



**The Field Guide
Recommended by the
God Observers' Club**

observers' Guide to God

Derek Thompson

Observers' Guide to God

by

Derek Thompson

“Observers’ Guide to God”

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Published by Derek Philip Thompson at Smashwords

ISBN: 9781311175403 (ePub edition)

APA Reference:

Thompson, D. P. (2015) *Observers’ guide to God*.

Publisher: Author

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Preface

Recent world events have caused renewed efforts to update outdated God observation methods. Some God spotters, like the train spotter narrowly missed by a train while photographing another train, have placed themselves in danger trying to see God. Nevertheless, since God sees everything we do here on Earth, it is only right we try to return the compliment.

The serious God observer strives to be on the cutting edge of the game. Even amateur God observers will want to avail themselves of the latest techniques. The primary aim of the present volume is to enhance the observer's capabilities at identifying and encountering God, whether it be in God's native habitat, or elsewhere. Observing God is a pastime for everyone, of all ages.

I thank the publisher for making this edition available in fireproof paper and providing a waterproof covering, although I am at a loss to know why. We acknowledge our generous sponsors, “Furnace Fashions” and “Pompadour Welding Helmets” whose names I will mention in the text several times as agreed.

Albert Steinberger,
Sydney University.



Introduction

Zebra spotting in an African safari park is easy. You pay a guide to take you to the zebras and you photograph them to prove you saw them. Bird watching is more difficult. They are small, keep fluttering around, and there are numerous species to identify. In such cases, observers' guides are an essential tool for the enthusiast. The search for God has similarities to bird watching, train and aeroplane spotting, and even butterfly collecting. This invaluable book is a guide for God spotters. The task before us is to help the enthusiast spot God. That first glimpse, followed by the exciting first meeting, makes all the hard work of the quest worthwhile.

Allow me to tell you something about myself. I am Albert Steinberger, a lecturer in field guides at the University of Sydney. I have ascended to late middle age having written several well-received field guides and I am eager to apply my expertise on behalf of God spotters. Our Publisher too, specialises in field and travel guides, although I think he wants

to be a movie producer. Readers should not be dismayed at my candour. In this digital age, publishers need not read the books they publish, and I am sure mine does not. Never mind, Dorothy, my wife is an excellent typist. [Note from Dorothy: Hello readers!]

Before tackling our task, you might wonder what attracts people to God spotting. There are trains to spot, bird sightings to record, bugs to catch, whales and celebrities to watch. Where does one find the time and money for God spotting? The value of God observation is much greater to the God observer than the yellow-billed leg-shaker (a much sought after rare bird) is to a twitcher (a birder who seeks rare birds). Furthermore, twitchers themselves are rare in the population but 93.6% of people I surveyed are interested in God observation.

As someone who has devoted much time to observational pastimes, I assure my readers that God spotting has a special fascination of its own. A religious turn of mind is unnecessary and may even be a hindrance. I was astonished to find that adherence to a religious organisation bears little relationship to one's success at God spotting. However, I acknowledge the valuable help of experienced members of the God Observers' Club, which attracts God observers like robbers to a bank. I have sought experts in both God observation and God avoidance, to give a well-rounded appraisal of the field.

Another thing I need to warn the reader of before going into the field is the negative remarks unkind people make, such as, "it's a load of bollocks", "you may as well try spotting live dodos", "a venture for the foolhardy", and remarks that are even more colourful. I do not want the novice to lose heart and refrain from venturing into the field. Your guide has encountered the objections, false trails and phantom

appearances. Be assured, there is a way through the jungle. The delights of God observation lay before us.



How to Use This Field Guide

Even a Safari Park has its hazards, and something as seemingly friendly as God spotting has its dangers. The observer need not be alarmed. Your guide found the way to the goal and I will relate the tortuous path I took to success. Prospective observers will come across many advisers providing conflicting ideas. This comprehensive guide is all you need. I will not confuse you by quoting the statements of pseudo-experts and religious organisations. The best way to learn God spotting is in the field with experienced God observers. The God Observers' Club recommends this guide.

Before we go into the field, I need to discuss things such as, what equipment to take, exactly what we are proposing to find, identifying God, and proper etiquette to use in God's presence. As to equipment, the keen novice God spotter will want to run out and buy all kinds of things such as binoculars, maps, notebooks, "Furnace Fashions" fire-proof clothing,

“Pompadour Welding Helmets” auto-darkening to 15+ shade welding helmet, paranormal cameras, and overseas plane tickets. I suggest that self-restraint in these purchases will save you money and avoid embarrassment.

As I always tell my students as they leave the lecture theatre to do field work, be prepared to have fun. This may appear odd advice in this case because God spotting is often associated with a religious temperament that is tediously serious. This is the first hurdle to leap. You will find God is a joyous being and difficult to find in dull, boring or solemn places. God may well be there, as we will learn in the next chapter, but these are not ideal conditions for observation. Another reason I have not pursued a religious solution is that I am not religious by nature and cannot help you in that regard. I recommend to such readers more religious field guides, but unfortunately, I do not know of any.

I assure those students struggling to follow directions they think irreverent that my instructions are not profane, just not religious. This confuses them to a satisfactory extent to allow them to get on with their work. Besides, student protests at irreverence are an excuse to avoid work. They quite happily throw paper aeroplanes around the lecture theatre while I am trying to teach them the intricacies of how the observer can stay unobserved by the one observed. Incidentally, that module of field study does not form part of this guide due to its inapplicability to God observation.

This field guide is designed to be useful for all observers whether experienced or beginners. I remember one of my confused students, named Max Bradfield, who for all his lack of experience, lack of aptitude, and general uselessness, blundered in on God and made a glorious sighting. Max was thoroughly overcome for over an hour. One of my colleagues

who lectures in comparative God observation was beside herself with hilarity at meeting the God she had taught about for years. Our task is made even more fascinating because of the extraordinary nature of the God we seek, which leads us into the next chapter.



Observing God

Let us clarify our aim. We aim to spot nothing less than God himself. I will give a few words of advice to help prepare the casual observer. There is an important distinction between observing God and observing birds. The awesome nature of God can overwhelm the observer. We must take precautions. As to God's appearance, one cannot gaze upon God and survive without the correct use of suitable equipment. A good field guide always keeps in mind observer safety. In addition, we must consider God's invisibility, which means God's appearance is not as well-documented as that of birds. Do not be perturbed, our quest is not stymied, as we shall soon discover.

We will start by listing the distinguishing features of God to aid the observer in field identification. I sought the help of an expert at the university's School of Theology where I found the office of Dr Freeman Lee. Freeman came from Hong Kong, which was where he first saw God. Although his experience

gave me a high regard for him, I was surprised that his office was as tiny as mine was. He invited me in saying he was not doing anything special. I could see he was marking student essays, which confirmed it for me. I squeezed in to a chair opposite him at his desk, explained my assignment and asked Freeman for God's distinguishing features. In my pocket was my bird watcher's notebook, which I carry with me everywhere. Out came my notebook, and I wrote the heading "Species Attributes".

"It shouldn't be too hard," said Dr Lee, "There is only one God. Only one species, one individual. God is who he is." Dr Lee spoke English well and had a practiced oriental accent. Freeman is short of stature, with straight black hair, glasses, and I would find him difficult to pick out in a crowd of Chinese people. Freeman tells me he has the same problem with westerners.

"Yes, I am sure there is only one God but when out in the wild, how do I single out God. What does he look like?" I said trying to direct Freeman to my point of interest.

"Heck, everything you see displays his nature, except for the nasty things that display his nature in negative. God is easily distinguished from other things, because God made all the other things," explained Dr Lee.

"Okay, so God is distinguished by not having been made, and having made everything else," I said writing in my notebook. "What features will help us identify God?"

"Well," said Dr Lee thinking how to simplify it for a field guide. He smiled as he had an idea. "There are '**The Three Omnies**'."

"Ah, like 'The Three Amigos'," I said taking his bait.

“No, not like ‘The Three Amigos’ at all,” said Dr Lee amused that I had fallen for it. “God is One Amigo. As Creator of everything, God is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient, which means God is everywhere, is all-powerful, and knows everything. ‘The Three Omnies’.”

“I can imagine my students getting excited and thinking, ‘If God is everywhere we will have no problem finding our Amigo’.” My ploy to put this remark into the mouths of my students was to ensure I did not appear stupid.

“I’m sure, Albert, you will think up a reply such as, ‘yes and no’, or ‘birds are everywhere too’. There must be some reason for the market in field guides.” Dr Lee could be inscrutable.

He continued, “Unlike the Three Amigos, God is not a second rate actor. When God acts, things happen and continue that way until God determines otherwise. One of God’s pastimes is upholding the universe. People observation is another.”

“What?” I said surprised. “I’m writing about observing God, not God observing us.”

Dr Lee replied, “It’s very different from train spotting, Albert, but if God was not interested in observing us, we could not observe him.”

“Oh well, that’s all right then.”

Dr Lee smiled and nodded. He continued, “When considering God’s habitat, omnipresence needs to be qualified. Why live in a slum if you own a mansion? God’s presence on earth is somewhat at arm’s length compared to his presence in heaven. Although heaven is part of creation, it isn’t despoiled by wars, pollution and... well, people. God keeps heaven

separate from what we call the universe to prevent it from getting polluted.”

“Pollution, yes,” I said taking notes.

Dr Lee smiled and went on, “Besides, this isn’t the end of the matter. If it were, you could not find God anywhere. God obviously did not give up on the universe. If God gave up on the world, it wouldn’t be here. God forecasted pollution but made the world anyhow. He even maintains its polluted existence. So, it must be possible to see God.”

“Good,” I said with great relief, struggling to follow Dr Lee’s reasoning.

“Speaking of goodness,” said Dr Lee.

“I was?”

“Goodness is an attribute of God’s integrity. God’s goodness is sometimes called omni-benevolence, which would be the fourth of ‘The Three Omnies’, but we can’t have that. Human beings fall short of perfection in goodness and integrity, and things that are unlike just don’t mix. Perfection and imperfection, good and bad.”

“Publishers and authors?” I added to the list.

Dr Lee ignored my contribution, “... they cannot have a cordial meeting. It is because of God’s goodness he prevents the inadvertent observer stumbling upon him and being dazzled to death by his glorious majesty. One might think that this precludes us from God observation, but as the song says, ‘it ain’t necessarily so’.”

Like all good mystery writers, I will leave the disclosure of this mystery until near the end. [Note from Dorothy: No

peaking!]. Besides, Dr Lee was in full lecturing mode. I was glad I was taking notes.

“Now, ‘**The Three Twins**’ display God’s goodness.”

“Twins!” I exclaimed. Dr Lee’s lectures must have been a riot of metaphors. I am sure he confused his students a treat.

“Yes, twin attributes: holy and righteous, faithful and true, gracious and merciful. They display God’s goodness.” This was getting too technical for a field guide lecturer, but I continued writing.

“There is something else about God, not in the class of species attributes,” Dr Lee said reading the heading in my notebook. “Because of God’s role as Creator of everything, his relations with creation are unique, giving rise to ‘**The Three Relations**’.”

“God has relatives?” I asked.

“Eternity, sovereignty, and providence.” Lee counted off with his fingers. He paused while I, resembling one of his flustered students, listed his points in my notebook.

“When God created things out of nothing, new relationships were made that are utterly perplexing for us created beings. For instance, our creation in time makes it difficult for us to understand God who upholds creation from the outside, so to speak. Although God does not change in his nature, he can respond to changes inside his creation. This is why it’s possible for us to meet him.”

“It does?” I asked.

“Yes, but there is a downside. We can cope with God being everywhere always. We even expect God to rule over creation, but when things go wrong, we use ‘The Three

Relations' to blame God. Don't forget God is good everywhere, always, and in every circumstance. We defend human shortcomings by blaming God for making us."

"There are two sides to every story?" I suggested.

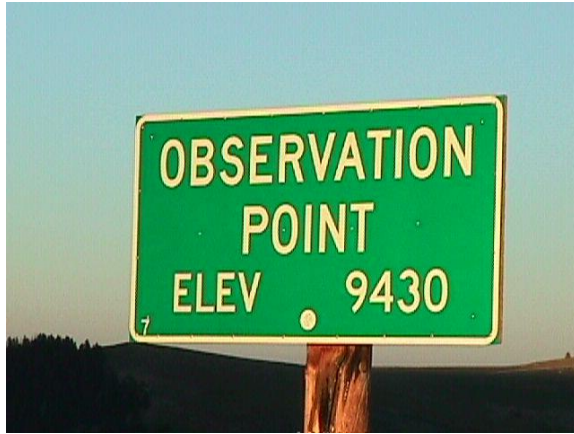
"It's true that God has a case against us. This raises the interesting philosophical controversy over free will. If we assume God has free will, and if God created humans with even a small measure of free will, we might suspect that our freedom limits God's sovereignty."

"Because we have a say in the future?" I asked.

Dr Lee continued, "Yes. But the future does not yet exist. So it cannot be any great harm to God's sovereignty if he gives us a say in future outcomes. God can accurately predict what will happen, so his omniscience remains intact. God still has the final overriding power over everything, so his omnipotence still applies. As for how God's predictive knowledge of the future and human free will can coexist, perhaps you should go over to the Philosophy Department."

"Yes," I said with no intention whatsoever of investigating the esoteric details of this line of reasoning which are best confined to the Philosophy Department. I thanked Freeman for his time and extracted myself from his tiny office.

I came away from the meeting pleased with what I had learnt. Dr Lee's species description will be invaluable, and his assertion that it must be possible to observe God was a great reassurance.



Field Information

When preparing for a safari we must eventually get started. Procrastination is the enemy. Do not listen to its reasons: “It’s dangerous!” “It’s expensive?” “Everyone says it can’t be done!” Such fears and more buzz around the novice observer’s head before the first field trip. Apply procrastination to the perceived problems and decide to answer them tomorrow, while leaving for the field today.

Any God worthy of his divinity can see us, but why would he want to observe us? Besides, God already knows everything. Could God want to meet us? I am sure he does! Who would not want to meet us? Well, me at least. No, I am joking, God wants to meet you, too. As Dr Lee said, this means our quest has a guaranteed possibility of success. Guaranteed because God guarantees it.

What are you going to do when you meet God? How does one approach God? There is a correct etiquette to use. This is not surprising. Before meeting a king or queen, you need to

learn how to speak to them, bow, speak only when spoken to, be on best behaviour, and wear your best clothes. When meeting God, things are different. God is dazzling. They do not call God “light” for nothing. Even the darkest welding goggles will not shield your eyes if God does not dim the brightness a few notches.

When meeting with God, the key word is humility. God is not impressed with the pretensions of his creatures. He can unmake them in an instant. Humility is not a matter-of-course human trait. It takes practice, and I advise the novice God observer to start practising straight away. If this takes onlookers by surprise, just explain you are practising for a get together with God.

What will you discuss with God? Consider this beforehand. Remember God commands a higher level of respect than the university Chancellor. God holds your existence in the palms of his metaphorical hands and a loose remark could be disastrous. My intended conversation has arisen from my study of my family’s history. I have noted the number of relatives who have gone before and in due course, a future generation will list mine as gone before. So, for my part when talking to God, I will broach the possibility of surviving the death ordeal, but you might talk sport or swap recipes. It is entirely up to you.

At an early stage in my research for this book, I had the good fortune of meeting Dr Christine Divebottom in one of the university cafeterias. In making polite conversation over a plate of pie and chips, I introduced myself and asked her what she taught. Dr Divebottom, a tall slender woman, who had seen taller days, said she taught Strategic Analysis. Still unclear, I asked her faculty. She informed me Strategic Analysis is a subject in the Faculty of Arts that applies critical reasoning to

humanities planning. I discovered that her PhD thesis was on the human interface of crotchet patterns. Seeing the vacant look on my face, she added that she did not know the university had a Field Studies Dept. We both agreed there are many obscure fields of study these days. I asked her if she had any advice for a strategy to use in God observation.

“I suppose you could treat it in the same way as problem solving. There are four alternative approaches,” Dr Divebottom advised.

“Are there? What are the four?” I asked.

“Let me think. With bird watching where the goal is B, and the observer O.”

“B is the bird we are seeking?” I queried.

“That’s right. The four alternatives would be:”

“1. O missed seeing B.”

“2. O avoids seeing B.”

“3. O sees another bird thinking it is B.”

“4. O observes B.”

I recorded these points in my ever-present field notebook. “Let me check if I am following you.”

“Number 1 are those people who walk through the bush and don’t see or hear a single bird. Meanwhile, the avid birder is furiously making notes and taking photos.”

“That’s right Albert,” Divebottom approved.

“Number 2 reminds me of those timid people who have seen Alfred Hitchcock's ‘The Birds’ too many times and run away on seeing a B flock. Meanwhile, bird lovers delighted to

be surrounded by birds, inspect them for tell-tale signs of identification.”

“That’s true of a few, Albert, but most in this category are not interested bird watching. Either way, they are declining your invitation,” added Divebottom.

“Aha,” I mumbled while scribbling Divebottom’s comment in my notebook. “As for Number 3, I was once bird watching in the bush, when I heard the calls of many birds from a group of trees nearby. When I drew closer, I found a single lyrebird that was mimicking every other bird that lived in the neighbourhood. Sometimes things are not as they sound.”

“Counterfeits,” Divebottom confirmed between bites of her sandwich.

“So number 4 is where, after painstaking research into the various species that frequent a locality and hours of searching and waiting, the observer is exhilarated to find the quarry. Sweet success, accompanied by much bragging back at the clubhouse.”

“Something like swapping fishing stories,” added Divebottom.

“But how does this apply to God spotting?” I wondered out loud.

“You can follow the same procedure for finding God.”

“How do you know? Have you been God spotting yourself Christine?”

“Yes I have.”

This revelation threw me for a moment. Christine had gone ahead of me on my quest! She might know what she is talking

about. I resolved to take more notes as she listed the alternatives.

“There are four possible approaches a prospective observer O can make towards God G. These are:”

“1. O missed seeing G.”

“2. O avoids seeing G.”

“3. O observes a counterfeit G.”

“4. O observes G.”

“So a strategy you could use is to rule out each of the alternatives until you find G.”

I thanked Christine for her suggestion and we departed for our offices. Since I had no other strategy, I decided to follow what I came to call the Divebottom Strategy.

The Divebottom Strategy may sound academic and cumbersome to the impatient observer wanting to go straight to alternative 4, but I decided to enjoy the full God Observation Tour. We will survey the blind alleys of God observation, the missed turn offs, long treks towards dead ends and useless detours along the way. This will place novice observers on a firm footing for the final phase of our quest and keep their decorum intact. Every explorer at the Observers’ Club laughs at his or her mistakes, but secretly wishes someone had warned them before they made them. I often see observers at the clubhouse nodding and sighing as they admit to making similar mistakes.

When we near the end of our search, we will face one last hurdle (every good mystery book has one of these). Then we are ready for the first sighting followed by drinks at the club. I urge the observer to enjoy the search itself.



No God Here

We now introduce the reader to the technical nomenclature of God observation (to aid the observer's note taking). The internationally accepted abbreviation of God observer or God observation, is GO. We include budding God observers on their quest as GOs. Similarly, we can abbreviate non-observer as NO. This term may be likened to "non-birders" and is not a criticism of their poverty in the craft of field observation. I will suggest other abbreviations as they arise.

Divebottom Strategy will ensure we cover the full range of issues an observer might meet. By avoiding dead ends, observers will be more confident in the pursuit of their quest. Divebottom's first alternative is analogous to the non-birders

lack of interest in birds. NOs interacting with birders can easily result in conflict. Birdwatchers have a code of ethics for their activities, which include how to behave around non-birders. God observers, too, need to be sensitive to the “non-observers”. Although we expose incorrect methods, we try not to criticise the people who have the misfortune to rely upon them.

Non-observers fail to see God. Intrigued by this, I wanted to understand why. A popular NO at the university is an undergraduate named Bob Farcourt, president of the university NO Club. I had heard that Bob frequents the university’s Manning Bar where he enjoys a drink with friends, so after lectures I went looking for him.

I found Bob at the bar with a schooner of beer in hand. He was pleased to have my company since his friends had not arrived yet. I introduced myself and explained my quest. Bob, an affable bloke, appeared to be genuinely interested. He seemed intelligent and well equipped to go far in business or politics. His friendliness allowed me to broach the question nagging me, “Why are you a non-observer Bob?”

“Well,” said Bob, “I haven’t seen God and if you don’t know where he is, you need to be careful to avoid any mishaps.”

“Have there been any mishaps?” I asked.

“No none. None of our club members has ever seen God. We do a great job of staying out of God’s way. So, wherever God is, he should be pleased we didn’t annoy him,” said Bob proudly.

“Do you think you’d die if you strayed into God’s purview?” I asked.

Bob said, “Yes, we dare not eyeball God. They say the divine gaze is unbearable.”

Remembering my discussion with Freeman, I replied, “If God is good, he must be happy for us to observe him at work or play, not that we should treat God as one of the chaps. We might need to take precautions.”

“I agree, Albert, I don’t suppose the sky will fall in because a chap stumbles upon God in the field, but I’ve never bumped into him myself.”

“Can you tell me any places or circumstances that you avoid?” I plied Bob. “It might be useful in my search for God?”

Bob thought while finishing his beer. “No,” he laughed wiping his mouth, “Everyone in the NO club is completely ignorant of such things. I once tried pursuing God as you are, Albert, but I had too many questions. When I happened upon the NO Club, I found a group of people who cared about peaceful coexistence. We do not deny that anyone is wrong in their beliefs and so we get along with everyone, including God, who we try not to bother.”

“Non-observers love tolerance,” I said echoing Bob’s convictions. “So, you don’t deny God exists, you just haven’t observed God yourselves?”

“No, not seen him. Can’t help you Albert.” I was surprised that Bob was happy for me to go on my quest although he doubted my chances of success. Bob’s NO friends arrived. Although NOs will welcome GOs into their company, they will get twitchy if a GO suggests that they are missing something. I decided it was time to leave. Bob said goodbye suggesting we talk again.

As I pondered our meeting, I formed the impression that NOs are not interested in God observation. They conduct their lives as if God does not exist. It is though they take a quick look around their house and under the sofa. “No God here,” they say, and conclude God cannot be found. NOs do not understand why anyone bothers. Possibly, like Bob, they were novice God observers at an earlier time, but they had no success and quit. For God observation to be successful, a greater level of commitment is required of the observer. Enthusiasm and diligence are traits of successful God observers. Experienced guides are essential, but there were none amongst the NOs.

NOs may be likeable, intelligent and honest people, but because of ignorance, laziness, or some personal reason, they are not interested in joining a GO expedition. Staying at home watching television or spending a night at a university bar does not measure up to the thrill of a GO expedition. NOs do not consider the possibility of their own failure as observers. NOs reject any challenge to their inactivity. This disinterest in God observation is the actual reason for their failure. Their club members’ lack of experience in the field has resulted in their inability as God observers. The high value of our quest and its likelihood of success are good reasons to abandon the NO Club.

[Note from Dorothy: Albert even talks in acronyms at home.]



No God Anywhere

Good field guides warn about places that seem likely places to spot your quarry, but are in fact devoid of any. It is like warning a train spotter not to waste time at a disused railway line. Indeed, some NOs see our quest as a waste of time.

This brings us to Divebottom's second category. As my contribution to the science of God observation field guides, I have proposed the term WON'T (Waste Of Non-observers' Time). They are not simply disinterested in our quest like the NOs; they positively deny that it is achievable. They go beyond the NO position and say that God cannot be observed by anyone, anywhere, any time. WON'Ts refuse to set out on the expedition to observe God saying that our quest is a waste of time, to use the WON'Ts favourite phrase.

Most WON'Ts think God is non-existent. They reason that since they have not seen God, and they do not believe anyone else has seen God either, God is a delusion. How a WON'T could know what everyone else knows is a great mystery. It

must be recognised that WON'Ts have failed to prove the non-existence of God and they cannot show that all God observers are deceived.

Observing God among nasty things

Stephen Carbody, the well-known celebrity and WON'T, said that he does not believe God exists because of the nasty things that happen in the world. This objection is as old as God observation itself. Carbody blames God for the nasties because God, if he exists, made the world. Carbody demands an explanation and accuses his Maker of not doing a good enough job. If I were God, I would have marked Carbody for scrapping. Fortunately for Carbody, God is not like me. God is good; remember?

I phoned Dr Lee to ask him if I could discuss the problem of observing God among nasty things. He thought we best do it over a yum cha. I like this man. He knows how to tackle a difficult problem.

Yum Cha

We met at a large restaurant in Chinatown where the bustling and noisy crowd added excitement to the occasion. After selecting from a passing food cart, Dr Lee went into his stride. "You will remember Albert that I told you God is good. This means the nasty things cannot be his doing. There must be a secondary cause in the universe able to introduce nasty things into the world. I am sure God would agree with Carbody that nastiness is a blight on creation that God would have to remove."

"Are you saying people are the problem?" I clarified.

Dr Lee nodded. “People are without doubt among the secondary causes responsible for nasty things. This has implications for your quest to see God.”

“God has a problem with us,” I observed. “People can’t even get on with each other.”



Lee continued, “Why would a good God keep a world contaminated with nastiness in existence? God must have a means of redeeming the situation, or else why maintain it? So, the problem of nasty things from God’s point of view, is allowing the secondary causes to continue, albeit temporarily, while those secondary causes who want to see God, achieve their goal.”

“Gosh, I didn’t expect God observation to be involved in this,” I said pouring a Chinese tea.

“The problem of nasty things is not the devastating problem that Stephen Carbody thinks it is. Firstly, Carbody does not believe there is such a thing as evil. Secondly, he thinks some things are nasty. So why does he think that evil, which is something he does not think exists, is a problem for God observation? On the contrary, the existence of nasty things

provides us with the confidence that God has a way of overcoming them.”

“It does?” I queried, distracted by a waiter taking photographs of the people at the next table.

Dr Lee replied, “It stands to reason Albert that God has a way to allow God observation without the attendant demise of the God observer, or else why allow a universe with nasty things to continue? Neither God nor God observer would ever make contact.”

“Yes, I see,” I said. The food cart came by. I passed up the fried chicken feet and played it safe by taking the dim sims.

Dr Lee paused while he took an unidentified food morsel (a UFM) in his chopsticks, and then continued, “People are social beings. Our very culture is socially determined. Human identity forms through relationships with others. Observing one another is the stuff of life. This provides a means for people, who are admittedly by nature secondary causes of nasty things, to see a perfectly good God. So you see your quest must have a way forward.”

This was encouraging news. Dr Lee went on to explain something that I will disclose later, because at the time I did not fully understand his point. We finished the yum cha and I headed back to my office with confidence that I would succeed in my quest. It was also good to know that the nastiness in the world is the very reason that God observation is not as easy as the casual observer would like. On the other hand, the nastiness in the world gives us reason to expect that God has a way of dealing with it. I knew that a good field guide would come in handy, and I would have to write one! [Note from Dorothy: GO Albert!]



Are There Whales?

Before going whale spotting, the observer needs to ask him or herself, are there whales to spot? It is sensible to ask the whale watch crew whether there will be whales in the area you are sailing to, but if you were to question whether whales exist, the crew would laugh you out of the boat.

From my preparation of bird watching field guides, I found the question birders ask is not something of the order of “do wedge-tailed eagle exist”, but “where can I find one?” Similarly, God observers want to know how to find God without being distracted by arguments regarding God’s existence.

Yet, some WON’Ts, who I call “new WON’Ts”, take an active stand against God observation by asserting that there is no God to observe. After my discussion with Dr Lee, I felt foolhardy enough to confront the world’s leading new WON’T. It so happened that the new WON’Ts were holding their World

Conference in Sydney. Of course, they do not call themselves WON'Ts. Their leader, Bertrand Castle, was the main conference speaker and I interviewed him during a break between conference sessions. Stephen Carbody was also at the conference as guest celebrity. When I arrived in the afternoon, I briefly met Carbody. He was friendly enough, offered to give me his autograph, but there did not appear to be enough substance to his grey matter to make it worth interviewing him.

Conference afternoon sessions were “workshops”. The construction activity in the workshops was intriguing. The conference organisers had set the delegates an exercise to build “houses” that excluded all reference to God. They reasoned that from within such a house it should be possible to prove that God does not exist. Over afternoon tea, I discussed this with Prof. Bertrand (“call me Bertrand”) Castle.

I declared my concern, “As you know Bertrand, I am preparing a field guide for God observation. Yet, the conference workshops are constructing “houses” devoid of God so that God cannot be seen from inside the house.”

Prof. Castle replied playing a straight bat, “We all observe the world from within our own house, so to speak. If we construct a house that assumes God’s existence, we should not be surprised at people believing there is a God to see”.

“Are you saying everything is relative?” I asked.

“Everything is relative to something else,” explained Prof. Castle. “This is why we are constructing houses from which we can look at the world on the assumption there is no God.”

“What if it rains or the houses catch on fire? They are only made of cardboard.” I said in disbelief.

“They are metaphorical houses my dear Steinberger,” Prof. Castle said in a condescending tone. “God observation from these houses is not on the agenda. It is not possible. We must bravely face the future using our intelligence and innate kindness to make a better world.”

“We all want a better world, but would a world without God be better?” I asked.

“God observers haven’t done very well,” Prof. Castle said.

“Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and Mao didn’t do very well,” I retorted with a list of infamous WONTs.

“You sound like a God observer, Steinberger,” complained Prof. Castle.

“I will never be a God observer if I lived in one of these metaphorical houses of yours,” I replied. I decided it was a good time to drink my tea.

“We are of the opinion that belief in God is based on fear,” continued Prof. Castle, “The unknown is terrifying and when times are tough, many people seek comfort in an imaginary friend.”

I struggled to spar with a world-leading scholar. “But Bertrand, when I talk to a friend on the phone I imagine him, but that does not mean he is not real. Building a house of cardboard to explain the world and its problems does the same.”

“No, no, no, science provides the basis of our construction, not your imaginary supports. We look to our own strengths to make the world a better place, not to imaginary supernatural help from above,” said Prof. Castle.

“What if what you call the imaginary supports are the real ones? Besides, wouldn’t it be useful to have supernatural help? Your houses could be likened to an ostrich hiding its head in the sand.” I was not taking that criticism, even from one of the world’s leading thinkers.

“God observers have long caused unhappiness in the world. They impose what they deem to be morality on the people,” said Prof. Castle getting red under the collar.

“Is happiness the purpose of life?” I questioned. I knew from the newspapers that Castle had recently left his wife for another woman. His morality was questionable, but I did not want to make him angry. He was already uncomfortable with my interview.

“It is better than the rules that God observers want to impose on people,” said Prof. Castle.

“They can be inconvenient,” I agreed searching for common ground with Bernard. “Let’s see how the workshops are going,” I said looking for a way out of an awkward conversation. We walked over to the construction area and met a group of delegates who were pleased with their work and eager for us to admire it. The “houses” looked like big brown cardboard boxes without windows.

A muffled voice came from inside a box, “They’ve wallpapered the inside of this box with extracts from the world’s great philosophers.”

“Is that you Carbody?” said Prof. Castle.

“Yes, I’ve been contemplating the meaning of life without reference to God,” said Carbody.

“Have you come up with anything,” I asked.

“Not yet, it is a bit claustrophobic in here,” replied Carbody.

Prof. Castle climbed inside a box and called out, “There is definitely no God in here Steinberger.”

“Who made the box?” I asked.

“The delegates, of course, from pre-existing stuff,” replied Prof. Castle anticipating my point. “Hey Carbody, I have evolution on my walls. Good scientific stuff to work with.”

I withdrew, leaving the self-made men, Castle and Carbody, to live in their metaphorical houses. Nor could I persuade any of the conference delegates to go with me on our quest. They were infatuated with the teaching of their leaders.

The common feature of all WON'Ts, from antique to new, is that they do not get started on the quest. If they were to influence the novice observer, it would be to abandon the quest like them. GOs need to have a fighting spirit. WON'Ts either run away from, or reject, our noble quest. Let their snide remarks bounce off your steely resolve like my students' paper aeroplanes off the blackboard. If possible, allow your enthusiasm for the expedition infect the WON'Ts so they want to join you.

As one becomes convinced that our quest is important and is likely to succeed, the temptation to give up diminishes. Life would be a waste of time if there were no God to observe. Therefore, it is better to waste time, or more accurately, use your time profitably, to observe God. Let us continue to the next obstacle in the course.

[Note from Dorothy: Albert won't tell you because he is practicing being humble, but he discovered a red-necked

wagtail thought to be extinct. What I mean is if there is a God to be spotted, Albert will find him.]



Counterfeit Gods

A law firm named Tilleke & Gibbins runs The Museum of Counterfeit Goods in Bangkok, Thailand. Counterfeit goods are big business in Bangkok. Although, copying someone else's product is cheaper and easier than designing your own, to do so is stealing. Similarly, a huge industry across the world claims to help you find God. Some of their traditions stretch back hundreds of years. The standard abbreviation for this industry is GOT (God Observation Tradition). Every GOT claims to lead us to our quest. A cursory examination of the many GOTs reveals an array of contradictory claims. This suggests that most, if not all, are frauds. These traditional industries are producing counterfeit goods that lead to dead ends in our quest. They are unnecessary detours GOs do well to avoid.

In the university's Fisher Library I found a huge number of books about GOTs. Every GOT with more than a few dozen adherents has a book about it. The sea of GOTs represented by the pile of books on the library table made me feel sea sick. In desperation, I decided to seek help from Dr Imy Haratharama, a colleague of mine at Sydney University. She is an expert in the Comparative Observation of God (the COG's ~~factory~~

faculty). Dr Imy received her doctorate at the prestigious COG's faculty of the University of Delhi. Dr Imy is short in height, but long on words. I planned to bump into her "accidentally" in the quadrangle while she was busy on her way somewhere. My plan worked.

"How are you Dr Imy?"

"I am well Albert, and you?" Dr Imy said with her white teeth flashing against her dark complexion.

"I am a little perplexed by the large number of GOTs. They are stalling my work on my field guide on God observation. There are just too many of them!"

"Yes there are, perhaps I can suggest something."

"I was hoping you could, Imy."

Dr Imy said, "There is no commonly agreed classification system for GOTs. There is no neutral ground."

"Didn't you say you could help me?"

"Ah! You use a classification system that helps you meet your goals. What is it in your case, observing God?"

I nodded and Dr Imy continued, "You can categorise the myriad of GOTs in regard to how they relate to God observation. They should break down into just a few groups, which should simplify things for you. Each has many sub-GOTs but the differences between these would not be a concern to you, although they are to their adherents."

"Mm, yes that would make things easier."

"I will give it some thought and email you a list, but keep it to yourself; we can't have students finding out. Don't ask me if any of the GOTs has really seen God."

“Thanks Imy. If you don’t mind me saying, you sound a bit cynical about all these GOTs.”

“Yes, I have been lecturing about them too long, which reminds me, I’ve got a lecture to go to. Let me know if you actually find God. It would make my job a lot easier,” said Imy disappearing into a side door.

Dr Imy emailed her secret GOT categories based on observability. These are Dr Imy’s categories.

- The first GOT category assumes there is a God who is open to observation.
- Second, a group of GOTs who assume there is no God and busy themselves with “the really important stuff of life”.
- Third, those who see God as an impersonal principle behind everything.
- The fourth group sees God as manifesting in a horde of gods, which gives us lots to see.
- Fifth, God is in everyone, so we need to look within.
- The sixth group conceives a God who is so far above the world we cannot see him.

I considered the above categories and decided that I needed to find out more from Dr Haratharama. This time I made a lunchtime appointment with Dr Imy at the University’s Wentworth Building Food Court, which has Indian food. I piled on our trays an extra pot of tea and desserts, expecting a long lunch. We found a quiet table (so we did not disturb others). With my field book opened, I said, “Imy, Can you elaborate for me how each of your categories relates to God

observation?" Dr Divebottom walked passed. She looked at Dr Imy, gave me a knowing smile and walked on to another table.

"Let's go through them one at a time," said Dr Imy, never one to say anything in a summary fashion she could describe in painstaking detail. For the reader's benefit, I will insert my notebook headings and edit Dr Imy's meanderings.

- **Which God?**

"Your first category of GOTs has an observable God," I started and then waited while Dr Imy sampled her Australian-Indian curried chicken and rice dish.

"Well," she said, "These GOTs claim to lead observers to God, but there has been much disappointment."

"Why is that?" I said.

"They didn't meet God," said Dr Imy. "They turned out to be counterfeits."

"This is where Dr Lee's description of God's distinguishing features would be useful," I said. "When we observe what we suspect might be God, we need to be sure it is God."

"Yes, well good luck with that one, Albert. Now let's move on to the next group."

- **We do not need to observe God.**

"This GOT is engrossed in the things of God while saying God does not exist," said Imy.

"How are they different from those who don't believe in God?" I asked.

"They enjoy the trappings of religion, the robes, the incantations, the candles, incense.... These things are attractive

to many who pursue peace, enjoy meditation, and are concerned about social justice,” said Dr Imy.

“But Imy, why are any of these things important if there is no God?”

“I suppose this doesn’t occur to them,” laughed Dr Imy. “They are fixed in their beliefs. Even matters of life and death they resolve by recycling, peaceful annihilation or absorption into the universe. I was a Viking in my previous life.”

“But you’re Indian,” I said incredulously.

“Beauty is only skin deep Albert,” Dr Imy shot back.

Baffled, I returned to the topic at hand, “Why would people want to pursue God’s things but not God?”

“DIY morality has no accountability. God observation can play havoc with one’s world view,” Dr Imy responded.

“This resembles the God avoiders,” I commented. As I had already found, prospective God observers need a fighting spirit to persevere to the end.

- **God as an impersonal principle**

“The third category of GOT,” said Dr Imy pouring a cup of tea, “regards God as the principle behind the universe.”

“We can’t see a principle,” I objected.

“No, not in the same way you see a personal God,” agreed Dr Imy, “but God’s invisibility makes him difficult to see anyway.”

“This GOT renders our quest futile,” I noted in my notebook.

“It teaches that an impersonal principle somehow gave rise to personal beings. A principle creating anything is unlikely, but this GOT usually says God created the universe. How an impersonal principle can underpin any system of personal morality is difficult to fathom,” said Dr Imy.

I added what I had learned from Dr Lee, “This GOT views the nasty things in the world as inconveniences, at least for other people. The way of life they seek is ultimately self-serving.”

“Yes,” continued Dr Imy, “But this GOT allows its adherents to rest easy and avoid any anxiety about meeting a personal God.”

“What anxiety?” I said, “If God is good, the observer can make it a priority to meet with God without fearing dire consequences.”

“If it only were that easy, Albert,” said Dr Imy wistfully.

- **Many gods**

“The next GOT has been around since ancient times. This GOT worships a multitude of gods. You should have no problem finding one there, Albert.”

“But if there is one God, the rest are frauds,” I objected.

“They accept that others might have different gods,” said Dr Imy. “However, most teach that there is just one god but this god manifests as many different gods to different people.”

“Does this cause tensions with neighbours with different gods?” I asked.

“It does indeed, Albert, especially where adherents to this GOT live in the one country. Also, large numbers of adherents of a particular GOT living in the one place results in a

multitude of variations. Their devotees are sometimes hostile towards other variants.”

“So, there are even different beliefs within the one GOT. It must be difficult to get along with others in the same neighbourhood,” I added.

“Albert, do any of these gods appeal to you?”

“Imy, all these manifestations are counterfeits!”

“It provides a thriving market for idol manufacturing,” Imy joked, “Besides, millions of people buy them, Albert, so you must take them seriously.”

“Yes, but consulting with a piece of wood or a lump of metal does not compare to meeting God,” I objected.

“So I can’t interest you in a trip overseas?” goaded Dr Imy amused by my reaction.

“This GOTs many gods or one god manifesting as many gods, are chicanery,” I concluded.

- **God in Everyone**

“Oh well, let’s go to the next GOT category,” said Dr Imy who did not appear concerned. “This GOT claims to be new, but recycles an old one. It says that God is in everyone.”

“We are all gods!” I exclaimed.

“So, God observation couldn’t be easier, Albert.”

“Calling a sparrow an albatross doesn’t make for an authentic sighting,” I said.

“Celebrities tell of their out-of-body experiences and meeting people from the after-life,” said Dr Imy.

“You could meet your Viking ancestors, Imy,” I joked.

“Surely you believe in the supernatural Albert.”

“I accept that there might be forces at work to convince the unwary observer they have experienced something supernatural,” I said.

“God is supernatural,” said Dr Imy.

“Although God is supernatural, not everything supernatural is God,” I clarified.

Dr Imy added, “This GOT is popular with people driven by the human desire for acceptance.”

“That does not make it likely to be true. Lowering the standard fails to qualify as a sighting,” I said ruling out this GOT.

- **Absentee God**

Dr Imy progressed to dessert, and to the next GOT. “This GOT says there is a God, but God looks on from a distance, and it is such a great distance he is outside of the universe. So, we cannot meet him. The common religious rituals apply, but they do not expect interaction with God and, not surprisingly, they do not have any. This group criticises the other GOTs because its own worldview is devoid of God.”

“An absentee God,” I wrote in my notebook.

Dr Imy continued, “If God created the world and left it to its own devices, he could view everything that happens on Earth from his vantage point outside the universe. However, from inside creation we cannot see God. We do not meet the clockmaker by observing his clock.”

Recognising Dr Imy’s reference to the argument from design, I added, “A clock suggests there is a clockmaker, but clock watching isn’t the same as seeing its maker.”

Dr Imy responded, “We need not view the world and God in such mechanical terms. Since humans are personal, one expects their creator to not be short on personality. If a person wants to meet another person, interaction at the personal level must take place for it to be a proper meeting.”

I had not expected Imy to make that observation. “It would be like going to lunch with someone and just peering at each other across the table without talking,” I agreed.

“Albert, if God simply peered at us from a distance, how would God get to know us? Interaction is essential to observation, and this applies both to God and to us,” said Dr Imy. “I wish you every success in your attempt.”

“But how am I to distinguish a fraudulent view of God from an authentic sighting?” I was asking the wrong person.

“Counterfeit god sightings don’t qualify as God sightings. I am sure by comparison with God, counterfeits will be obvious,” suggested Dr Imy.

“It is often said that the best way of detecting a counterfeit is by comparing it to the original. Still, the counterfeits are an unwanted detour,” I said.

Dr Imy added as we finished our lunch, “People who advocate for the counterfeit GOTs honestly believe in them. They are usually people of integrity, but sincerity isn’t everything.”

“What if they are mistaken, deceived, or even deluded?” I agreed.

“Exactly, but I wish you more success,” said Dr Imy as she glanced at her watch and stood up. “Let me know if you make an authentic sighting.”

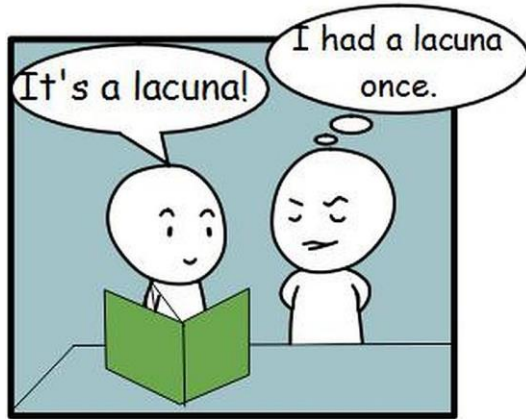
I conclude that none of the counterfeit GOT adherents has seen God. Even Dr Imy, as well credentialed a COG's scholar as she is, admitted she has not seen God. My competitive nature rose within me at the challenge I had set myself. Let us set aside the counterfeit GOTs, and continue on our quest to find God.



The Quest to Find God

God wants us to meet. I had not expected this when Dr Lee said at the Yum Cha, “God’s desire to observe you and your desire to observe God will enable the meeting you both seek.” God is difficult to find for someone who is everywhere. Perhaps the problem is at our end. We might be overlooking God or be out of earshot. Whatever the reason, we fail to encounter God. This is the big lacuna.

The first time I heard the word “lacuna” was at the Newtown God Observers’ Club. Kev Makeshaw, the local club president, sucked on his Havana cigar and said, “Albert, you know what the problem is?” I nodded in the negative. Kev continued, “It’s the big lacuna.” I had no idea what lacuna meant, but I was not going to ask Kev. Not wanting to appear ignorant, I just nodded in agreement. I should have realised that Kev was baiting me but I had not known him long at that stage. Kev is no intellectual. He is a character. Once when recruiting new members for the club he went to an illegal gambling casino to “play” the tables and several new members resulted. So, I waited until I got back to my office to refer to a dictionary. Lacuna means hiatus, blank, a missing part, a gap.



First, I thought Kev must have intended God is missing from many people's lives. It sounded pious enough. What could be wrong with that? It was too religious for Kev, and for me. No, God was not the big lacuna in this sense. God would never be missing in action or AWOL. No, Dr Lee said that God is not missing from anywhere.

I had a second attempt. What if we were the ones missing? I know where I am. I cannot be missing. "What is the big lacuna?" I pondered.

Then it came to me, "It's the missing voice in the conversation." We exclude God from the conversation. The universities are full of scholars speculating about God and there are multitudes of people exploring alternatives without stopping to ask God for directions. Most leave God out of the discussion and plan their expeditions without him. If God is everywhere but we fail to contact him, our failure must be avoidable.

I realised that I needed a confab with God about the quest. I must make an appointment with God. How does one book an

appointment with God? The next day, being Sunday, I decided I would go to the Newtown Observers' Club for help.

I arrived mid-morning to find the club in a commotion. There with people running everywhere. Kev Makeshaw was at the centre of the bustle. He had a map laid out on the table. "Excellent timing, Albert. We are just leaving for a God observation trip. Do you want to come?"

"Do I!" I said not hiding my enthusiasm.

"There's been a sighting out west. These things can be contagious. I am sure we will see God. We should take a look." Kev took a last suck on his cigar before putting it out.

At that moment, a small car with P-plates pulled up outside the club. The driver was Max Bradfield, one of my students. He was wearing cricket whites and a blue university team cap on his head. Kev saw my surprise and commented that Max was a leader of the Observers' Club youth group. I squeezed into the back of the car with Kev, who rarely drove being too busy making phone calls.

I was amazed when Dr Imy Haratharama climbed into the front seat, but then she turned and said, "Albert, I'm surprised to see you here."

"It's part of my research for a field guide," I replied.

"Yes, me too. Research." I think it was a case of two half-truths makes one lie.

During the journey, we passed the impressive buildings of Furnace Fashions and Pompadour Welding Helmets, which reminded me of the need to take precautions. As my mind wandered, I remembered the question that I went to the club to ask.

I turned to Kev, “I attended the club this morning to ask you if God takes appointments and how to make one.”

He smiled and said, “It looks like you already have an appointment.” Could God have read my thoughts about making an appointment? Was this an example of God’s famed omniscience?

During a conversation about Max’s chances of making the university’s fifth grade cricket team, Max mentioned Bob Farcourt was a member of the cricket club. Bob was captain of the third grade team. Max had invited Bob to come on our field trip, but Bob said that as captain he should lead his team onto the field.

“I am not surprised,” said Kev to Max. “Those NOs always have an excuse. They are never interested in joining a God observation expedition. God observation never fits into their schedules.”

We arrived where the sighting had occurred, the Western Suburbs Observers’ Club. Max parked in the car park. I felt uneasy. God appearing at an Observers’ Club would be like a wild lion appearing at a zoo. I thought we were going bush. If God wanted to meet us at an Observers’ Club, why not at Newtown? Surely God’s presence here would set the building ablaze? I had so many questions I was hesitant to enter the club.



The Final Hurdle

Max ran off into the clubhouse forgetting to turn off the car engine. Imy and I were not so keen, and we stood next to the car calmly waiting for Kev. I asked Kev for an explanation. He reached in the car to turn off the engine and get the key to lock the car doors. I was suspicious that Kev was taking a long time over the car, and when he pulled out his handkerchief to clean the windscreen, I knew he was delaying.

Max appeared at the clubhouse door. "I've seen God!" he shouted and bolted back inside the clubhouse.

"What is going on?" I asked Kev. Imy ran into the clubhouse. Her undignified behaviour shocked me. Max was young and impressionable and could be excused, but Imy? Really!

"I guess he made a sighting," Kev said.

“Surely not,” I objected. “Why would God appear here? Besides, Max is still alive, and he wasn’t wearing any protective clothing.”

“You’ve got a point there,” agreed Kev. “You might have to revise your observation procedures.”

“What? Anyway, how would it look in my field notes if I wrote sighted God in the Western Suburbs Branch of the Observers’ Club? It would be a vagrant God sighting. Birds can turn up in unexpected places, even jumbo jets, but God! Who would accept that entry?”

Kev answered, “The purpose of field notes is not as evidence of sightings, but as a record for the enthusiast. It’s like in bird watching. A photograph or notebook entry is just a record of that delightful moment when I spotted the yellow-billed leg-shaker.”

I was astonished that Kev had seen the yellow-billed leg-shaker and for a moment considered interrupting the line of conversation to discover if he had any clues about finding one. It is funny how the most significant of conversations can be interrupted by something of no relative importance. Although, I would take up the matter of the leg-shaker with Kev another time.

Meanwhile, Kev continued, “It helps birders relive the thrill of the sighting. And a sighting in an unexpected place is even better, as long as it’s not a stuffed bird in a museum, eh Albert?”

“That would never do,” I agreed, wondering whether Kev had read my highly acclaimed Australian Birders’ Field Guide. “Well Kev, how does this work?” I said, my mind returning to the topic.

“Work?” queried Kev.

“Does God just show up unexpectedly and give the once over to innocent people going about their own business?”

“No, that would never do,” Kev echoed. “It goes against God’s code of ethics.”

“Does God have a code of ethics?” I asked.

“Yes, of course he does. A God who can do whatever he likes does not act arbitrarily.” It was obvious to Kev.

“Sometimes it seems like that. One person is graced with a God observation and another goes through life without ever seeing God,” I countered.

“That brings us back to how it works,” said Kev returning to my question.

Kev checked his pockets looking for a cigar. I tried to distract him by keeping the conversation going. Besides, I was not at all keen to go inside the clubhouse. I feared disappointment. “So Kev, how does it work?”

“Two things are needed for a sighting: An observer and the observee. Unlike in train spotting, with God the observed one is also an observer. God has the upper hand in this spotting dual. God only shows himself to dedicated observers. Casual observers are like tourists who say they saw the Eiffel Tower on their last holiday and will see the Great Wall of China on their next. God is unseeable to them.”

“God can see everyone. It’s one of his ‘omni’ attributes,” I said displaying my knowledge of the subject, but Kev wanted me to follow his argument.

“Albert, for us to meet God face-to-face, would cause instant disintegration. For us less-than-good beings to gaze

upon the Almighty would bring our innings to a close.” A bothered expression came on Kev’s face. “Ah! It is a great mystery why more people don’t share our interest in meeting God, Albert. But for us enthusiasts, God finds a way of making contact.”

“God does?” I queried. This was my quest; now it was also God’s quest. “And I don’t need the fireproof suit?”

Kev laughed, “No that wouldn’t help you, but don’t worry, God fixed it. Many years ago, God entered his creation.”

“Akin to an artist entering a painting or an entomologist becoming an insect,” I mused, remembering my conversation with Dr Lee (the one I told you I did not tell you about earlier).

“In the Observers’ Club we call him ‘the Image of God’, because he makes it possible for us to see the invisible God.”

“I was trying to figure out how we would see an invisible God,” I said.

“Anyway,” said Kev, “for God to do this, thanks to the nastiness in the world, would inevitably make the Image a target for the nastiness he opposed. A nasty end to the Image’s life on Earth was a sure thing. He didn’t use his divine influence to avoid the inevitable. He was susceptible to hard times and death, like the rest of us.”

“What was the point of coming then?” I asked.

Kev explained, “The purpose was to allow humans to meet God without dying. The Image of God can do things that the rest of us humans can’t do. For starters, he took back his life. He is a faithful friend to us in spite of our imperfections, and at the same time a faithful son to God. The Image acts as a mediator.”

“So I can see the Image of God?” I asked.

Kev replied, “No probably not. The Image no longer resides locally. He lives in heaven.” Kev saw the crestfallen expression on my face and added, “But all is not lost, he sent his Spirit into his people.”

“I can meet the Spirit of God?” I said.

“God wants to make contact,” affirmed Kev.

I contemplated this for a few moments. The observer and the Observed are both on the same quest. The Image of God had already cleared the last hurdle. My observing the Image will not kill me. With God’s record, I could not fail to meet him. My perceptual apparatus was a mere metaphor in observing God. Prof. Castle was right about metaphors, but he chose the wrong metaphors. Valid metaphors are being friends with God, adopted into God’s family, walking in the light, etc.

“You have an appointment,” Kev prompted looking at the time on his phone.

“In that case, let’s go in the club and meet God,” I said, with my face set towards the clubhouse. The final hurdle had transformed into an opportunity to meet God.



The First Sighting

I strode into the clubhouse looking around for the Spirit of God. He was everywhere! “Here I am,” he said. The Spirit had no need for audible words or visual displays. He used direct spirit to spirit communication, so I am translating what I perceived in my spirit. The one and only God, the one who keeps us in existence, comes to meet us because the Image of God has opened a way. The Spirit of God came to his people and I had joined the party.

I felt unworthy. Unlike the good-natured Image, there is a not-so-good side to my nature. I was very aware of my failures. I thought I deserved to die from meeting God. However, the Spirit smiled and said in my spirit, “Pleased to meet you Albert.” God had taken the proper precautions himself. The fireproof suit and welding helmet (as excellent as our sponsors’ equipment are) were not needed. As if I could stand before a

perfect God and survive. My reasoning faculties must have been in neutral gear.

“I’m pleased to meet you, too,” I said, at a loss for words. I had observed God sure enough, but not with my physical eyes. A wave of revelation washed over me. We cannot see God using our physical eyes. We apprehend nothing in itself with our physical eyes. Light bounces off the outer form of an object. The reflected light waves form a picture on the retina in our eyes. Electrical impulses travel along the nerves to our brains. Seeing things with your eyes is a shadowy experience. But when we meet God, we walk into a solid wall of reality. The first sighting comes with a jolt.

“Let’s be friends,” communicated the Spirit. He didn’t need to ask. My get together with God made me aware of God’s overwhelming love. I had not expected this. God is not an object to view using binoculars, or a concept to grasp by my superior intelligence, but a Person to befriend. The notion of God being out there, remote from us, evaporated. He is never remote. When I tried to see God on my terms, he was invisible. God observation uses different apparatus, the eyes of faith. This is not so strange. Friendships are formed between people through faith. We believe in our friends, trust them, and give of ourselves to one another. We relate to the Image in the same way we relate to other people. This is why the Image entered creation as a human. When we place our faith in the Image, the Spirit rushes into your life like a lover running to meet the loved one. I had not thought that God observation had anything to do with love. I knew the Image, when he was on Earth, taught people to love one another, but I thought this was ethical advice. He was actually expressing his nature. Love involves us in God observation, not because God is in others, but because God is love.

From God's side of the observation, people are blemished by a streak of nastiness, and a good God could not bear to be with us. God relates to us via his Image because to the Image, we are brothers and sisters, imperfect maybe, but family none the less. God observes his people as friends of the Image. Our imperfections are overcome by the Image's great love. The Image powerfully mediates between parties that could not otherwise occupy the same space.

The first sighting was a joyous occasion. Max was lying on the floor with a smile on his face. Meeting God had overloaded Max's circuits and he needed immediate floor rest. Imy was laughing at anything and everything, so much so that tears of joy streamed down her cheeks. As for me, delighted at God's acceptance I wanted to tell everyone who would listen, but I was incoherent: "I've seen God. Me!" The local observers' club members tried to be helpful, but they were as overcome as the visitors. Kev had seen such euphoria before and joined in our excitement by taking photos with his mobile phone.

After sighting God, our lives are changed. When going birding, you struggle to remember a bird's markings. God observation does not become a fading memory. The Image once said, "I am with you always." God remains God to his people, not as a remote sovereign God who punishes the disobedient, but as a constant friend who his people live to please. A new relationship is born. As long as our streak of nastiness continues, we do inappropriate things. Except now we have cause to resist them with help from the Spirit, and we have the hope of a future life without nastiness polluting our characters.

When God observation is done the right way, it is certain of success and comes with the promise of God's ongoing

presence with us. It might not always look that way from Prof. Castle's metaphorical house, but God's world view is much larger and preferable. God even answered my question, which I had forgotten to ask. He said, "If I want to keep my friends around after they are gathered to their ancestors, will I not do so? I have experience at raising the dead."



Back at the Clubhouse

Kev and I bundled Max into the back seat of the car. Max was still resting and Imy still giggling. Kev was talking on the phone broadcasting the news of the God sighting. As I drove the team back to base camp (our God Observers' Clubhouse) I pondered how I might change my field guide. Imy must have been thinking along similar lines. She started to say she would re-write the Comparative Observation syllabus, but broke off into laughter at the thought. I used to avoid Dr Imy, but now she is a fellow club member. Things were changing fast, and I did not care at all.

The experience bonded the four of us together and we were keen to meet with the club members. I was no longer an outsider on a quest, but a part of the club. The “members’ only” area is now my native habitat. Living in a world of individualism had isolated me from others. Now I am a bona fide God Observers’ Club member, one of the company. A social dimension had moved into my life to supplant the ego. Move over Sigmund.

When we arrived back at the club, to my surprise Dorothy greeted me with, “You took your time Alby”.

“What are you doing here Dot?” I asked.

Dorothy explained, “When I was typing your manuscript, I took a shortcut to the last phase of Divebottom Strategy. What kept you?”

“I think I was too fearful to dive in at the deep end,” I confessed.

“You are too conservative Alby. But you always get there in the end,” said Dorothy returning to help with preparations for the meal. It took a few moments for me to realise that the celebration was for Max, Imy and me.

As I mingled in the crowd, I met Christine Divebottom, who surprised me with a hug. “You didn’t have to go through the whole strategy Albert,” she chided.

“I am very thorough,” I replied extricating myself from her, but I turned around and bumped into Freeman Lee, who gave me a more respectable handshake.

“Well done Albert. You met the One Amigo,” Freeman said with a laugh.

“Yes Freeman. I needn’t have been concerned at being dazzled by the light. Our Amigo just smiled at me as though he knew what I was thinking.”

“He probably did,” agreed Freeman.

“Freeman, when you were relating God’s attributes to me, you didn’t tell me about his love.”

“Love is not so much an attribute as the centre of his being. But, yes I should have told you about it. We must get

together to discuss God observation more thoroughly,” said Freeman making way for another well-wisher.

There followed much backslapping and encouragement from other club members who introduced themselves.

We found our seats at the tables, with me next to Dorothy on one side and Kev on the other. Kev, in his role as club president, sat at the head of the table. Kev stood and announced, “Members, before we eat I will interview our new club members about today’s adventure at the Western Suburbs Observers’ Club. We made a glorious sighting of God. Let’s hear from each of them. Max, you go first.”

Max rose to his feet, “God’s power overwhelmed me. My preoccupation with university exams and the cricket team paled into insignificance compared to meeting God. It was crazy of me to be a youth group leader when I hadn’t even seen God. Thank you for your confidence in me. Well, now I’m fully qualified to take others with me on future expeditions.” Max received a warm round of applause.

“Imy,” said Kev, “you appeared to enjoy the expedition.”

“Oh yes,” said Imy, “I never imagined God observation to be such fun. I couldn’t stop laughing,” which was enough to start her laughing again. Meanwhile, Kev displayed the photos he had taken on a screen. It gave everyone a laugh. Imy regained her composure and continued. “My approach to God was very serious, but I was the one taking myself too seriously. I will lighten up my COG’s course. The lectures shouldn’t be so boring in future!” This drew appreciative applause from club members.

“What’s your story Albert?” said Kev, “Now you can finish your field guide.”

“I could not complete a field guide on God observation without seeing God myself. Although I was optimistic from the beginning, I got anxious towards the end. I guess I was seeing things from the wrong perspective. Thanks Kev for your help.”

Kev replied, “Our intrepid explorer has achieved his quest.”

“A quest I intend going on again and again,” I said searching for words. “In the words of the club motto, ‘Blessed are the God observers, for they will see God’.” This drew thunderous applause and cries of “Hear, hear!” from the club members. Kev took his seat, signalling the start of feasting accompanied by a buzz of conversation. I leaned over to Kev, “Now what do you know about the yellow-billed leg-shaker?”

[Note from Dorothy: Time for a cuppa]



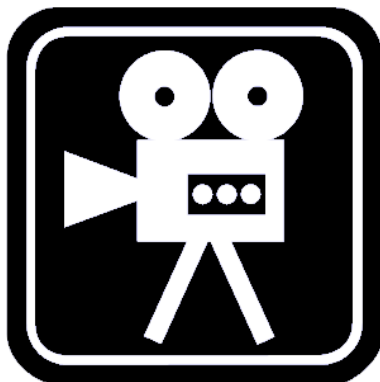
Epilogue

I started out with the intention of writing a definitive field guide on God observation, but what I have achieved is far from definitive. It turned out to be beyond me to nail down the complexities of God observation. Still, I believe my field guide will be helpful for many people in their quest and I am grateful to the God Observers' Club for endorsing my efforts. Whether you use this field guide or another, the important thing is achieving your goal.

May you, my readers, share my experience (although without the fireproof suit and welding helmet now going cheap), and enjoy the delights of God observation. As I found, you can save yourself much time, effort and money along the way. You do not have to climb a high mountain. Nor do you need to go overseas, join an elite group, go running after a special person, or buy their books (although this one is superb value). No ritual acts, merit points, or learning mysterious

secrets are needed. God is observing you and waiting for you to come to observe him.

The End



Acknowledgements

The production management thanks the many people who contributed to this book. These include Mr Albert Steinberger, our field guide (and wannabe mystery novelist), his expert colleagues, and those behind-the-scenes people, the luggage carriers, the catering crew, and the on-location safari team. I wish to acknowledge the work of the editorial team, our [excellent] typist, Mrs Dorothy Steinberger, and Mr Max Bradfield, our student graphics designer who seemed to think this is a comedy book. The success of this volume has given us high hopes for a movie-length documentary film. Thanks to God for being a good sport (as we say in Australia) in allowing us to achieve our quest.

Derek Philip Thompson
Publisher.



About the Author

Derek Thompson was made in England and exported to Australia with mum, dad and brother in 1957. After rigorous training in electrical engineering at Sydney University, he worked for 34 long years with NSW Public Works as an electrical engineer and project manager. He is married to Margaret and has two daughters. Derek has no aspirations to be a movie producer (in spite of what Albert says). He is a God observer who, on retirement, completed a Diploma in Theology with Charles Sturt University and now is busy writing and working for an ecumenical church organisation called the Illawarra Prayer Network.



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