

Editor's Note

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Animism, in a broad variety of forms, is the global religion of a fallen world. Animism is found on every continent, and it asserts itself even in the most secular of societies. Animism can be defined as a belief in spirits and supernatural forces that interact powerfully with human life. This includes both personal spiritual beings such as demons and the jinn, and forces such as witchcraft. Animism proceeds from a three-layered cosmology. Secular materialism sees the universe in a single layer consisting of the material world ruled by naturalistic cause and effect. Western Christianity, deeply influenced by secularism, sees the universe in two tiers. The material world is one of those tiers, and the other tier is God, existing above the material world and largely disconnected from it except for occasional miraculous interventions. Animistic worldviews often include an upper tier for a supreme God but add a middle tier between that God and the natural world in which spirits and supernatural forces work. For most animists, this middle tier is the most important. The fortunes of life, whether good or bad, are ascribed to these spiritual forces, and much of their energy is expended appeasing or even manipulating those forces.

Animism interacts syncretistically with every world religion. In many parts of the world, it constitutes that actual religion of the population, with a thin veneer of the local formal religion on top of a deep well of animistic thought and practice. This is true in nominally Christian cultures in much of the developing world. Christo-paganism can be found all over Latin America,

Africa, and Asia. It can also be found, to varying degrees, in more developed societies. In particular, prosperity teaching is a form of animism that seeks to manipulate God using various forms of Christian practice to gain health and wealth. This syncretistic blend of Christianity and animism may well be the greatest global threat to biblical faith in the 21st century.

In contrast, a biblical cosmology has three tiers, but God is deeply involved in both the world of spirits and magic and in the natural world, and he is sovereign in both. A biblical worldview neither ignores the spirit world nor obsesses over it. Biblically faith pastors and churches guard against any form of animism that seeks to corrupt the faith once delivered to the saints. This edition of the journal explores various aspects of animism from the perspective of Christian mission. Our hope is that it will not only be useful for missionaries, but also for first world Christians as they pursue biblical faithfulness in their mission both at home and to the ends of the earth.