

IS IT IDOLATRY WHEN THE WORSHIPPER MEANS WELL?

The Sign, page 192 "In the pre-modern world images were perceived to be, in some sense, alive".

Genesis 4

Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.

Cain was being sincere and he was sure God would be pleased. He had the right God. So why did God have a problem with him? Because Cain didn't come to God in the way God wanted. If you can approach the right God in the wrong way and God can reject you, imagine what he will do if you have the wrong idea of God and the wrong God?

Leviticus 10:1-3:

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD has said: 'Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.'" And Aaron held his peace.

Again we are told that God takes it very seriously if you try to worship him in an unauthorised way. It is interesting that the Roman Catholic Mass, the centre of that faith, has no biblical backing. It is worse then than anything Nadab and Abihu had done.

Deuteronomy 32:17-21

They sacrificed to false gods, which are not God — gods they had not known, gods that recently appeared, gods your ancestors did not fear. You deserted the Rock, who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth. The Lord saw that and rejected them because he was angered by his sons and daughters. I will hide my face from them," he said, "and see what their end will be; for they are a perverse generation, children who are unfaithful. They made me jealous by what is not god and angered me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding.

Idolatry is treating man-made ideas about the divine as God which means you are neglecting the real God. It is the ideas that are the biggest or main thing. It is the idea that a statue is a god that is the main problem. The statue is a problem rooted in a bigger one. A god that is too ordinary, too small, too faulty or too inclusive is no better than a fox or a rat. Idolatry is degrading to truth and reason and God (if he exists!) and man.

"If you are accepted because you are you, not only is your value in my eyes not conditional and not necessarily limited, but it is also unique. I can do business with anybody, but if I have a personal relationship with you, I cannot have that relationship with anybody else, just simply because anybody else is not you." John Lucas. Lucas shows that to have a relationship with the wrong version of God is not a relationship. There is nothing unique or special about a relationship with a god or person who is only in your head.

Believers treat good as a manifestation of God or reflection of God. It is very easy to turn what is good about a person into all that matters about them. We can love their traits not them and be convinced that we love them. We have good emotions and feelings. We have good thoughts and our imagination can do us good. This means that many believers are in fact turning these into their God and adore a God who is in their heads. The question of whether or not there is a God has nothing to do with this. It is far more easy for you to love what you think about God rather than God than to do that with a human being. The human being on the receiving end of such "love" can sense there is a problem and let you know. The other reason that it is so easy is that if you see the good as a sign of God or a mirror of God you can love the image in the mirror not the person. That cannot happen with another person for they are not dependant on signs and alleged revelations from the supernatural to communicate their presence.

The apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:4 warns against he who preaches another Jesus or against the reception of another spirit (this spirit is a total replacement for the Holy Spirit and also any spirit in addition to the Holy Spirit) or against

another gospel that does not fit the one you have accepted. He shows how it is possible to have the real Jesus but a false gospel.

Idolatry is when you worship a thing as God instead of God. 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.

There is a phenomenon called reification. Reification means you think about and/or feel and/or treat an abstract idea as if it were a thing. An idea has no real existence. You can think you worship God when you actually worship only an abstract philosophical opinion or belief or idea. You would be an idolater if you do that even though your idolatry is totally undetectable and you do not realise it yourself. There is no evidence at all that anybody really worships God.

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. Pray to the picture of a departed loved one and you will feel that you have a relationship with them and that the picture somehow at least temporarily is them. You can sense that you have a person to person relationship with a non-person or a thing. 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. Want proof? The Christian God is nothing like us and is totally beyond our understanding and does not have feelings and is unaffected by time - he is outside of it altogether in a static existence. That is actually far worse than having a personal relationship with a photograph for at least like yourself the photograph has physical characteristics and stimulates your senses.

If our devotion to God may be based on idolatry of the heart, surely our devotion to statues and communion wafers is even more suspect? In a word, perhaps the more a religious activity resembles idolatry the more likely it is to be idolatry?

We treat things as gods and as conscious entities - we turn on the delusions. We demean ourselves then. The impulse may be natural but it is still something fiendish and to be fought.

The Bible is severe against idolatry. God through the prophet Isaiah softened nothing, "All who make idols are worthless and the things they treasure are worthless." If it is true that Catholics adore a wafer as God when it is not God that their religion has to be completely rejected as futile before God even if man gives it value. The idolaters of Isaiah's day were undoubtedly regarded as mostly good people but Isaiah repudiated that assessment. St Paul the apostle wrote that fellowship with Jesus Christ means having nothing to do with idolatry or Belial. He said that the relationship between Christ and idols and Satan is zero. This implies a zero tolerance policy.

Wisdom 14, a book in the Catholic Bible says that the desire to be idolatrous causes fornication and all other sins and that the idol-worshipper is motivated by vanity. In other words, it looks like somebody praying to a statue is degrading themselves but they are vain for they want to honour as God what they declare to be God. They are arrogant. It is degrading in the sense that arrogance is degrading. It is vain because it is them worshipping their idea of the divine that they have invented - they don't care about what God really is.

Stephen when he told the Jews that God did not live in temples made by human hands was referring to the Temple of Jerusalem as if it were an idol. See Acts 7. They did not think that God was the Temple. They thought it was the symbol of his presence. The holiest part of the temple consisted of an empty room signifying that God was above all things and couldn't be represented. Stephen refers to the temple as "that which is made by human hands" to emphasise that it was nothing but a building. The expression was taken from Isaiah 31:7 where it refers to idols. If the Jews were idolaters just for loving the temple then the Catholics must be worse for they adore bread as God himself!

In 1 Corinthians 1:17 Paul asserts that those who are arresting and exciting preachers of the gospel actually rob the gospel of its power. This is a clear statement that religion should not have props such as good preachers or fancy ceremonies or magical rites. The sense of God should be enough for it does not need such props.

All idolaters including Catholics make their god with their hands and then consecrate it to put the god in it. It is more correct to say the idolater reveres the consecrated work of his hands than to say he reveres the work of his hands. Even an image that is merely a symbol of God can become a God if one is too attached to it.

Christians and the book they call the word of God, the Bible, are horrified about the heathens worshipping many gods. That

is idolatry. The Bible God says its the worship of false gods. And they went even further. They thought that their gods had come down to them in the form of images and statues and other things. That is idolatry too.

Christians tend to be less horrified about idolatry about God and the angels and the saints than they are about obvious pagan idolatry. Some gullible souls worship images of Jesus as if they were God himself. Is it really as bad to worship something you think is God or something you think is Zeus or Jupiter or some pagan god? Take the person who worships an idol as God. He is said to mean to worship a moral being and a being who wants to help us live better lives. The pagan gods had poor morals and were always plotting and scheming against each other. Lots of them cheated on their goddess wives. So it is thought that it is better to worship an idol of God than one of another God. But the correct approach is, "They know what they should worship. They are worse than the heathen for they know God and set up idols of God to avoid him."

The Christian who believes in a God who allows tax fraud and sex orgies may not believe in a God who does these things but he believes in one who sanctions them. His worship is bad for the same reason as the worship of nasty vindictive sluttish Aphrodite is bad. It is the worship of immorality.

The Church says our moral perception of God will always be faulty for we are never perfect in this life. Thus there is always some idolatry in our worship.

Idolatry is wasting adoration on what is not God or worthy of it. Its bad for you and bad for God even if it feels good.

Idolatry is more than just false worship. It is said to spring from human rebelliousness against God. People are thought make gods they think they can control. But in fact they do not. They know that they cannot make anything do everything they want. Even idolaters know that bad things will happen. Idolatry is just religious reverence paid to something that is not God. Even if its paid to an angel of God it is still being paid to a being other than God.

The worship of God is always idolatry.

It is idolatry for God is not entitled to it. We know that hurting a baby for no reason is wrong even if there is no God. Thus we can never adore God above all things - it is good we must adore. Idolatry is wrong because it demeans human nature even though it may not look like it does for many idolaters are happy.

Most people think there is a God but they want to see him their way and that is what they worship. That is idolatry. Its craftier than actually getting down and worshipping a statue. It is harder to spot and therefore far more dangerous. It is far more deceptive.

Brigham Young taught that Adam, the first man, was God the Father and the only God to be worshipped. He didn't speak much about this doctrine as the Mormon faith was far from enthusiastic about this teaching.

Mormons today argue that if Young taught that Adam was God, then though he was wrong, the important thing was that he wanted us to worship God. They say he did not have us worshipping anybody other than God but just made an error about who God is. They say you can think that Joe Soap is now the Pope and not know its Joseph Ratzinger but that does not invalidate your respect and honour for the Pope. But such honour implies that you are being fake for you do not even know the man you honour. The argument confuses honouring the pope as a role with honouring the pope as a man.

Now Young taught that sinful Adam was God - to say a man is God is to fail to see that the imperfect and sinful man cannot be a perfect and holy God. It is not a mere mistake about who God is. Making a man God is lowering God down to what that man thinks and says and does. If you adore the wrong man as your God, it follows that you make the one true and essential role model of him. There is no real adoration unless you want to honour what you adore by becoming like him as much as possible. If the true God has the quality of absolute holiness and has had it always, it follows that you deny that if you say Adam, a sinner, is God.

The Mormons say we have a duty to worship God. What use is that if we can worship Adam or Moses or Abraham Lincoln as God and still worship the real God? The true religion would be the religion that has the instructions for worshipping God according to his requirements. Mormonism cannot be the one true religion if its prophet Brigham Young ordered it on divine authority to adore the wrong God. And the religion's rationalisation that it does not matter who you worship as long as you intend to adore God makes it stupid to make such a fuss about religion.

The Catholics worship the Eucharist, the bread and wine of Communion, as God. They say it has been turned into the body and blood of Jesus Christ who is God. They declare that it is the core doctrine of Christianity. It follows then that all their worship is indirectly or directly given to the Eucharist. If the Eucharist worship is idolatry, it follows that the religion is idolatry through and through.

If bread and wine really turn into Jesus, that means Jesus is somehow made of them. We turn our bread into part of us. The Church says that Jesus' body is complete and perfect in Heaven. Thus the food and drink cannot turn into it. The view that the bread and wine are annihilated and replaced by Jesus is rejected officially by the Church. Clearly what we have is a pretence that the bread and wine has turned into Jesus. Its intentional idolatry.

The Catholics have fooled the Protestants into being indifferent to the idolatry. They say, "Even if the bread and wine are not Jesus we intend to adore him not bread and wine. That is why our worship should be respected." But the worshippers of false gods intended by implication to honour the real gods. They thought that if the worship was lavished on the wrong gods the real gods would understand and accept the worship. The same goes if there is only one God. Their intention was not enough - they still worshipped the wrong thing.

The Church says we are all sinners - or rebels against God. It warns that we cannot look down on others as worse sinners than us. It quotes the Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee from Luke 16 to prove that. If we are sinners then nobody can argue, "They mean well when they worship this idol so maybe God understands and accepts the worship as being ultimately intended for him?" Our attitude would prevent that rationalisation from having any validity.

Worshippers of images of goddesses Diana and Artemis, had a vague sense that the images were somehow the divine beings. This corresponds exactly to the Catholic claim that the bread and wine are somehow really the body and blood of Jesus and bread and wine no longer. Most Catholics do not know the thinking behind the doctrine. And the Church says that all that counts is agreeing with her that the bread and wine are really Jesus himself. That is not the point. The point is that it is an idol being worshipped. The Bible says that idolatry is sinful as it is intending to worship images. It does not matter what the image is of. The Catholic Church has led its people into idolatry and rebellion against God.

The Catholics appeal to saints to implore God for his mercy. With earthly judges, you may need somebody to appeal for mercy for you for the judge may not be aware how remorseful you are or unwilling to take your word for it. The saints interceding with God is not the same for he knows the whole story and sees all. In reality, the saints are treated as more merciful than God and able to force his hand. They are better Gods than God.

Even if the worship should be respected it should not be encouraged. It is not fair to ask Muslims and Protestants to encourage and even praise it. Their silence would be encouragement. It is only fair to expect them to challenge it but kindly and firmly.

Religionists want people to be obligated to love and worship God and the less religious of them want people obligated to love others. This shows that their ultimate motive is to use religion to achieve power. I'd assume the believer is an idolater until proven otherwise.

Society abhors idolatry that dehumanises and insults. Humanists and atheists find it offensive how religious people have more gratitude towards God for their recovery from illness than they do for anybody that helped them get better. Some never thank those people and thank God instead. Practically speaking, the worship of God leaves as much to be desired as idolatry does.

If you learn about and focus on prayer to a God who is not there or to a false version of a real God then you are wasting your time. That may be seen as harmless but it is not. You are doing that when you could be selling tickets to raise money for the poor. You are depriving yourself of a chance to develop. It is harmful if your goal is service of the truth for you are defeated.

Catholics see prayer as you lining up to God to let him use you as his instrument. It is argued that to respect and honour the saints is really to honour God for they are all about letting his power flow in them and so their work is his. Then if they have Jesus the son of God made man what do they need saints for? Jesus is not enough at all. This goes further than the ignorant idolatry of the pagans.

Conclusion: For atheists and believers in God alike, there is no excuse for idolatry. We can sometimes praise the idolater for meaning well but not praise or condone his idolatry. A false god is treated by you as an object to make yourself feel good and feign devotion to. Idolatry is bad not just because it is superstition but because of what it says about you.