

CONCERNING THE CHURCH OF ALMIGHTY GOD/EASTERN LIGHTNING

Some with cursory knowledge have wrongly associated The Church of Almighty God (CAG), commonly known as Eastern Lightning, with the local churches and the ministry of Witness Lee. This misunderstanding derives from ignorance of the differences in their teaching and a superficial knowledge of history.

Teaching

Witness Lee affirms, while The Church of Almighty God denies, every key aspect of the Christian faith, including the inspiration and authority of the Bible, the Triune God, the person of Christ, the work of Christ, and salvation by believing in Christ and His redemptive work, as the following comparisons show¹:

The Inspiration of the Bible

Witness Lee: "The Bible is the Word of God. We believe that the Bible, word by word, is divinely inspired by God (2 Pet. 1:21), as the breath of God (2 Tim. 3:16). The genuine Christians do not have any doubt about this point. We must believe that the Bible is God's infallible Word."

CAG: Those who believe in God even think that although all of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testament were written by people, they were all given by inspiration of God, and a record of the utterances of the Holy Spirit. This is the erroneous interpretation of people, and it does not completely accord with the facts.

The Authority of the Bible

Witness Lee: We must confess that the Bible is absolutely authoritative... Our only standard should be the word of the Bible, the word of God.

CAG: The Bible is of no great use for today's people of the last days. At most, it serves as a provisional reference, but it basically has little use value [sic].

God

Witness Lee: We must be clear that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit coexist simultaneously from eternity to eternity. Undoubtedly, the Father is God (1 Pet. 1:2; Eph. 1:17), the Son is God (Heb. 1:8; John 1:1; Rom. 9:5), and the Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4). They are not three Gods but one. The Scriptures say clearly and definitely that God is only one (1 Cor. 8:4; Isa. 45:5; Psa. 86:10), yet He is also three—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. He is the Triune God.

CAG: This concept of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is most absurd!

[T]he Trinity simply does not exist. That is, the Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit simply does not exist.

Christ

Witness Lee: As the only Begotten of the Father, the Son is the unique One who has declared God: "No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18). There is only one declaration, because the Son is the only Begotten. The Son's status as the only Begotten makes His declaration unique.

CAG: There are some who believe that as long as the One who comes is a male, He may be deemed the only son of God and God's representative, and there are even those who say that Jesus is the Son of Jehovah, His only son. Is this not a seriously overblown notion of man?

The Work of Christ

Witness Lee: The human blood that He shed is able to redeem man from sin. But this blood is also the blood of Jesus the Son of God, which has the unlimited divinity of God, and it has made this redemption eternally efficacious. He died once for all, shedding His blood to redeem all those who believe in Him throughout the ages. The efficacy of the blood of Jesus the Son of God is universal, eternal, and it is not limited by time, space, or function.

CAG: The work of [Christ in] the past is outdated, dead history, and it doesn't count with God. It's been eliminated.

Salvation

Witness Lee: In John 16:9 we are told that the Spirit will convict the world concerning sin because of not believing in the Son of God. This indicates that the unique sin which causes people to perish is unbelief. God's commandment to sinners is to believe in the Son of God.

CAG: It's absolute rubbish to say that any person who prays to the Lord Jesus is saved once for all. Those are human words.

Comparing these teachings on these fundamental tenets of the Christian faith shows Witness Lee and the local churches to be thoroughly Christian and the CAG to be something else.

History

The CAG dates its beginning from February 11, 1991, when a young Chinese woman, Yang Xiangbin, began channeling messages in the name of "Almighty God" (AG). It is important to understand the background that allowed the CAG to take root. As China emerged from the cataclysm of the Cultural Revolution, the gospel began to spread like wildfire, and the local churches were at the forefront. However, Christians in China lacked Bibles and spiritual books, which had been destroyed by rampaging Red Guards. This made it difficult to ground new believers in biblical truth. The ministry of Witness Lee met a great need, but it was available only in a fragmentary way to a limited audience.

A nationwide sweep in 1983 resulted in the arrest of 2800 leaders among the local churches. This left the many new believers vulnerable to wolves such as Zhao Weishan, administrative head of the CAG. Though the CAG has at times traded upon the names of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee to disarm believers and has used some of the same terminology that these two brothers use, the CAG actually opposes the ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee, and the meanings the CAG gives to Christian terms has from the outset been different. Put simply, the appeals and commonalities of the CAG are ways used to deceive and carry off as spoil believers who respect the ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee but were not themselves grounded in the truth.

It is unreasonable to blame Witness Lee for the spiritistic blasphemies of Yang Xiangbin or the anti-Christian teachings promulgated by Zhao Weishan and the CAG. The CAG is not an outgrowth of the local churches. Whatever contact its leaders had with the local churches was brief and tangential. Some historical parallels may help. Before establishing the Unification Church, Sun Myung Moon was a member of the Presbyterian Church in Korea. Yet no one would say that Moon's teaching derived from Presbyterianism, nor should anyone blame Korean Presbyterians for Moon's heretical system. The same would be true of Jim Jones and the Disciples of Christ, David Koresh and the Seventh-Day Adventists, or Joseph Smith and the Second Great Awakening. Similarly, Hong Xiuquan, the leader of the bloody Taiping Rebellion, read a gospel tract by a Western missionary and later came to the conclusion that he was God's Chinese son called to exterminate the "Manchu demons" who were ruling China. He started a civil war in which twenty million people died. In the same way that it would be absurd to blame the Western missionary for Hong's delusion, it is unfair to blame Witness Lee or the local churches for the CAG's perverse teachings.

Those who continue the work and ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee among the local churches and those who function in the leadership of those churches both inside and outside of China uniformly repudiate the destructive heresies of the CAG, which are doctrines of demons (1 Tim. 4:1). Moreover, the local churches affirm and contend for the orthodox Christian faith, the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

¹ All quotations from Witness Lee can be found by searching ministrybooks.org; all CAG texts are accessible via their site holyspiritspeaks.org.