

## ALL RELIGION IS IDOLATRY

Can we generalise about religion?

Nobody can specialise in all religions but nobody has to. Just see what they have in common - eg regard for faith or magic or the supernatural and dodgy morals and dwell on that. Faith in a God of some sort is the ultimate idol for faith is not God.

What is idolatry?

Idolatry is the worship of false gods. It involves the worship of Gods that do not exist. If a person thinks a god is in his statue and worships the god that person is an idolater. Nobody worships statues just because they are statues but because they are thought to be representations of the God or the god is thought to live in the statue. It is the God not existing that is the problem.

What is best way to detect it?

False claims, false religions, false gods and false scriptures do not want to be checked out or examined. Nothing willingly invites questioning but the truth. An idol will avoid being checked simply because it is fake.

Why is idolatry wrong?

Idolatry is wrong not because it is the worship of an idol but because it is degrading. Atheist find it offensive that a wafer is regarded as more important than a human being. The worship of pagan idols of gods who were very human and had failings is not as idolatrous as the idol of Catholicism which is supposed to be almighty and perfect.

Does false religion mean fake religion or untrue religion? Both even?

A fake religion to be clear means one that is not a religion but says it is. A false one is just lies - if the errors are plain and people see that then they become liars if they still uphold the errors.

What is the motive for idolatrous worship?

To feel safe and protected by the false God. Thus to carry a charm is the same thing as to bow before an image of a false God.

What does that tell us?

That if people really are protected by what they worship and have exceptional safety statistics then they are not idolaters. They are no better or worse off than an atheist then they are idolaters.

Why should we be always under suspicion of idolatry?

We tend to be grateful to things when they benefit us. We feel a sense of gratitude towards the car that gets us to hospital. We kick and curse the car and swear at it when it breaks down. We treat events and things as if they consciously bless us and curse us. It is no wonder then we so easily and too easily believe in God and pray to God. Our motivation is suspect - we are probably idolaters nearly all the time anyway.

What is a good test for idolatry?

Being let down. If you are overly attached to your car, for example, and it lets you down in time of trouble then its an idol. Even God lets you down for even the best saint can suffer crippling depression and a horrible end. It is an insult to them to pretend that God is letting them suffer for a purpose. Idolaters use that excuse for their false gods.

What is the only thing that can never let you down?

Belief in belief. This too is idolatry because it is belief in our own power not in God.

Is all prayer idolatry?

Belief in prayer is made infallible. There is more infallibility in putting your proposition outside of examination than simply saying, "This is true because I say so." It becomes, "This is true because I say there is no way to refute it." Prayer is an idol. Even if there is a God, God cannot accept it. Prayer paradoxically is anti-God and is an idol. It disrespects truth for you try to avoid refutation so prayer is a lie and thus seems to think that God and everybody else is stupid and cannot see it.

Does the Atheist regard all religious worship as idolatry?

Yes - if there is no God Christians are idolaters for they worship what does not exist.

Even if there is a God is he worshipped by his people?

They worship their perception and image of him not him. They are idolaters. Idolatry is bad for it is giving things the

respect due to people. When you honour an idol you neglect to honour your neighbour. Serve your neighbour not a God you have made up in your head.

Why else is the worship of God idolatry?

Because believers say that worshipping a created being that is perfect in the sense of being as good as he can be should not be worshipped. Only an uncreated all-good being should be worshipped. This means there is more concern for the divinity's power than for his goodness.

But their perception and image of God is right and so they worship the real God?

Immaterial! Irrelevant! Right or wrong it is still their perception they worship. It is only by chance if they are right. Even believers in a version of God that cannot possibly be right still think they are right.

Is the worship of God the worship of the inventors of God?

Yes. To worship somebody's idea is really to worship that person for the person that makes the idea is necessarily better and more important than the idea itself. If you worship your perception of God that is not the same as worshipping God. It is worshipping part of yourself for your perception is part of you. And so it is with worshipping other people's perception of God.

Why is it dangerous to create a God to fit your needs?

Because deep down you know he is your own creation. You will feel anger and hate towards anybody that is able to expose the charade. It causes people to violently suppress those who contradict their "faith".

If God is spiritual and immaterial how can you find him?

By seeing the goodness in your heart as signs of his presence and activity. If you do that you don't need outward things such as religion, miracles or statues or rituals. They are idolatrous.

How can honouring a statue of God be idolatrous if you mean the honour to go to God?

If it is true that the pagans only viewed idols and the sun and the moon not as gods but as symbols of God then this way of honouring God is idolatry. It is only superficially honouring God. He is in fact dishonoured.

What if spirituality or Christianity is a relationship with God and not a religion?

That argument is nonsense for you can have a relationship with a religious structure made up by people, with rules and with rites and with doctrines. A religion is a kind of relationship.

What does the notion that greed for money (is idolatrous (Col 3:5,6) tell us?

That greed is greed. Greed for God must be idolatry too. Jesus told us that God is all we really have and to love him as if he is - ie give all the love in us to him only. That is idolatry. It is hypocrisy of Christians to deny all this.

What does the Bible say about man's religious commands?

Jesus condemned them as rubbish. 'I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing' (Gal 2:21 NAB) implies that if you try to earn favour with God by keeping his law that insults Christ's death. Imagine if you try to earn favour with God by using a man-made religious law!

What do we conclude?

All God-worship is idolatry.

## APPENDIX

Theologian Paul Tillich argued that if you put forward an idea or person and make them beyond criticism they become idols.

This is bad because you would not try to silence criticism unless you feared or suspected the idea or person was in fact flawed or nonsense. The more you protect it the more you sense that it is rubbish.

This is bad because it deprives God of the chance to teach you.

This is bad because it deprives others of the chance to teach you.

This is bad because if person a has an idol and person b has another one conflict will result for both of them ban any critical inquiry.

Idolatry is when you worship a thing as God instead of God or when you give something worship it does not deserve. It is more about worshipping a perception of God that a really worthy God will object to. It involves the worship of something that is not true goodness. It need not be evil. It could be amoral. It could be too human. Idolaters are usually thought of as statue-worshippers but in fact they use images to worship unworthy deities so they don't have to actually think the images are their gods. Both idolaters and those who adore the "true God" want to ally with power and worship it. In fact, the

worshippers of God are the worst idolaters. Idolatry is evil because it misses the point of God: infinite perfection that demands total perfection in love and goodness from us. It is more interested in what God has to offer than in God. Even if there is no God this is not good. You are still nurturing badness inside.

If our own sinfulness demonstrates our incapacity to judge rightly then that means we will often put forward bad as good. We will do that with God too.

If there is no God, then there is no legitimate authority that preaches and acts in his name or which got authority from him. If there is no God, then there is no way man can ground a definition of God. Do not give man power by honouring his ideas about God for it is man that will benefit from it not God.