

# The World of Animism – A Biblical Worldview Perspective

*The belief in spirits and their effect on our world appears in just about every culture. Christianity should replace this anti-Christian worldview, but instead many Christians just incorporate it into their own belief system. Dr. Pat Zukeran contrasts these two belief systems.*



*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

## Worldview of Animism

From Genesis to the present, the biblical worldview has clashed with the worldview of animism. Animism (or folk religion) is a religion that sees a spirit or spiritual force behind every event, and many objects of the physical world carry some spiritual significance.

In most parts of the world, animism blends in with formal religions. Among followers of the major religions lie many animistic beliefs and practices. Animistic beliefs actually dominate the world. Most Taiwanese believe in the Chinese folk religions. Most Hindus and Muslims in Central and Southeast Asia, and most Buddhists in China and Japan combine their religion with various animistic beliefs and practices. In many parts of the world, Christianity has not displaced the local folk religion but coexists beside it in an uneasy tension.

The animistic worldview contains both the observed or physical world and the unseen or spirit world. There is no sharp distinction between the two realities; what happens in one affects the other. The seen or physical world consists of what we can see, feel, and experience. It includes forces of nature

and physical beings. In the seen world the earth plays a prominent role because it is viewed as a living entity and is often worshiped as Mother Earth. Nature is believed to be alive. Hills, caves, mountains, and lakes are often revered as sacred places. Animals may be embodiments of spirits. Many are worshiped as sacred, such as the cow and monkey in India.

Plants can also contain spirits and some are worshiped. Forests are seen as places where the spirits dwell. Trees like oaks, cedars, and ash are worshiped in Europe. In many parts of the world, there exist numerous subhuman beings that are supposed to live in lakes, forests, and caves. For example, in Europe they include mythical beings like trolls, gnomes, and fairies.

The unseen world of animism begins with the understanding of "mana," or the life force that permeates the entire universe. This power is impersonal and not worshiped. This sacred power concentrates more heavily in the deities, sacred people, places, or objects. This mana rules over all creation and is not controlled by the gods or man.

Also part of the unseen world is the Supreme God. Following him are a host of lesser gods who dwell in particular regions. Following the gods are the spirits, who often dwell in nature and are confined to a specific area. Then there are the spirits of the ancestors who continue to play a role with the living.

There also exist unseen forces that include supernatural powers like fate, cosmic moral order, the evil eye, magic, and witchcraft. There are also impersonal energy forces in objects that give the objects power. These objects are believed to give a person power to do good or evil.

In the Bible, God transforms the animistic views of Israel into a biblical view. He teaches them that the other gods are not gods at all (Isaiah 43:10). He condemns the use of magic,

witchcraft, and divination. He shows that suffering is not the result of the spirits or the gods but His sovereign act of bringing people back to Himself.

## **Themes in Animism**

Do you ever wonder why some Christians worship their ancestors? It derives from the first of several themes within the ancient religion of animism. The first of the themes is a community-centered life. The ancestors, the living, and the unborn are the center of existence. The clan life is the most important entity because an individual has meaning only in the context of a community.

The second theme is the role of the spirit world. Humans live in a world surrounded by supernatural beings and forces, most of which are hostile to humans. The worlds of the seen and the unseen are interconnected. For this reason, people spend their time seeking to appease the gods, the spirits, and the ancestors with offerings or bribes. Extreme care is taken to maintain the harmony between the two worlds. Since all created things are connected, a simple act like eating a fruit from the wrong tree may bring disaster.

Third is the focus on the present. The primary concern is with the here and now. People seek to deal with success and failure, power and knowledge needed to control life.

Fourth is the focus on power. People view themselves as constantly struggling against spirits, other humans, and supernatural forces. Everything that happens can be explained by powers at war. The goal is to attain power to control the forces around them.

Fifth is pragmatism. Animists are not interested in academic understanding of spiritual and scientific truth but in securing good, meaningful life and protection from evil. The test of a folk religion is, "does it work?" To achieve their

goals, most people will turn to several methods that may be contradictory in hopes that one will work. I was once speaking to a Chinese woman who was suffering from lung cancer. Although she attended church and prayed to the Lord for healing, she also visited the Chinese Buddhist temple seeking prayers for healing from the priests. For those in animistic cultures, in times of need people will beseech aid from various religions or gods to find a method that works.

Sixth is transformation and transportation. Things may not be what they appear to be. Spirits can take the form of animals or plants. Shamans in a trance believe they can travel to distant places and bring harm to an enemy. They also believe they can travel to the spirit world, find information, or retrieve lost souls.

Seventh, animism takes a holistic view of life. The obsession with invoking good luck and avoiding bad luck involves every aspect of life—from what you eat, to where you place furniture (such the current feng shui fad), to how you sleep. In Al Hambra, Los Angeles where there is a large population of Chinese, houses with the number “4” in the address do not sell. The number four, pronounced “shee” in Chinese, is the first letter in the word for death, so the number is considered very unlucky.[\[1\]](#)

Eighth is particularism. People are tied to their land. Each community has its own set of gods and spirits. The gods gave the people their land, and that is where the ancestors reside. In battles, victories and defeats are attributed to the power of the territorial gods.

Finally, fear plays a major role. In a world full of spirits, omens, and spells, life is rarely secure. Many see the world as a hostile and dangerous place filled with spirits and forces antagonistic to people. Seemingly mundane activities such as moving the wrong rock can bring potential disaster. People turn to their ancestors, gods and spirits for

protection.

The focus of the Christian life, in contrast, is the relationship believers have with God. God's relationship with mankind is based on grace and love. Since God is gracious, He does not need to be constantly appeased by believers. His laws are clearly revealed to us in the Bible. When we disobey, we may suffer the consequences of our sin or experience His discipline, which is always motivated by His love and intended to bring us to a right relationship with Him. In times of difficulty, we do not fear His wrath but He invites us to draw even closer to Him. 1 John 4:16-18 says, "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment because in this world we are like Him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear . . . ." Although believers encounter tragedy and suffering, we do not live in fear but in faith, trusting in the character of God.

## **Gods in Animism**

It may surprise you that most animistic religions teach that there exists one Supreme Being. He is often described as omniscient, eternal, beneficent, omnipotent and righteous. He is the creator, the moral lawgiver, punishes those who do evil, and blesses those who do good.

However, this being has distanced himself from man and cannot be known personally. Legends abound that he was once near but was angered with man and removed himself. He left men to their own devices and used lesser gods and spirits to do His will and serve as His ambassadors.

Therefore, most of the worship goes to the lesser gods and spirits who are in direct contact with humans. Anthropologist Wilhelm Schmidt studied numerous cultures and concluded that man's first religion was monotheism, which then corrupted into

polytheism.[{2}](#) This would concur with Paul's timeline of man's rejection of God that he lays out in Romans 1.

An example comes from the folk religion of China. Long before Confucianism, Taoism, or Buddhism, the Chinese worshiped Shang Ti, the Lord of heaven. He alone was worshiped until the Zhou dynasty, which began in 1000 B.C. From then on, only the emperor was allowed to pay homage to Shang Ti, and the knowledge of Shang Ti among the common people was lost. The worship-starved Chinese eventually embraced the religions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism that provided spiritual knowledge and worship.[{3}](#) Numerous stories like these abound throughout the world. In Korea, the supreme God is called Hananim. The Gedeo people of Ethiopia call Him Magano. Missionaries use this belief of a high God to point people to the God of the Bible.

Following the Supreme God is a host of lesser gods. These beings mediate between man and the Supreme Being, but must first be paid homage. Gods possess specific powers and are localized to a geographical area. The gods inhabit places such as rivers, mountains, forests, oceans, etc. Some gods exercise power over human affairs (business, marriage, death, etc.) other gods exercise powers over nature (storms, rain, etc.) Among the Hawaiians, Lono is the god of the oceans and controls the clouds and storms. Pele, the fire goddess, dwells in the volcanoes. Many still honor these gods in Hawaii today.

The biblical worldview teaches that a personal, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent God governs the universe (Colossians 1:16-17). He alone rules creation and there are no other gods besides him (Isaiah 43:10). The God of the Bible is not distant from man, but mankind has distanced ourselves from God. God remains involved in the affairs of this world, constantly pursuing men and women to receive His gift of grace and forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

# Spirits and Ancestors

Do you ever wonder if there are spirits in forests or other dark places? Can the dead communicate with the living? Animism holds to a belief that numerous spirits exercise their power over places where they dwell, such as mountains, streams, and rivers. Spirits have never inhabited human bodies, and since they can be either good or evil they must constantly be appeased. For example, the South Sea islanders ask forgiveness of the trees they cut down for canoes so that the spirits of the trees will not harm them.[\[4\]](#)

There also exist legendary half-divine beings. Some are humans who became gods. Some gods are thought to have become human. For example, the pharaoh of Egypt and the emperor of Japan were believed to be descendants of the sun god. Many teach these beings had supernatural birth and did not die, but vanished into the sky. Many are believed to have taught humans valuable skills like making fire, canoes, houses, planting fruits, etc.

Important in animism is the remembrance of the ancestors. Animism teaches that people possess immortal souls. At death the soul is free to wander near the grave, travel the earth, or enter the world of the spirits. The spirits of the ancestors participate in the daily lives of family members. Neglecting to honor them has severe consequences. Souls of the departed who did not live fulfilled lives or died tragic deaths become ghosts. Ghosts search for bodies to inhabit and often bring harm.

At death, one enters the realm of the ancestors who maintain a relationship with the family. Ancestors remain deeply interested in the family they began. They care for, protect, and punish those who seek to do harm.

Ancestors are revered for several reasons. First, as the founders of the family, they remain interested in the care of

the family. Second, they have answered the question of what follows death, so they can help the living through dreams, necromancers, and visions. Third, some have accomplished great achievements, which must be celebrated. Fourth, animists believe they protect the family. Fifth, they function as mediators between God and the family.

One's happiness in the afterlife depends on the care given by one's descendants. Anyone banished from a family or tribe in essence becomes extinct with no one to remember or care for them.

As Christians, we agree with the animists that there is an immaterial soul that exists beyond the grave. We also place the family as a high priority. One of the Ten Commandments is for children to honor their father and mother. However, no departed souls remain on earth. According to Hebrews 9:27 upon death, one is immediately in heaven or hell. Secondly, the dead do not have contact with the living. In Luke 16, the rich man who was suffering in hell sought a way to communicate with his living family to warn them of their fate. However, he was not able to communicate in any way nor could the living communicate with him. Christians celebrate and honor the memory of our loved ones, but we do not worship them nor seek to appease their spirits. We wait with joy and anticipation in knowing we will be united again in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Basic Practices in Animism**

In animism there are numerous taboos or prohibitions. Prohibitions are made to preserve the harmony between the spiritual world and physical world. Places or people where the life force is concentrated are protected. Myriads of taboos exist and violation of them can result in cursing of a community and must be atoned for by sacrifices.

Second, there are sacred places. Sacred places of worship



exist to commune with the spiritual world. These are places where sacred power is concentrated. In Haiti there is a sacred tree where a pact with the devil was signed over 200 years ago by the animistic witch doctors. These witch doctors were most displeased when Christian pastors recently prayed over the tree and successfully commanded the spirits to leave it.

Third, there are sacred things. A whole host of objects possess power and are potentially dangerous. Stones are often believed to possess sacred power. This is one reason you can easily find crystal jewelry and other semi-precious stones for sale in catalogs and stores. Certain plants and insects are believed to be sacred and taboo. Carved images are believed to possess the spirit of divinities.

Fourth, there are sacred actions. Worship includes sacrifices of animals or plants to the deities. The priests or shamans perform the sacred rites. Omens play an essential role; this is the origin of saying "God bless you" after someone sneezes, to protect the spirits from jumping into the suddenly vulnerable person. Signs in the heavens and certain reptiles or animals encountered in a day (such as a black cat crossing one's path portending bad luck) may predict one's future.

Fifth, there are sacred words. There are many oaths, curses, and blessings. The spells of both white and black witchcraft are sacred words. Words are charged with sacred power if uttered by a priest. Such words possess the sacred power, mana.

Sixth, there are sacred persons. Witches use their powers for good and evil. They can use their powers to protect communities from enemies. They can use their power to communicate with the gods and spirits. In most societies, witchcraft and sorcery are most feared. Witches are believed to travel great distances in short periods, kill at a distance, and master demons. Witches have supernatural powers to inflict harm on others. They can cast spells on others.

They can inject foreign bodies into a victim, causing illness. Witches have the ability to communicate with dead spirits. Many societies believe they can transform themselves into animals.

Then there is the shaman or the medicine man. He can cure sicknesses. He directs sacrificial rites and escorts souls to the other world. At times he can leave his body and observe events from a distance. He is born into the family or earns the job by passing tests and rituals. There is also the sacred king. Then there are sub-humans such as trolls and water spirits. Finally there are “little people,” such as leprechauns.

Seventh, there are sacred rituals that must be performed regularly. The head of the family performs some; others require the expertise of the priests.

Eighth, there is the practice of magic and divination. The art of casting spells and communicating with the spirit world are reserved for the priests.

The Christian must be aware when his practices are influenced by animism. Often many feel that saying “amen” or wearing a cross brings protection. Others use sacred stones or believe performing a ritual will bring them fortune. A Christian has direct access to God through Christ and does not need to rely on another person of a sacred office. Also, Christians have all we need in Christ and do not need powers from the spiritual realm. Christ has given us all we need to overcome.

## **Overcoming Animism**

As our study has revealed, fear is the overriding disposition among those in animistic religions. There are several reasons for this. First, one is never really sure if a taboo has been broken and the gods, the spirits, or the ancestors have been angered. Should one of these beings become angered, they may

inflict horrific punishments. In Hawaii, there are several frightening stories about the night marchers, the spirits of ancient warriors who march along a sacred path each night. It is believed that some people have been killed because they were in the path of the night marchers.

A second reason for the prevalence of fear is that animism includes some of the most feared practices known to man. Sorcery, magic and voodoo are some of the ancient arts that strike terror in the hearts of people. It is a frightening thing to know that a priest or witch has placed a curse upon you.

Throughout the Bible and even today, believers continually encounter animistic practices and thinking. In times of crisis, many young Christians will pray to God, but also seek help from their animistic religion.

Among Christians, animistic beliefs will be displaced only when Christians transform their minds with God's word and free themselves from the life of fear in animism. Transformation takes place when Christians understand the Bible explains the true nature of the universe. First, in contrast to the many temperamental gods in animism, the Bible teaches that there is only one God. Isaiah 43:10 states, "'You are my witnesses,' declares the Lord, 'and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.'" There is no pantheon of gods—only the one true God, and all others are false gods.

Second, in the Bible God forbids the animistic practices of witchcraft, necromancy, magic, and worship of foreign spirits. Deuteronomy 18:10 commands, "Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination, sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who consults the dead." Those who practice these arts are entertaining spirits who are opposed to God and

seek the destruction of all people.

Third, Christians do not need to live in fear of hostile spirit beings and spells. Christ, who loves His people, has triumphed over all. Colossians 2:15 says that He “disarmed the powers and authorities, [making] a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”

Christ has brought into submission all authorities under His rule. Not only that, nothing enters into our life until it first filters through His loving hand. God’s hand of protection shelters His people. David wrote in the Psalms, “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God whom I trust’” (Ps. 91:1). When tragedy strikes, Christians understand that its purpose is not to punish believers, but to teach us new things about God and ourselves, refining our character to make us more like Him. Christians can be freed from a life of fear and find joy in a life of faith in Christ.

## Notes

1. Paul Hiebert, Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1999), 157.
2. Norman Anderson. *The World’s Religion*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 38.
3. Don Richardson, *Eternity in their Hearts*. (Ventura, CA.: Regal Press, 1984), 62-70.
4. Hiebert, 55-56.

## Bibliography

- Anderson, Norman. *The World’s Religions*. Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1975.
- Beckwith, Martha. *Hawaiian Mythology*. Honolulu, HI.: University of Hawaii Press, 1976.

- Halverson, Dean. *The Compact Guide to the World Religions*. Minneapolis: Harvest House Publishers, 1996.
- Hiebert, Paul, Shaw, Daniel, and Tienou, Tite. *Understanding Folk Religion*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1999.
- Noss, John. *Man's Religions*. New York: Macmillan Company, 1968.
- Parrinder, Geoffrey. *World Religions*. New York: Facts on File Publications, 1983.
- Richardson, Don. *Eternity in their Hearts*. Ventura, CA.: Regal Press, 1984.

©2002 Probe Ministries

---

# **Jehovah's Witnesses: Witnessing to the Witnesses – Understanding and Responding to False Doctrine**

*Dr. Zukeran provides us with a concise summary of the key doctrinal issues in the beliefs taught by Jehovah's Witnesses. Understanding these problems held by their followers in areas such as the resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and false prophecies, prepares us to be more effective witnesses for Christ to members of their faith.*

## **History of the Watch Tower**

One of the most aggressive and fastest growing cults is the Jehovah's Witnesses. Today they have a worldwide organization that numbers about 3.5 million members operating in 205 countries. Several factors account for this rapid growth. The

first is their zealous door-to-door evangelism. Second, we Christians have failed to make a solid defense of our faith against their attacks when they have come to our door. The result is the Witnesses continue unchallenged in the propagation of their organization and deceive many. Third, the rise of the cults are a fulfillment of the prophetic warnings given by Jesus and the Apostles.

In this essay I want to look at the beliefs of the Witnesses and then give the reader practical witnessing strategies. The history of the Jehovah's Witnesses begins with the founder of the organization Charles Taze Russell. He was a member of the Congregational Church who came to reject the doctrine of hell and eternal punishment. In 1870, with no formal education, he began a Bible society which eventually named him pastor. In 1884, he founded Zion's Watchtower and Tract Society in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which is now the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society headquartered in Brooklyn, New York. Since then they have mushroomed into an organization which produces more literature in one year than the Christian and Catholic churches combined. And, of all the cults, their missionary forces are the most well trained in evangelism.

Witnesses deviate from biblical Christianity in several areas. I will discuss some of their major doctrinal errors. First, like all the cults, they deny the Trinity. They believe there is one God, Jehovah. Jesus, is actually Michael the Archangel, the first of God's creation, who became flesh at the incarnation. After the resurrection, He returned to heaven as Michael the Archangel.(1) The Holy Spirit is not God but an active force much like electricity or fire.(2)

Second, Witnesses deny the bodily resurrection of Christ, but instead believe He was raised as a spirit and manifested Himself several times in different materialized bodies.(3)

Third, they deny the existence of hell and eternal punishment, but believe in total annihilation after death. Only the elite

ruling class, the 144,000, are allowed to go to heaven. The faithful Jehovah's Witnesses remain unconscious after death till they are resurrected in the Millennium. Those who are not in the organization are annihilated after death.(4)

Fourth, Witnesses have a works-oriented salvation. Salvation is not based upon a relationship with Christ, but found in the organization. One must serve the society, and depending on one's faithfulness and absolute obedience, one **may** be saved.(5)

Fifth, they believe that Jesus returned invisibly in 1914 and established His throne in heaven. At Armageddon, God will destroy all evil, and abolish all the world's governments, and establish a new Paradise on earth. Then the living and resurrected Jehovah's Witnesses will inherit Paradise earth. The 144,000 mentioned earlier will rule with Jesus. At this time all unbelievers who have died will be raised (with some exceptions) and will study under the Witnesses during the Millennium, a period of a thousand years. Studying with them will be the unbelievers who have survived Armageddon. After the thousand years, their faith will be tested because God will release Satan from the abyss. At that point all unbelievers will have to choose between Satan or Jehovah. Those who reject Jehovah will be annihilated.(6)

Clearly the doctrines of the Jehovah's Witnesses deviate in critical ways from sound biblical principles. Next, I want to discuss approaches to evangelizing Jehovah's Witnesses.

## **False Prophecies of the Watch Tower**

One of the most effective ways to evangelize Jehovah's Witnesses is to destroy their faith in the Society. Remember, salvation is found only in this organization. The Watch Tower Society is seen as the spokesman for God. If you can show Witnesses the serious errors of the organization, they will begin to have doubts and questions. This can sometimes lead

them to leave the Society.

Attacking the Society's record of false prophecy can cause JWs to question the organization. This approach is effective because they claim to have the true understanding of the end times. If we can show them that the organization has been constantly wrong in the area of prophecy, this will certainly make an impact. When the Jehovah's Witnesses show up at your door again, begin first by asking them, "Are you prophets of God?" Some will say, "Yes." Others may say, "We are prophets in a sense." You must make it clear there is no such thing as "a prophet in a sense." There are only true prophets and false prophets. Some may deny being prophets. If so, show them a copy of the April 1, 1972, *Watch Tower* article on page 197, which states clearly that they are prophets.

Second, define clearly what makes a true prophet and a false prophet using Deuteronomy 18:20-22. A true prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah and predicts future things which come to pass. A false prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah and predicts future things which do not come to pass. Make sure they understand this, for this is the most critical step.

Third, ask them, "Is there an organization that fits the character of a false prophet?" That's when you say, "Let's take a look at the Watch Tower Organization." Have handy copies of the articles mentioned here. The 1889 issue, "The Time is at Hand," page 101 states, "The battle of the great day of God Almighty (Rev. 16:14), which will end in A.D. 1914, with the complete overthrow of earth's present rulership, is already commenced." This 1914 prediction of Christ's return never came true.

Then the *Watch Tower* predicted that Christ would return in 1925. The 1918 issue of, "Millions Now Living Will Never Die," p. 89 states, "Therefore we may confidently expect that 1925 will mark the return of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the faithful prophets of old, particularly those named by the



apostle in Hebrews 11 to the condition of human perfection.” This proved to be another false prophecy.

The *Watch Tower* made a third prophecy of the return of Christ; this one was to occur in 1975. The August 15, 1968, issue of, *Why Are You Looking Forward to 1975?*, p. 494, predicted the return of Christ in 1975. Once again the Witnesses were shown to be false prophets. If the Witnesses don't believe these articles are real, tell them to look them up in their church's library.

Another interesting prophecy is found on page 154 of their book *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*. Here they state, “Some of the generation living in 1914 will see the end of the system of things and survive it.” Most of the 1914 generation are dead, and the few remaining are very old. In just a few years, the *Watch Tower* will again have another false prophecy. When presented clearly, the record of the *Watch Tower's* false prophecies is a very effective tool in witnessing to JWs.

(A free PDF file of copies of these false prophecies, as well as helpful information on the invention of the word “Jehovah,” is available here: [JW-False\\_Prophecies](#))

## The Name of God

Another effective avenue of witnessing to the Witnesses is in the name of God. Jehovah's Witnesses state that God's true name is “Jehovah.” They say the term “God,” is merely a title, and that the real name for God is “Jehovah.” In fact they go so far as to say that unless one calls on the true name of God, “Jehovah,” one cannot be saved.(7)

Let's take a real close look at the name “Jehovah” and see if it is in fact the true name of God. The term “Jehovah” is actually a false reading of the Hebrew pronunciation of God, or YAHWEH. Allow me to explain where the word “Jehovah” comes

from. The words in the Hebrew Old Testament contained no vowels. The words were constructed of consonant letters only. The Scribes knew what vowels to use in the pronunciation of the words by the construction of the consonants, the context, and memory. It was written this way until the fifth century when the Masoretes added the vowels under the consonants in their version of the Old Testament known as the Masoretic Text.

The name of God in the Old Testament spelled YHWH, was considered holy, and was not to be read aloud. Instead, when the Hebrews came upon YHWH, they would say ADONAY, which means "Lord." In order to indicate this substitution, the Massoretes placed the vowels of ADONAY or the English equivalent of e, o, and a underneath the consonants of YHWH. Later some Christian translators mistakenly combined the vowels of ADONAY with the consonants of YHWH producing the word "Jehovah." Now the term is recognized to be a late hybrid form never used by the Jews. That's the origin of the word "Jehovah." Let's now look at what other scholars say about the name "Jehovah."

*Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*: "Jehovah" – False reading of the Hebrew YAHWEH.(8)

*Encyclopedia Americana*: "Jehovah" – erroneous form of the name of the God of Israel.(9)

*Encyclopedia Britannica*: The Masoretes who from the 6th to the 10th century worked to reproduce the original text of the Hebrew Bible replaced the vowels of the name YHWH with the vowel signs of Adonai or Elohim. Thus the artificial name Jehovah came into being.(10)

*The Jewish Encyclopedia*: "Jehovah" – a mispronunciation of the Hebrew YHWH the name of God. This pronunciation is grammatically impossible.(11)

*The New Jewish Encyclopedia*: It is clear that the word Jehovah is an artificial composite.(12)

According to the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, p. 680, vol. 7, "the true pronunciation of the tetragrammaton YHWH was never lost. The name was pronounced Yahweh. It was regularly pronounced this way at least until 586 B.C., as is clear from the Lachish Letters written shortly before this date."

Therefore, for Jehovah's Witnesses to insist Jehovah is the true name of God and that one is saved only if he calls on that name, is an error. When Witnesses appear at your door explain to them the name "Jehovah" and read what the scholars say about Jehovah. Also remember, God uses many names for Himself such as, King of Kings, the Lion of Judah, the Alpha and the Omega, and others. When JW's realize what the authoritative sources have to say, especially the encyclopedia references, they will begin to realize the need to take a serious look at this error in the organization.

## **The Bodily Resurrection of Christ**

A third subject area for effective witnessing to Witnesses is the bodily resurrection of Christ. Witnesses believe that Christ's crucified body was disintegrated by Jehovah never to exist again. Accordingly, Jesus was raised as a spirit who then materialized and appeared in several different fleshly bodies as the angels had done. Indeed, it was in this form that He appeared to His disciples; i.e., He wasn't in a human body; He just appeared to be human. He ascended into heaven as a spirit and once again became Michael the Archangel.(13) This doctrine can be easily disproved.

First, in Luke 24:36-43, Jesus clearly states in verse 39 that He is not a spirit but a man of flesh and bone. He even ate food to prove that He was not a spirit but had a physical body. In John 20:24-27, Jesus shows Thomas His wounds. Jesus is clearly demonstrating to His disciples that the body previously on the cross had been resurrected. If Jesus had a different body than the one on the cross, He would have been deliberately deceiving the disciples. Ask the Witness, "Would

Jesus deliberately deceive His disciples into believing something that was not true?"

Next, turn to some passages where Jesus predicts the resurrection of His body. In John 2:19-21 Jesus says, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." See Acts 2:26-27, another prophecy of the Messiah's bodily resurrection. Clearly the prophecies and Jesus' appearances prove a bodily resurrection.

Witnesses cite 1 Peter 3:18 and 1 Cor. 15:44-50 to back up their belief. In 1 Peter 3:18 we read, "Christ died once and for all... he being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the spirit." This verse does not prove Jesus is a spirit. This verse says that Jesus was raised in the Spirit and by the Spirit of God who gives life. Romans 8:11 states that the Holy Spirit was involved in raising Jesus from the dead. Jesus was not raised *as* a spirit but *by* the power of the Holy Spirit.

According to 1 Cor. 15:50, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Since Jesus is in heaven, Witnesses say He must be a spirit.(14) They are correct in saying that the earthly body cannot enter heaven. However, when Jesus rose, He had a glorified body (Luke 24:39). Therefore, He can dwell in heaven because of His glorified state. According to 1 Cor 15:39, "All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another... There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies." Christ's glorified body allows Him to travel in the earthly and heavenly dimensions. Some verses indicate that Christ exists in heaven in bodily form. "For in him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" Colossians 2:9. The verb "dwells" in the Greek is *katoikei*, and is in the present tense. In other words, Jesus has a glorified body in heaven, the one that was resurrected. Note also 1 Timothy 2:5, "There is one God and one mediator, the man Christ Jesus." The verb "is," is a present tense verb also. How can Jesus be a man if He is Michael the Archangel? Seeing these errors may prompt them to seek the truth.

# The Holy Spirit

A fourth avenue of effective evangelism with Jehovah's Witnesses is the subject of the deity of the Holy Spirit. As I mentioned earlier, the Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the Holy Spirit is not a person because they see the Holy Spirit as a force—much like electricity or fire. Here is what Jehovah's Witnesses say about the Holy Spirit.

In their book *You Can Live Forever In Paradise on Earth*, they state, "As for the 'Holy Spirit,' the so-called third person of the Trinity, we have already seen that this is not a person but God's active force." (15)

In their magazine *Why Should You Believe in the Trinity?* they state, "To a certain extent it (Holy Spirit) can be likened to electricity, a force that can be adapted to perform a great variety of operations." (16)

Here are some verses that are effective in proving the deity of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 5 Ananias and Sapphira lied to the church about the amount they sold their land for and the amount they gave to the church. Peter confronts them on this issue and states in 5:3, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit...?" Peter later states in the next verse, "You have not lied to men but to God." Here the Holy Spirit is called "God" with a capital G both in our Bibles and in the Witnesses' Bible. Another interesting question to ask Witnesses is, "Can you lie to a force like fire or electricity?" The answer is "No." You can only lie to an intelligence, a person.

In Acts 13:2 the Holy Spirit speaks, "While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'" Ask the Witness, "When was the last time electricity or fire spoke to you?" It is obvious only an intelligent person can communicate in language.

Ephesians 4:30 states, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." Any logical person should realize you can only grieve a living being. Ask a Jehovah's Witness, "How can you grieve or bring sorrow to an impersonal force like electricity?"

When you put all these facts together, the fact that the Holy Spirit is called God, He can be lied to, He speaks, and He can be grieved, the evidence shows that the Holy Spirit is a person, not an inanimate force. When presented clearly, I have not met any Jehovah's Witness who have been able to refute these verses.

God bless and good Witnessing!

## Notes

1. *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1982), p. 39.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
3. *Reasoning From the Scriptures* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1985), pp.333-36.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 76-80.
5. *Live Forever*, pp. 350-55.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 170-84.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-44.
8. "Jehovah," *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1973 ed.
9. *Encyclopedia Americana*, vol. 16., 1972 ed.
10. "Yahweh," *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 12, 1993 ed.
11. "Jehovah," *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 7, 1904 ed.
12. "Jehovah," *The New Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1962 ed.
13. *Live Forever*, pp. 143-45.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 143-46.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
16. *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1989), p. 20.

---

# Christianity, Zen and the Martial Arts

## Zen and the Martial Arts

In the beginning of the movie *Enter the Dragon* Bruce Lee admonishes his young disciple to feel, not think! He wants to see “emotional content,” not anger, in developing his practice. Technique is like a finger pointing a way to the moon, but we must not focus on the finger or we will miss the heavenly glory. Lee sends his pupil away after several slaps on the head, convinced he has mastered the lesson.



This scene illustrates the close connection between the martial arts and Zen Buddhism. Lee’s lesson was entirely Zen in approach. Its object was the perfection of a kick technique with enthusiasm; a mere mechanical performance was insufficient. The student must feel his art as well as accurately execute it. This means the technique should be as natural and unconscious as breathing. It must become second nature. On the other hand, Lee’s object lesson was not really about kicking but feeling as a means to enlightenment or nirvana, a state of realization that the self does not exist.

But does practicing the martial arts mean we must also adopt Zen Buddhist practice as well? Can we separate the martial arts from Zen practice and belief and embrace a Christian approach? In order to do this we must first distinguish the goal of Zen from the martial arts and then see how the martial

arts may be practiced from a Christian perspective.

Zen believes that words cannot adequately convey meaning. They are only the sign posts on a map and not the destination, or the finger pointing to the moon but not the moon itself. Zen relies on flashes of insight connected to feelings or intuition. Zen adopts the Taoist view in world religions asserting that "he that knows does not speak and he that speaks does not know." This means that the truth or enlightenment they are seeking cannot be expressed in words. It cannot be found in a book such as the Bible in Christianity, the Koran in Islam, or the Torah in Judaism, or even the sutras found in other forms of Buddhism, but must be experienced. They have little place for theory, but stress action and encounter with the practical world. Buddha mind transmits only to Buddha mind. They do not just talk about Nirvana but viscerally pursue it.

Zen means a way of meditation, a method for attaining enlightenment, not gradually as in other sects of Buddhism, but suddenly through shock and illogic. Zen practitioners are the shock troops of Buddhism. Zen monks are known for their acts of irreverence by burning Buddhist scriptures or defacing statues of Buddha, all designed to demonstrate their protest against theoretical learning. Truth is found in ordinary life and the practical as illustrated by the movie the *Karate Kid* whose main protagonist must sand the floor or paint the fence and wax the car before he can learn to throw a punch. Karate was not something that could be learned from a book.

## **Zen in America**

In their practicality Zen adherents are not unlike Americans, which explains Zen's popularity in the United States as part of the counter-culture movement of the 1960s. Americans do not like theory, metaphysics, and laborious arguments, but are practical, to the point; action oriented, not cerebral.



Americans are pithy in their word usage and prefer axioms and pearls of wisdom succinctly stated as opposed to the long winded arguments of scholars and professors.

Zen relies on dialectical thinking or paradox to frustrate traditional logic in order to shock its followers into realization. Zen uses the *koan*, an insoluble riddle that can only be understood through persistent contemplation and application to one's life. For example, a famous koan asks, "what is the sound of one hand clapping?" The smart-alecky response of snapping your fingers together like Bart Simpson will earn you a smack on the head or a rap with a bamboo stick from the master and a seat at the back of the class.

Zen does not emphasize detachment from life, as earlier Buddhism did, but the embrace of life. People learn not by retreat but through immersion. There is no sacred and secular distinction as in traditional religions, a point a monk may prove by burning a statue of the Buddha and declaring, "there are no holy images."[\[1\]](#)

The koan is learned by intuition and cannot be articulated in words. Koans are not meant to have strict logical answers you can verbalize, but only understand for yourself in meditation. Pointing to a flag waving in a monastery, the monk says, "What is moving, the flag or the wind?" The answer is neither; the mind is moving.[\[2\]](#)

Zen appealed to soldiers in Japan and was adopted by the military creed known as Bushido where it was mixed with the martial arts around AD 1300.[\[3\]](#) It is this Japanese version that is most familiar to Americans. However, Zen originates with the Indian sage Bodhidharma who brought the message that cannot be spoken to China in AD 520.[\[4\]](#) In Zen we see a clear connection between Taoism, the ancient Chinese religion, and Hinduism. Both believe in a similar view of God as ultimate reality or the impersonal principle of the universe. In popular culture we know this as "the force" from *Star Wars*,

the active energy of the universe that animates all things. In theological studies we call this pantheism or the belief that all things are God.

## Separating Zen and the Martial Arts

Legendary history says Bodhidharma brought the martial arts with him in the spread of Zen across China, but modern scholarship notes that the martial arts were practiced in China prior to the coming of Bodhidharma.[{5}](#) The founders of the famous Shaolin monastery were probably military men who retired to monastic life in AD 497, and most monks came from the general population where the martial arts were already practiced before the spread of Buddhism. Monasteries were sources of wealth in ancient China and required defending. The martial arts scholar Donn Draeger also notes that the martial arts were established in Japan prior to the acceptance of Buddhism, and the joining of these two practices represents a modern innovation.[{6}](#) These historical facts lead to the conclusion that the martial arts were practiced centuries before the arrival of Zen.

The martial arts or fighting arts have a long and diverse history in ancient China, India, and Greece that certainly precedes Zen or the founding of Shaolin and long predates the Samurai by thousands of years. These arts include hand to hand fighting, wrestling, boxing, and weapons use such as sword fighting and even gladiatorial combat training.

There is certainly a synthesis created between Zen and the martial arts in Shaolin and later in the Code of the Samurai, but the fighting arts of all kinds precede Zen. Historically speaking there is no intrinsic connection between Zen and the martial arts. People practiced these arts before Zen and will continue to practice them without Zen today.

Also, philosophically speaking there is no necessary

connection between Zen and the martial arts. Zen is a method to achieve enlightenment through shock and illogic that awakens followers into the realization of unity of essence with ultimate reality, which means emptying and loss of self. The martial arts, on the other hand, were developed for the practical reason of self-defense, sport and warfare.

Given the austerity, paradox, practicality, and composure of Zen disciples in the face of death, the warrior appears naturally attracted to it as a philosophy. Draeger points out that Zen contributed to the fighting technique of the Samurai by helping him empty his mind of all distractions and prepare him for the rigors of military life. It enabled him to transcend mere physical technique.[\[7\]](#) However, there is nothing intrinsic to either system that makes their practice necessary to each other, any more than fencing and the fighting techniques of the knights of the Middle Ages must involve Christianity. Zen's contribution to the martial arts is a convenience or incidental and not a philosophical necessity. This means the two can be logically and practically separated without harm or inconsistency to either system. It is possible to engage in martial arts without eastern religious philosophy. What Christians are responsible for, is to find martial arts instructors who teach the techniques without the Zen aspect.

## **Christianity and Zen**

A basic principle of apologetics is finding the common ground between two different systems. This includes similar things such as beliefs and morals. This allows for a conversation and friendship to develop. Do not underestimate the power of friendship and empathy. In the final analysis we are not about winning arguments, or breaking bones for that matter, but winning people, individuals whom God loves; the hardest hearts can be softened by a little kindness and understanding.

There may be many points of contact between Christianity and Zen such as love, truth, realism, and even paradox, but the one I find most interesting is individualism. Both beliefs place a strong emphasis on individuality and respect for individual dignity in terms of self-discipline and self-defense, a common ground where both Christians and Zen Buddhists alike share their interests in the martial arts. And we must make it clear that the martial arts are not the sole province of Zen teachers. Christians and Zen Buddhists simply have a common interest in these techniques for the purpose of self-growth, exercise, and sport. One need not be either a Buddhist or Christian to perform the martial arts, but both may use them for their own purposes.

The second principle of apologetics is to define the differences between the two systems and seek for the resolution in Christ. There are many differences between Zen and Christianity. Zen is a faith that seeks enlightenment through self-realization that there is no self. Christianity does not pursue enlightenment, but salvation. Buddhism believes that the individual self is an illusion, but Christianity believes the self is very real and very sinful. Christianity seeks to reconcile the self to a personal God through Jesus Christ. Christianity does seek to empty the old sinful self and replace it with a new self made in the image of Christ. This is not accomplished through works or meditation or following the Eightfold Path, but strictly by faith.

Buddhists do not believe in a personal all powerful God, but an impersonal force. Christians believe in a personal creator God who stands outside of the created world, making reconciliation impossible in terms of human effort. Buddhism stresses the importance of human works, discipline and right attitude and actions to achieve Nirvana. Christianity says salvation is impossible unless God saves us. Buddhism wants to empty the mind and escape the world of change. Christianity

wants to save the world for the glory of God and fill the mind with his word.

“The Buddha” means “one who is awakened,” which suggests that his title is self-earned and self-appointed. All that the Buddha accomplished has come from “within,” from his own abilities and merit.

“The Christ” means “the chosen one,” which suggests that his title was given to him and not earned. It comes from grace and from “without” or “outside” of him. One man leads to a system of works and the other to a system of grace. This point should never be confused.

## **Christianity and the Martial Arts**

The primary problem for Christians in approaching the martial arts is violence. The martial arts are fighting techniques that can be used for several purposes: the most obvious is self-defense, then exercise, and finally sport.

We approach these techniques with the same Christian principle that we use in our approach to any other subject: we are free in Christ! Paul declares that we are saved in Christ and the world is ours. “For all things belong to you, whether . . . the world or life or death or things present or things to come: all things belong to you and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God” (1 Cor. 3:21-23). This means we use the gifts and talents at our disposal not for self-glorification but for the glory of God. Remember the first principle of Christian love: “Love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength” (Matt. 22: 37). Practice the martial arts with a commitment that reflects love for God. “We do all things for the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Let the two greatest commandments guide your behavior: love God and your neighbor as yourself.

These principles do include self-defense. It is not unloving

to defend yourself or an innocent person from an unjust attack. Self-defense has been an accepted point in Christian theology for centuries. This principle has been part of “just war thinking” and simply means Christians are justified under certain conditions to defend themselves and innocent people against aggressive parties who will take advantage of them. In fact, not to defend ourselves or the innocent through inaction when we are capable of intervening to stop or prevent assault is equally considered as wrong as the assault itself.

The martial arts present a much more suitable and even peaceful alternative to self-defense than say a handgun, whose ease of use can be lethal. In the martial arts one has the advantage of training and discipline that act as a hedge to immature and reckless behavior. It takes years to learn these skills and with it one is taught self-control, discipline, and values, especially the value of human life.

What is completely unacceptable is the idea of training remorseless killing machines, like the sensei from the *Karate Kid* movie who taught his pupils to crush their opponents and “show no mercy.” Such a view will only lead to your own destruction. For it is not without reason that Jesus said, “Those who live by the sword will die by the sword” (Matt. 26:52). But, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” (Matt. 5: 7). Mercy is the hallmark of the Christian. We learn in order to serve, just as Jesus said, “The Son of Man has not come to destroy life but to save it” (Luke 9:56). Those pursuing martial arts should use their skills in the service of life to achieve discipline and protection and to offer themselves as role models of dignity and responsibility to the younger generation.

## Notes

1. John Lewis, *Religions of the World Made Simple*, rev. ed., (New York: Doubleday, 1968), 49.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 50.

4. Houston Smith, *The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 128.

5. Salvatore Canzonieri, "History of Chinese Martial Arts: Jin Dynasty to the Period of Disunity." *Han Wei Wushu* (February-March 1998), 3 (9); Ibid., "The Emergence of the Chinese Martial Arts." *Han Wei Wushu* (23).

6. Donn F. Draeger, *Modern Bujutsu and Budo* (New York: Weatherhill, 1974), 128.

7. Donn Draeger and Robert W. Smith, *Comprehensive Asian Fighting Arts* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, LTD, 1980), 95.

© 2011 Probe Ministries

---

## Avatar: New Technology, Old Message

James Cameron's hit movie *Avatar* presents dazzling new animation technology and special effects yet an old message and a familiar story: when mankind embraces the pantheist worldview, there will result a oneness with nature. This enlightened union will lead to a life of peace and paradise upon the planet. The title of the movie itself gives its message away—an avatar in Hinduism is an incarnation or the descent of a deity to earth.

One of the most popular gods to appear as an avatar is Vishnu, the preserver god and one of the three main gods in the Hindu

Pantheon. There are ten famous manifestations of Vishnu in the sacred writings of Hinduism [Jonathan Smith, ed. *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995), 96.].

In this movie the alien race, the blue-skinned Na'Vi, live in a forest paradise. Although they are technologically primitive, they are superior in their understanding of true reality and nature itself. They live an enlightened existence for they are in communion with Eywa, the "All Mother." Eywa is not a personal being, as with the Christian view of God, but an impersonal force made up of all things. Her force is concentrated in a large sacred tree in the middle of the sacred forest. The Na'Vi become one with Eywa when they attach their pony tails to one of her vines. In one scene, the hero of the movie attempts to warn Eywa of the battle soon to come and asks for her help. However, he is told by his alien wife that Eywa is neutral and does not get involved in issues of justice. In the movie, death is encountered several times and the message is that at death, one's immaterial essence becomes one with Eywa. This is a clear presentation of the pantheist worldview and follows the same theme of such movies as *Pocahontas*, *Dances with Wolves*, and *Fern Gully*.

The conflict occurs when humans arrive on the planet and they, in contrast to the Na'Vi, are ignorant of Eywa and destroy the forest for monetary reasons. The army is portrayed as evil as they attempt to seize the sacred forest by force and mine the valuable minerals under the sacred tree. With primitive weapons, the alien beings defeat the well-armed humans and rescue their planet from destruction.

This movie is an evangelistic call for mankind to embrace the pantheistic worldview and attain oneness with the universe. As a result, peace will come and a harmonic paradise will be created. However, we must seriously question this message of hope. Pantheism is embraced in several countries. We must ask ourselves, have these countries attained a harmonic paradise?



One nation that embraces the pantheistic worldview is India. Few would confidently state that Hinduism has brought a beautiful paradise in that nation.

Another important facet of pantheism is that nature takes precedence over human life. In India and Nepal, I have witnessed cows, monkeys, and even rats receiving better care than humans—and many are even worshipped while human beings remain secondary. Pantheism also denies the reality of this physical world and promotes the belief that the spirit world represents true reality. Thus, it in fact denies true reality. Finally, pantheism denies our humanity because it fails to acknowledge our individuality and sin nature. As a result, true transformation of human nature cannot occur through pantheism.

One of the valuable messages in *Avatar* is the value of caring for nature. This is one of the reasons many are attracted to this movie. The popularity of this pantheistic message points out a shortcoming of the Christian church in modern times. As Christians, we are taught in Genesis to care for creation and not exploit it. However, unlike pantheism, we do not worship nature; instead, we are called to be stewards of what God created. We are to value what God has created and use the earth's resources responsibly, not in a destructive, uncaring manner. We are to develop technology to improve our lives and use it in a manner that reflects care for the creation around us. Scripture provides a clear exhortation to the church to articulate the biblical view of the environment.

*Avatar* is another apologetic for pantheism, perhaps the favorite worldview of Hollywood. However, it presents a false hope for peace and paradise. The Christian message of hope must be proclaimed in a compelling manner if we hope to gain the attention of our culture. The challenge before us is to demonstrate that Christianity offers the true message of hope. First, the miraculous, sinless life of Christ and His resurrection demonstrates He is the Creator, not an impersonal

force. The true message of eternal life and forgiveness of sin is found in Christ alone. This message must be defended. Second, the biblical principles of responsible use of technology and care for the environment must be demonstrated.

Finally, creation is in a fallen state as the Bible teaches. Romans 8:20-21 states, "For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God." Creation and mankind await the day nature will be restored fully and the curse of sin will be taken away. This will happen not as a result of embracing the false ideas of pantheism but with the coming of the king of creation, Jesus Christ. Since God will restore creation, we should move in the direction of God's future restoration and carefully manage and restore areas we have destroyed.

© 2010 Probe Ministries

---

## Confucius – A Christian Perspective

*Dr. Patrick Zukeran considers the teachings of the greatest Eastern philosopher from a Christian perspective, analyzing their commonalities and differences.*



*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

### The Life of Confucius

Born in 550 B.C., Confucius is considered the greatest of all

Eastern philosophers. His teachings are foundational to Asian cultures. His writings, *The Five Classics*, a collection of ancient Chinese literature, and *The Four Books*, a collection of his and his disciples' teachings, were for centuries the standard curriculum for Chinese education.

Confucius' teachings and biography were written many years after his death and were edited by his disciples. Although historians present various accounts of his life, there are some basic facts about which we are reasonably sure. From these basic facts, it is possible to outline the major events of his life.

Confucius lived during the Chou Dynasty (1100 B.C. to 256 B.C.) He was born in northern China in the Lu province into a family of humble circumstances. His father died at a young age. Confucius began studying under the village tutor and, at the age of fifteen, devoted his life to study. He married at twenty but soon divorced his wife and had an aloof relationship with his son and daughter. In his twenties, he became a teacher and gathered a group of loyal disciples.

At this time, the land was divided among feudal lords. The moral and social order was in a state of decay. Confucius sought a way to restore both cultural and political order. He believed that reform would be accomplished by educating the leaders in the classics and his philosophy. He therefore sought a political position of influence, from which he could implement his principles.

When Confucius was fifty years old, tradition teaches that the Duke of Lu appointed him to a cabinet position. Several historians believe he eventually ascended to higher positions of public office. Due to political disagreements and internal conflicts, he resigned his post at fifty-five and left the province of Lu. He then traveled from state to state for thirteen years, seeking to persuade political leaders to adopt his teachings. Although many lords respected him, no one gave

him a position. Discouraged by the lack of response, he devoted his final years to teaching and writing. Before his death in 479 B.C., he expressed his discouragement and disillusionment regarding his career.

However, his disciples were able to gain significant positions in government after his death. They modified his teachings and added their own insights and centuries such that Confucianism later shaped Chinese culture by becoming the official religion of China. The values he espoused of education, family loyalty, work ethic, value of traditions, conformity to traditional standards, honoring of ancestors, and unquestioning obedience to superiors remain entrenched in Asian culture.

There is much to appreciate regarding the life and teachings of Confucius. Christians would agree with his philosophy of ethics, government responsibility, and social conduct on several points. These similarities provide bridges upon which we can build meaningful dialogue with those in East Asian Cultures. These values make East Asian people open to the message of Christ. Despite the similarities in ethics, there are some major differences between Christianity and Confucianism that are important to identify. This work will highlight these differences and provide ways we can effectively share Christ with those in East Asian cultures.

## **The Metaphysics of Confucius**

Confucianism, as its founder taught, is not a religion in the traditional sense; rather, it is an ethical code. Chinese culture was steeped in the religion of animism, a belief that gods and spirits dwelt in natural formations. Along with an animistic worldview, there was a belief in ancestor worship. The spirits of the dead needed to be honored and cared for by the living family members.

However, Confucius avoided spiritual issues in his teachings. Although he believed in spirits and the supernatural, he did

not feel the need to devote extensive efforts in teaching about them. Rather, he was humanistic and rationalistic in his outlook. According to David Noss, author of *A History of the World's Religions*, Confucius' "position on matters of faith was this: whatever seemed contrary to common sense in popular tradition and whatever did not serve any discoverable social purpose, he regarded coldly."[\[1\]](#) The answer to the cultural and social problems was found in humanity itself, not in anything supernatural. This is further exhibited in the following three references:

1) A disciple of Confucius wrote, "The master never talked of prodigies, feats of strength, disorders or spirits"[\[2\]](#)

2) Confucius himself stated, "To devote oneself earnestly to one's duty to humanity, and while respecting the spirits, to keep aloof from them, may be called wisdom."[\[3\]](#)

3) In the Waley translation of the *Analects*, Confucius stated, "Our master's views concerning culture and the outward insignia of goodness, we are permitted to hear; but about man's nature and the ways of heaven, he will not tell us anything at all."[\[4\]](#)

In the Confucian system a divine being does not have a significant role; his philosophy is man-centered and relies on self-effort. Man is sufficient to attain the ideal character through education, self-effort, and self-reflection. His system articulated the proper conduct in relationships, ceremony, and government. The core problem of mankind according to Confucius is that people are not educated and do not know how to conduct themselves properly in their societal roles. The chief goal of life is to become educated and live a moral life.

However, Confucius acknowledges a supreme power which established the moral order of the universe. This he refers to as the "Mandate of Heaven." The "Mandate of Heaven" may also

refer to fate and events occurring in life which are beyond the control of the individual. The just rule and the virtuous man live in accord with this moral order. This is the moral order that lies behind the Confucian ethical system. One must be careful not to violate the will of heaven. Confucius wrote, "He who put himself in the wrong with Heaven has no means of expiation left."<sup>{5}</sup> Some scholars believe the uses of the term reveals that Confucius was referring at times to a supreme being.<sup>{6}</sup> After his death, Confucianism evolved, combining with Chinese traditional religions and Buddhism to add a spiritual component.

In contrast, Christianity is God-centered. It is built on a relationship with a personal God who is involved in the world. Confucius focused on life here on this earth. Jesus focused on life in eternity. For Jesus, what happens in eternity has ramifications for life here on earth. In Matthew 6:19 Jesus stated, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasure in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal." Here we see a contrast in the perspectives of Jesus and Confucius.

## **The Ethics of Confucius**

Three key principles are emphasized in the teachings of Confucius: the principle of Li, the principle of Jen, and the principle of Chun-Tzu. The term Li has several meanings which are often translated as propriety, reverence, courtesy, ritual, or the ideal standard of conduct. It is what Confucius believed to be the ideal standard of religious, moral, and social conduct.

The second key concept is the principle of Jen. It is the fundamental virtue of Confucian teaching. Jen is the virtue of goodness and benevolence. It is expressed through recognition of value and concern in others regardless of their rank or

class. In the *Analects*, Confucius summarizes the principle of Jen in this statement often called the silver rule: "Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you."[\[7\]](#) Li provides the structure for social interaction; Jen makes it a moral system.

The third important concept is that of Chun-Tzu, the idea of the true gentleman. It is the man who lives by the highest ethical standards. The gentleman displays five virtues: self-respect, generosity, sincerity, persistence, and benevolence.[\[8\]](#) His relationships are described as follows: as a son he is always loyal, as a father he is just and kind, as an official he is loyal and faithful, as a husband he is righteous and just, and as a friend, he is faithful and tactful.[\[9\]](#) If all men lived by the principles of Li and Jen and strove to the character of the true gentlemen, justice, and harmony would rule the empire.

The Christian would find himself in agreement with many of Confucius' ethical principles and virtues. A Christian would also agree with many of the character qualities of the true gentleman and seek to develop those qualities.

What accounts for the similarity in ethics in Confucianism and other religious systems is that which Paul states in Romans 2: within every man there exists a God-given conscience or natural law that guides our moral conduct. This is because we are created in the image of God, and thus we reflect His character. However, similarity in ethical codes does not mean the religions are the same.

The key difference can be identified by examining the silver rule of Confucius in contrast with the greatest commandment of Christ. Confucian law is summarized by the silver rule; however, Jesus summarizes his teachings this way: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as

yourself" (Matthew 22:38.) Confucius believed that in order to truly achieve the principles of Li, Jen, and the character of the true gentleman, one must look within oneself. Jesus takes His teaching a step further. All His principles revolve first around a relationship with God. We only truly love our fellow man and live the righteous life God calls us to after our nature is transformed by the work of God's Holy Spirit which comes to indwell all who trust in Christ.

## Nature of Man

The Confucian philosophy is built on the foundational belief in the goodness of human nature.<sup>{10}</sup> The *Analects* state, "The Master said, 'Is goodness indeed so far away? If we really wanted goodness, we should find that it was at our side.'"<sup>{11}</sup> He further taught that all individuals are capable of attaining the highest virtue. He stated, "Has anyone ever managed to do Good with his whole might even as long as the space of a single day? I think not. Yet I for my part have never seen anyone give up such an attempt because he had not the strength to go on."<sup>{12}</sup> In other words, all individuals are capable through self-effort to attain the ideal goodness.

Confucian disciple Mencius further develops this stating, "Man's nature is naturally good just as water naturally flows downward."<sup>{13}</sup> This innate goodness can be developed and actualized through education, self-reflection, and discipline. Study in the six arts, which include ceremony, music, archery, charioteering, writing, and mathematics, develop one's character.

However, despite man being naturally good, Confucius faced reality honestly. He questioned whether it was possible to ever truly attain to the level of the true gentleman. Confucius stated, "I for my part have never yet seen one who really cared for goodness, nor one who really abhorred wickedness."<sup>{14}</sup> He said of himself, "As to being a divine sage or even a good man, far be it from me to make any such



claim.”{15} He further stated, “The master said, the ways of the true gentleman are three. I myself have met with success in none of them.”{16} However, if man by nature is good, why can we not attain that which should be natural to us?

The Bible is built on a contrasting view of man. It teaches that man is created in the image of God and was thus originally good. However, because of the fall in Genesis 3, man is now sinful and in rebellion toward God. Therefore, his natural tendency is to disobey the commandments of God, and he is driven to please himself. Paul states in Romans 7:18, “I have the desire to do good, but I cannot carry it out.” As Confucius observed, no man is able to live up to the standards of the “True Gentleman” or God’s commands because man’s nature is sinful and in need of transformation.

According to the Bible, good education is a positive step toward helping man change, but it falls short. Man is in need of a heart transformation. Life transformation occurs when a person enters into a personal relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ. One’s nature is transformed because God’s Spirit indwells an individual. Although the Christian is not capable of living out the principles of God’s law flawlessly, he is not left to live a holy life on his own strength. God provides man the indwelling of His Holy Spirit to enable man to live in obedience to God’s law.

## **Relationships**

Central to Confucius’ teaching are relationships and social roles. There are five great relationships.{17} If these attitudes are practiced, there will be harmony among all:

1. Kindness in the father and obedient devotion in the son
2. Gentility in the eldest brother and humility and respect in the younger
3. Righteous behavior in the husband and obedience in the wife

4. Humane consideration in elders and deference in juniors

5. Benevolence in rulers and loyalty of ministers and subjects

The most important relationship is the family as it is the basic unit of all humanity. Consistent with the pantheistic world view, he did not believe in an individual self or soul. Rather, roles and relationships define a person. The goal of living is to achieve harmony by acting appropriately within those roles and relationships because the harmony of relationships within the family can extend into the life of the community and the world. The way individuals relate to their family members influences how they treat members of the community. This, in turn, affects relationships beyond the community. Thus, harmonious family relationships lead to harmonious relationships in the community. If there is discord in the family, this will likewise carry over into the community.

In the family unit, the father is the key figure. He must be a good example to his sons. It is the son's duty to obey without questioning and honor his father even after his father's death. When the father dies, obedience is then given to the oldest brother. Confucius stated, "Meng I Tzu asked about the treatment of parents. The Master said, 'Never disobey! . . . While they are alive, serve them according to ritual. When they die, bury them according to ritual and sacrifice to them according to ritual.'" [\[18\]](#)

Confucius taught that government should be for the people. Feudal lords are to be responsive to the needs of the people they govern. If the rulers lived by the highest principles, the people would then follow, and there would be reform from the greatest to the least. The duty of those in subordinate positions is to be unquestioningly loyal to their superior. Confucius stated, "It is said that if good people work for a country for a hundred years, it is possible to overcome violence and eliminate killing. This saying is indeed

true.”[\[19\]](#) Confucius believed that a good society would be achieved through education.

There are points of agreement between Confucius and the Bible. Confucius believed the virtues he espoused are lived out in relationships. The same is true for Christianity; our relationship with God is reflected in our relationships with one another. The truth of the Christian life is lived out in a community, not in isolation. The family is the key social unit, and the father is the leader of the family. However, Christianity takes relationships one step further than Confucius. Not only can we have the five relationships espoused by Confucius, we can also have a personal relationship with God. It is from this connection that our earthly relationships find their greatest meaning.

## **A Final Critique**

There is much in the teachings of Confucius that I have found commendable. His moral values often parallel those taught in the Bible. As previously mentioned, the Bible teaches that we are created in the image of God, and, therefore, we reflect His moral character. His moral law code is embedded on our hearts (Rom. 2). Most people of Asian descent may not be strict adherents to Confucianism, but they are all influenced by his philosophy. Anyone seeking to serve in Asian cultures would find it worthwhile to read his works. Confucianism is very adaptable and fluid in its structure. That has been a weakness, but it has also a strength of the system since it allows Confucianism to join other inclusive religious systems. There are several significant differences, and, I believe, deficiencies within Confucian philosophy.

First, Confucianism falls short as a comprehensive life view because it fails to address several key issues. The Confucian system does not answer the key questions such as, Why does the universe exist? How do we explain its origin? What is the meaning of mankind's existence in the universe? What happens

after death? These are universal questions that must be addressed. Man is a spiritual being, and this philosophy leaves one spiritually void. The Bible teaches that God has set eternity in the heart of men (Eccl. 3:11.) The longing for spiritual answers is a universal need. For this reason, Confucian philosophy eventually combined with Chinese Folk religion and Buddhism. Nonetheless, it still fails to provide complete answers.

Second, Confucius taught there was an overarching morality and will called the "Mandate of Heaven" which guided the universe. The Mandate of Heaven is the moral order established by heaven. Some believe Confucius was referring to an impersonal force; others believe he was referring to a personal being. In either case, Confucius felt the heavens (or the one in heaven) do not communicate with people. Confucius stated, "Heaven does not speak; yet the four seasons run their course thereby, the hundred creatures, each after its kind, are born thereby. Heaven does no speaking!"[\[20\]](#) in contrast, the Bible teaches that we can have a relationship with the one who established the moral order. God is involved with creation and has made the way for a relationship with Him possible through His son (Jn. 3:16). The creator of all things has communicated with us through His Word and His Son. He also invites us to commune with Him in prayer and intimate fellowship. The imagery of the Shepherd and His sheep found in Psalm 23 and John 10 reflect His desire for a close relationship with us.

Third, Confucius built his philosophy on the belief that man is basically good. However, despite this, Confucius honestly admitted that no one had attained the level of the true gentleman. Confucius stated, "I for my part have never yet seen one who really cared for goodness, nor one who really abhorred wickedness."[\[21\]](#) He said of himself, "...the Ways of the true gentleman are three. I myself have met with success in none of them."[\[22\]](#) If man is good by nature, we must ask why we cannot attain what should be natural to us.

The Bible is built on a contrasting view of man. It teaches that man is created in the image of God but fallen in sin and rebellious toward God. Therefore, his natural tendency is to disobey the commandments of God and please himself. Paul states in Romans 7:18, "I have the desire to do good, but I cannot carry it out." Good education is a positive step toward helping man change, but it falls short. Man is in need of a heart transformation. Life transformation occurs when a person enters into a personal relationship with God and God's Spirit transforms one's nature through the indwelling and enabling power of His Holy Spirit.

## Conclusion

Confucius teaches many valuable ethical principles that are consistent with Biblical teaching. This offers Christians a good way to build bridges with many in East Asian cultures. However, the spiritual void in Confucianism is a great weakness; however, it provides a wonderful opportunity to present the case for Christianity.

Christianity offers a comprehensive life view, for it explains the nature of God, our relationship to Him, the origin of creation, and what happens after death. In Confucian teaching, one cannot communicate with the creator, but in Christianity, the Creator invites us and makes the way possible for a relationship with Him through His Son Jesus. Finally, true transformation of one's nature will not occur through education, but rather through the Holy Spirit indwelling the believer in Christ.

## Notes

1. David Noss, *A History of the World's Religions* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994), 298.
2. *Analects of Confucius*, trans. Arthur Waley, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), 7:20.

3. *Analects* 6:20
4. *Analects* 5:12
5. *Analects* 3:13.
6. Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Volume 1 (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1983), 57-8.
7. *Analects* 15:23.
8. *Analects* 17:6.
9. Noss, 297.
10. Stephen Schuhmacher & Gert Woerner, *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1994), 80.
11. *Analects* 7:9.
12. *Analects* 4:6.
13. Mencius XI:2, trans. David Hinton, (Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 1998), 197.
14. *Analects* 4:6
15. *Analects* 7:33.
16. *Analects* 14:30.
17. Noss, 293.
18. *Analects* 2:5.
19. *Analects* 13:11.
20. *Analects* 17:19.
22. *Analects* 4:6.
22. *Analects* 14:30.

## Bibliography

*Analects of Confucius*. Translated by Arthur Waley. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992.

Anderson, Norman. *The World's Religions*. Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975.

Chung, Tsai. *Confucius Speaks*. New York: Anchor Books, 1996.

Cleary, Thomas. *The Essential Confucius*. San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992.

Halverson, Dean. *The Compact Guide to World Religions*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1996.

*I Ching*. Translator: Richard Wilhelm. New York: Princeton University Press, 1979.

Noss, David. *A History of the World's Religions*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994.

Parrinder, Geoffrey. *World Religions*. New York: Facts on File Publications, 1983.

Schuhmacher, Stephen & Woerner, Gert. *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1994.

Smith, Jonathan, ed. *Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion*. San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995.

Wilson, Epiphanius. *The Wisdom of Confucius*. New York: Avenel Books, 1982.

Yamamoto, Isamu. *Buddhism, Taoism, and Other Eastern Religions*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998.

Yu-lan, Fung. *A History of Chinese Philosophy, Volume 1*. Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1983.

# Islam Day in Hawaii – Misinterpreting Tolerance

May 20, 2009

On May 6, 2009, the Hawaii State Senate overwhelmingly passed a bill by a 22-3 vote to recognize September 24th, 2009 as Islam Day. The reason for this bill was to recognize "the rich religious, scientific, cultural and artistic contributions that Islam and the Islamic world have made. It does not call for any spending or organized celebration of Islam Day."[\[1\]](#)

Democrat Senator Will Espero presented his reason for this bill stating, "We are a state of tolerance. We understand that people have different beliefs. We may not all agree on every single item and issue out there, but to say and highlight the negativity of the Islamic people is an insult to the majority of believers who are good law-abiding citizens of the world."[\[2\]](#)

Two Republican senators opposed the bill, stating their reasons. Republican Senator Fred Hemmings said, "I recall radical Islamists around the world cheering the horrors of 9/11. That is the day all civilized people of all religions should remember."[\[3\]](#) Republican Senator Sam Slom stated, "I don't think there's any country in the history of the world that has been more tolerant than the United States of America, and because of that tolerance, we've looked the other way a lot of times, and many thousands of our citizens have been killed by terrorists."[\[4\]](#)



How should we approach this issue as believers in Christ? I believe there are two points we should be very concerned about. First, I agree with Sen. Will Espero that the majority of Muslims are peaceful, law-abiding citizens. However, I do not believe Islam is a religion of tolerance and peace. The teachings of Islam's sacred works and its history reveal this to be the case.

Throughout the Qur'an Muslims are commanded to spread Islam through the use of force. When Muhammad first began preaching his message, he did teach tolerance of Jews and Christians as he attempted to win converts from these religions. Sura 2:256 teaches that there is to be "no compulsion in religion." However, as he grew in power and the Jews and Christians rejected his message, these commands were later abrogated by later commands to fight against unbelievers in holy war.

Sura 9:5 teaches, "But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans wherever you find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them, for Allah is oft-forgiving, most merciful."

Sura 9:29 states, "Fight against those who believe not in Allah, nor in the last day, nor forbid that which has been forbidden by Allah and His messenger and those who acknowledge not the religion of truth among the people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians), until they pay the Jizyah (tax) with willing submission and feel themselves subdued."

The Qur'an teaches holy war against unbelievers. Muhammad also represents the perfect model for Muslims to copy. Muslims are called to imitate him in all aspects of life. Islamic scholar John Esposito writes,

“Muslims look to Muhammad’s example for guidance in all aspects of life: how to treat friends as well as enemies, what to eat and drink, how to make love and war . . . . His impact on Muslim life cannot be overestimated, since he served as both religious and political head of Medina: prophet of God, ruler, military commander, chief judge, lawgiver . . . . Traditions of the Prophet provide guidance for personal hygiene, dress, eating, marriage, treatment of wives, diplomacy, and warfare.”{5}

What kind of leader and model was Muhammad? He was a warrior. The history of Islam records his raids on caravans, battles, and the merciless killing of those who disagreed with him. The first biography of Muhammad states he fought twenty-seven battles in which thousands were killed.{6} His successors followed in his footsteps, spreading Islam through jihad attacking the countries of Africa, Asia, and Europe. Many of these countries posed no threat to Muslims nor were they aggressive towards Islam. For example, Egypt was not aggressive towards Islam, yet they were attacked and the Muslims killed over four million Egyptians. The nations of Europe posed no threat yet Islam invaded Europe and nearly conquered Europe until Charles Martel repulsed them in 732 A.D.

Most Muslims are peaceful but the religion of Islam is not a religion of tolerance and peace. In reading some of the authoritative sources of Islam, the Qur’an, the Hadith (sayings and actions of Muhammad), and the earliest biography of Muhammad, one will soon realize this to be the case. Therefore, it is dangerous to tolerate a religion that promotes intolerance and the use of force on unbelievers. Observe the history of Islam when they became the majority and instilled Sharia Law in a country. Once Sharia Law is instituted, they do not tolerate other faiths. In passing this bill, the leaders of Hawaii send the unbalanced message that we will honor this religion and its values, yet ignore the

dangers it poses. I believe the leaders of Hawaii do not know what this religion teaches, and its history. It is dangerous then to honor a religion that poses such a threat to our nation and civilization.

Second, there is a misunderstanding of tolerance. Senators state tolerance as a reason to honor Islam. However, true tolerance has moral guidelines and limits. A tolerant society should not tolerate pedophiles or the abuse of women or racial discrimination. Tolerance does not mean all religions and values are equal and true, and therefore should be allowed to permeate a culture. However, this appears to be the definition the leaders of Hawaii are going by. True tolerance has its limits; it does not tolerate all beliefs. Should we tolerate racism and groups like the KKK that promote this belief? Would we in the name of tolerance have a KKK day? What about Nazism? What about the Taliban?

If we are to tolerate all beliefs as equally valid and true and worthy of recognition, we will end up allowing groups like these to permeate our culture. Philosopher Karl Popper states, "If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them." [\[7\]](#) Unlimited tolerance with no moral guidelines will eventually lead to the downfall of our civilization as we allow false ideologies to destroy the moral foundations of our nation.

I ask the leaders of Hawaii to study the religion of Islam and its history from its beginning to what is occurring now in Europe. I believe Islam represents one of the great threats to western civilization and if we do not stand against its ideas, we may soon succumb to its tyranny.

For more information please see