

## *The Dragon Prays -- A Reflection*

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After having read *Dragon Prays*, I am not quite sure just where I should begin to respond. *Dragon Prays* is the story of a young man actually named *Dragon Prays*. It tells of his coming of age; it tells of a soul on its journey toward faith and its finding God. The story contains varying levels of complexity. For me it will be impossible to make a systematic analysis of the story and still remain faithful to its original theological reflections expressed in poetic language. I can only respond by calling upon my own personal experience and my own spiritual point of view.



*When I was a child I spoke as a child and acted as a child. Now that I have grown up I have put aside the things of a child (1 Cor. 13:11).*

The author uses this passage from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians to begin the story of *Dragon Prays*. His coming of age can be seen as a process of constant transformations. Beginning with the faith of his parents based on fear, passing through the "training" of the Cultural Revolution, hemmed in by cultural and ethnic standards, coming from the "underground" into the "open" church, and finally leaving his own country to live in foreign lands - these were the transformations that *Dragon Prays* underwent. During this process of growing up he had to discard all those things that divide men and women from each other; those elements which alienate inner communication, such as politics, church structures, cultural and traditional ideologies. He slowly grew to maturity by constantly listening to his inner restlessness, questioning set formulations of faith and ways of acting and following the desires welling up from the depths of

his heart.

*Dragon Prays'* story is in some aspects my own and I believe, too, that it is the story of every Chinese Christian. His story is a description of the struggle and contradictions that every child of the dragon meets as he or she wants to live the Christian life. The message that every part of the story proclaims is: to follow Christ one must face the many "unfreedoms" and challenges of one's environment. The Gospels relate the story of Jesus of Nazareth. In them we see how his own Jewish culture, traditions and religious customs challenged him. In the eyes of the Jews of that time (especially of the religious authorities), he was not a "good" Jew. In fact, they came close to considering that he was not even a member of the Jewish people. In the eyes of some Chinese, *Dragon Prays* would be seen as a traitor and an un-filial son. Traditional Chinese filial piety and fraternal duties play the same role as law and tradition do for the Jews. In our attempts to realize these ideals we are bound with many unnecessary fetters. They are the "unfreedoms" in our own culture.

As *Dragon Prays* grew to maturity, his faith enabled him to transcend the limitations imposed by Chinese tradition and culture. The God in whom he believed was not hemmed in by the close family spirit found in the "underground" churches nor in the buildings of the "open" churches. His God was one whose voice could be heard among the tinkling of bicycle bells. The conclusion contained in *Dragon Prays'* puts this question to the Chinese believer: Who are my real parents? Where is my true home? Like *Dragon Prays*, our faith in God must often burn away "old fashioned idols existing in our hearts"; we must often escape from our "air raid shelters"; we must permit ourselves to go beyond the horizons set by the older generation; our minds must go beyond the "mighty torrent of the revolution".

In concluding the story, the author uses the calling to life of the synagogue official's twelve year old daughter as the high point of *Dragon Prays'* journey to growth and maturity. The child of the dragon has not died; he was only waiting for his true Father whom he had never seen to call him to life. Call what back to life? Or from where? Most likely, the author used this story of the twelve year old girl as an example. The child of the dragon must allow Jesus Christ to call him out from the life of confinement and darkness which is China's political

environment. Looking at the matter from a spiritual point of view, the small girl's resurrection was only a return to and a continuation of her former bodily life. *Dragon Prays*, however, has to die with Christ and only then can he let the Lord come to life within him. Jesus Christ is hidden within each person. This is the Christ *Dragon Prays* did not recognize, the Christ he had never known before, yet it was this Christ who led him down the road which he walked. In his life as a "priest", *Dragon Prays* continues to recognize, affirm and bear this Christ within him. It is Christ who will continue to lead *Dragon Prays* to a higher form of life and give him a new outlook for leading the life of a dragon, opening for him new ways to fulfill the way of filial piety. This is his "destiny", the special "way" he must walk. His responsibility as a child of the dragon, his purpose for existence, can no longer only be to see to the advancement of his own clan. *Dragon Prays'* growth to maturity means that he can no longer live for himself alone, but must work for the coming of God's Kingdom. The root of our faith is in Jesus Christ. After our "resurrection" from this root, we become better Chinese persons, and we grasp once again the true way of filial piety. We must never lose our "black eyes, black hair and yellow skin". We can never cast off the roots of our own culture, but in and through Christ we remold ourselves into Chinese firmly rooted in God, and give birth to God's image from within the uniqueness of Chinese culture.

