "Miracles, Signs & Wonders." It is the shortest chapter

in the book and yet Pentecostals are known for their belief and expectation of such phenomena. He rightly exposes that many people can become individualistic in their experience of the miraculous and so stresses the importance of seeing such in the context of an expression of God's love. Lee exposes two areas which exploit the miraculous, namely that of commercial gain through Christian books and television, and also through "witchcraft" where prayers are offered by Christians to God for marriage break-ups and even the death of enemies.

He concludes Part One in highlighting the trait of idolizing preachers and ministries and after summarizing, counsels the reader to approach Part Two with an open mind as the content may intimidate some.

Lee rightly points out that "religions of all types attempt to divide people" (43) and they require submission to their rules and contrasts how Jesus was different. However, he omits the mention of repentance in this context and leaves Jesus' words about adultery unqualified. By his admission, Lee is an advocate of "classical marriage" and its values but believes Pentecostals should not "create a judgmental atmosphere if our young generation makes such choices" in case they are "forced either to leave the church or to become hypocrites and lead secret lives" (46). It perhaps might have been helpful if he added a qualification which teaches that cohabitation is sin and damages one's testimony.

As a book about Pentecostalism, surprisingly only six pages are devoted to a chapter about the Holy Spirit. In this chapter, Lee introduces the concept of "Pneuma centrism" and admits his guilt of succumbing to it. However, he shows concern and provides practical wisdom as to a way forward away from Pneuma centrism while constructively criticizing Pentecostals and Pentecostalism.

Regarding interpreting Scripture, Lee rightly asserts that people can be inconsistent in their bible interpretation and states that he reads the Bible "only through the eyes of Jesus Christ" (66). Given this, however, Lee could be perceived as not advocating interpreting the Bible in its context/genre in the light of Christ. While offering useful insights into difficult Scriptures through examining them in the Aramaic text, he perhaps is deviating from the theme of the book. Also, there is a consensus that disputes the premise that the New Testament was written in Aramaic and then translated into Greek.

In chapter eleven, he gives an excellent explanation of culture, but perhaps digresses from the emphasis on Pentecostalism as the material is relevant and applicable to all Christians irrespective of their denominational background. The suggestion of rethinking vocabulary together with practical examples is something everyone could adapt to assist in promoting change. He concludes the book with a summary of

the material and with a "tentative statement of faith" which could be true of believers who don't identify themselves as Pentecostals.

Lee succeeds in fulfilling the book's purpose, but one could argue that the "new kind of Pentecostalism" he espouses isn't new, albeit new to many believers and churches. Not all Pentecostals have fallen prey to the excesses and errors mentioned, so this new kind of Pentecostalism is not new to them. It would have been helpful if he defined the term "carpet-time"(6) and perhaps reworded the statement that if Jesus was on earth today that "He would maintain fellowship with a Muslim" (35). Evidence perhaps should have been provided to substantiate the claim that "some European countries plan to forbid pastors and clergy to pray for the sick due to unreality about healing"(9).

In summary, Lee is insightful, practical and honest which together with interspersed testimony provides a pastoral perspective to his writing. Overall this is a very readable and relevant book which makes a contribution to challenge both Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals alike.

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