

Falun Gong

An Evaluation from the Theological Perspective of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

History, Beliefs, Practices

Identity:

Falun Gong, also called Falun Dafa, is a Chinese system of beliefs and spiritual disciplines founded in 1992 by Li Hongzhi. “Falun Gong” means “Law Wheel Practice” and is named for a wheel symbol representing Buddhist and Daoist principles.¹

Founder:

Li Hongzhi (b. 1951 or 1952)

Statistics:

Exact numbers for Falun Gong followers are difficult to determine since the spiritual disciplines are often practiced by individuals, rather than in organized communities. The Chinese government estimated that by 1999, seven years after its founding, Falun Gong had 70 to 100 million followers in China. Human rights organizations believe that Falun Gong has followers in over 100 countries, including the United States.² Falun Gong operates the touring dance company Shen Yun and the Epoch Media Group with its conservative news outlet, *The Epoch Times*, which Falun Gong claims is the fourth largest newspaper (by subscriber count) in the United States.

History:

Falun Gong and Falun Dafa are names for the same practice. The Falun Dafa name, which means “Great Way of the Law Wheel,” has been used in China, while Falun Gong is used more often in Western nations.³ The Falun Gong movement grew out of the experience of founder Li Hongzhi with Qi Gong, a Chinese practice of breathing exercises, movements and postures. Very little is known about Li Hongzhi’s early life. Falun Gong stories of its founder describe spiritual qualities and supernatural powers developed even in his childhood. When Communists seized power in China in 1949, traditional beliefs were purged from Chinese society. When Falun Gong was founded in 1992, the new system of spiritual disciplines “represented a rediscovery of the

¹ Daoism (or Taoism) is a Chinese religion in which followers seek to live in harmony with the “dao,” or the natural way of all things. See an evaluation of Buddhism from a Lutheran perspective by the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations at resources.lcms.org/reading-study/ctcr-library-religious-organizations-movements-and-lodges.

² “Statistics & Evidence,” *Falun Dafa Infocenter*, accessed March 12, 2026, faluninfo.net/key-statistics-related-to-falun-gong.

³ “FAQ – What is Falun Gong?,” *Falun Dafa Infocenter*, accessed March 12, 2026, faluninfo.net/faq-about-falun-gong.

‘old, good things of ancient China.’”⁴ After traveling and teaching in many countries around the world, founder Li Hongzhi moved to the United States to live in New York.

Falun Gong opposes the Chinese Communist Party, feminism and homosexuality and supports conservative political views. Falun Gong rejects modern medicine and founder Li Hongzhi believes that aliens from outer space created modern technology with the purpose of replacing human beings with soulless clones. Believing that Falun Gong — with its emphasis on traditional Chinese culture as well as what they called “superstition” and “heretical teaching” — was a threat to their regime, the Chinese Communist Party began persecuting Falun Gong members in July of 1999, using book burnings, propaganda and mass arrests against them. An investigation by David Matas of B’nai Brith Canada and Ethan Gutmann of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies concluded that the Chinese government has executed an estimated 9000 Falun Gong followers in order to sell their lungs, livers, kidneys and other organs.⁵

Falun Gong operates the politically conservative news outlet *The Epoch Times*, which began in 2000 as a propaganda newspaper against the Chinese Communist Party.⁶ In 2006, Falun Gong founded *Shen Yun*, a world-touring dance company that celebrates ancient Chinese culture as it was before Communism.

Texts:

Books by Li Hongzhi include *Falun Gong* (1993), *Zhuan Falun* (1994), *The Great Way of Spiritual Perfection* (1997), *Teachings at Conferences in the United States* (1997), *Explaining the Teachings of Zhuan Falun* (1997) and *Guiding the Voyage* (2001).

Beliefs and Practices:

Falun Gong combines principles from several Chinese philosophies: truth and honesty from Daoism, compassion from Buddhism and righteousness, piety and tolerance from Confucianism.⁷ Falun Gong followers believe that founder Li Hongzhi is divine, and many believe that he can read minds and that he is always watching believers. Li believes that Falun Gong is a practice “that can remove illnesses, keep people fit and make one live longer. Like tai chi, it’s a morning exercise.”⁸ According to Falun Gong beliefs, these exercises are designed to move “life energy” through the body.

⁴ “What is Falun Gong?,” *Falun Dafa Infocenter*, accessed March 12, 2026, faluninfo.net/what-is-falun-gong-falun-dafa.

⁵ Wesley J. Smith, “More Evidence that China [Is] Killing Dissidents and Selling Their Organs,” *First Things*, April 27, 2010, firstthings.com/more-evidence-that-china-killing-dissidents-and-selling-their-organs.

⁶ Brandy Zadrozny, “How the conspiracy-fueled Epoch Times went mainstream and made millions,” *NBC News*, Oct. 13, 2023, [nbcnews.com/news/us-news/epoch-times-falun-gong-growth-rcna111373](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/epoch-times-falun-gong-growth-rcna111373).

⁷ “Ancient Roots, Almost Lost,” *Falun Dafa Information Center*, accessed March 12, 2026, faluninfo.net/falun-gong-story-ancient-roots. Confucianism is a system of ethics and a way of life taught by the Chinese philosopher Confucius (c. 551–c. 479 B.C.).

⁸ Jonathan S. Landreth and J.S. Greenberg, “Questions for Li Hongzhi; Eye of the Storm,” *The New York Times Magazine*, August 8, 1999, [nytimes.com/1999/08/08/magazine/the-way-we-live-now-8-8-99-questions-for-li-hongzhi-eye-of-the-storm.html](https://www.nytimes.com/1999/08/08/magazine/the-way-we-live-now-8-8-99-questions-for-li-hongzhi-eye-of-the-storm.html).

Li Hongzhi teaches that the universe has four stages: Formation, Stasis, Degeneration and Destruction (comparable to human birth, aging, illness and death). Currently earth is in the last times, the Destruction phase. The supreme being, the Creator, took 200 million years to make Three Realms, which correspond to earth, heaven and a higher heaven. The Creator has been reincarnated within countless bodies in order to establish world cultures. Other divine beings became human to impart spiritual teachings to people and create world religions to uphold morality. Although the Falun Gong Creator loves all people, he has greater love for those he feels deserve his love.⁹ According to the Falun Gong belief in reincarnation, those who do not lead happy lives are suffering for evil deeds done in a past life. Believers practice meditation and physical exercises and are taught to be loving and kind as they uplift the souls of others. Falun Gong followers should not criticize others, although there is an exception: criticism of the Chinese Communist Party is allowed.

Li Hongzhi believes that chaos reigns now in society because people have forsaken belief in orthodox religion. He also teaches that chaos is caused by aliens from other planets who invade human minds and culture, cause wars and introduce inventions of modern science such as computers and airplanes. The aliens wish to replace humans with clones, and Li believes that aliens have constructed a layer of cells in human beings and use this layer “to control human culture and spirituality and in the end to replace human beings.”¹⁰

A Lutheran Response

Falun Gong followers believe in a Creator and multiple divine beings, one of which is their founder, Li Hongzhi. As Christians, we know and believe that there is one God, the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. He is the Creator and “by faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God” (Heb. 11:3). This divine work was completed not in 200 million years as Li Hongzhi believes, but in six days (Gen. 1:31). The Falun Gong Creator is believed to have been reincarnated countless times, but we confess that God the Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, became incarnate only once to suffer, die and rise from death for the sake of our salvation (1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Cor. 15:3–4).

According to Falun Gong beliefs, followers are to be kind and loving as they seek to uplift others; yet they believe that their Creator has greater love for his more deserving believers. While teachings that encourage good behavior are commendable, no efforts at godly living can earn God’s love and favor. God’s grace is His undeserved favor for sinners, and we are saved only by His grace through faith in Jesus (Eph. 2:8–10). Created anew in Jesus, we seek to follow in His steps and “walk in love” as He did (Eph. 5:2).

Falun Gong also teaches the false idea of reincarnation, the belief that people are reborn countless times into different bodies. Scripture teaches that “it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment” (Heb. 9:27). There are no multiple lives through which

⁹ Li Hongzhi, “Why The Creator Seeks To Save All Life,” *NTD/New Tang Dynasty Television*, April 18, 2023, ntd.com/article-by-falun-gong-founder-mr-li-hongzhi-why-the-creator-seeks-to-save-all-life_913971.html.

¹⁰ “Interview with Li Hongzhi,” *Time*, May 10, 1999, time.com/archive/6954898/interview-with-li-hongzhi-2.

individuals may be rewarded or suffer to pay for past behavior. As the apostle Paul writes, “Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2).

God’s Word teaches us that all authority, including the authority belonging to secular governments, comes from God (Rom. 13:1–7). When earthly authorities oppose God’s will and His laws, we know that “we must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). We pray for freedom and safety for all people, asking especially that our brothers and sisters in Christ and all who suffer persecution might live in peace.

Falun Gong teaches that certain divine beings became incarnate as prophets or other religious leaders to impart spiritual truths to people. As Christians, we know that the various world religions and spiritual leaders do not represent inspired truth. God has revealed Himself to us in His Word and, above all, through His Son: “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son” (Heb. 1:1–2). Jesus alone is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6) and His is the only name “given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Links and Websites

From the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod:

Render Unto Caesar ... And Unto God: A Lutheran View of Church and State (1995), available at resources.lcms.org/reading-study/ctcr-library-social-issues-and-citizenship.

Buddhism: An Evaluation from a Lutheran Perspective (2014), available at resources.lcms.org/reading-study/ctcr-library-religious-organizations-movements-and-lodges.