BABYLON STRIKES BACK

The Syncretistic Motive of Modern Culture
Joe Boot

GUARDING THE GOOD DEPOSIT: THE GOSPEL AND Gnosticism in the Early Church
David Robinson

NOT GOOD TO BE ALONE: ROB BELL AND SCRIPTURE
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THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO YOGA
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AT FIRST GLANCE IT may seem strange, in 2015, to dedicate an entire issue of *Jubilee* to the subject of paganism. The word evokes mental images of Druids, or characters from Greek mythology; in other words, its relevance to culture and Christian theology isn’t immediately apparent. It may seem strange again to associate paganism with Gnosticism – a juxtaposition of the rustic and the esoteric. As we’ll see, however, such an alliance is perfectly natural, and these doctrines are only strange to us in name. Pagan and Gnostic beliefs and practices have made significant inroads into the mainstream of Western life, language and thought, to the point where even many Christians have unwittingly adopted a view of God, the world and mankind that is closer to pagan spirituality than biblical Christianity.

At root, the issue is a question of nature and authority – what are we, and who says so? As the following pages of this issue will make clear, the Judeo-Christian worldview stands alone among every view of reality, asserting that God is uncreated, a being wholly and ontologically1 other than us. While human beings have the dignity of being made in God’s image, we are nevertheless created beings, and therefore our nature is given to us by God our Creator. On this count, all other worldviews ultimately collapse into the pagan belief that we share an ontological sameness with the gods, who are depicted as exaggerated or magnified versions of man. Deity is seen as a difference of degree, rather than of kind. Perhaps as a necessary consequence, they likewise teach variations on the Gnostic belief that with a little luck, some of us can attain to godlike status, by awakening or tapping into the divine element lying dormant within.

Pagan religion seeks and exalts an ontological unity with the divine, the elimination of all distinctions. When mankind understands and accepts that distinctions are an illusion and that all is one, the stage will be set for a new age of interfaith understanding and peace. For the Christian, such a view is not only impossibly false, it would not be desirable if it were true. It is the distinction between Creator and creature that makes Christianity utterly unique and, ultimately, our only hope. C.S Lewis’ illustration concerning Christ’s atonement is helpful here:

If I am drowning in a rapid river, a man who still has one foot on the bank may give me a hand which saves my life. Ought I to shout back (between my gasps) ‘No, it’s not fair! You have an advantage! You’re keeping one foot on the bank’? That advantage – call it ‘unfair’ if you like – is the only reason why he can be of any use to me. To what will you look for help if you will not look to that which is stronger than yourself?2

Lewis goes on to explain that Christ’s advantage is not merely his position, but his nature. Jesus could be the perfect sacrifice for us because of his unique nature as fully God and fully man – perfect by virtue of his divinity, and a sacrifice by virtue of his humanity. The uncreated God entered time and space to take on Himself the just penalty for our sins; Hercules didn’t, and neither can any of us. In his first letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul makes clear from his own example that it is God who reaches out to us; there is nothing about us to commend ourselves to God. He describes his own salvation this way:

I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1 Tim. 1:12-17)

The word Paul uses which is translated “insolent opponent” in v. 13 is the Greek *hubristen*, from which we get our English word ‘hubris,’ which
carries the sense of self-injury, or as Bengel puts it, “rejecting my own salvation.” Paul’s ignorance was not just a lack of information, but a wilful, prideful rebellion against the King of the ages. Notice the gift that God extends to Paul as the solution to his ignorance is not deeper knowledge or instruction, as though he simply needed to be brought to a higher level of understanding. Rather, Paul receives mercy and grace – utterly unmerited and unattainable by other means than the vicarious work of Christ.

IN THIS ISSUE

Rev. Dr. David Robinson lays out the key features of Gnosticism, and considers the example of Irenaeus, drawing examples from Christian history to articulate a biblical response to Gnostic teaching.

Rev. Dr. Joe Boot exposes and traces the anti-Christian roots of modern pagan cultural impulses, demonstrating that true unity is not ontological, but a covenantal oneness with God and his people, accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Peter Jones deconstructs the former evangelical Rob Bell’s fallacious argument for same-sex marriage as a superficial and deliberate misuse of Scripture, demonstrating that pagan ideas will always distort human sexuality and identity.

Pamela Frost addresses “Holy Yoga,” demonstrating historically and theologically that the postures and language of yoga are thoroughly pagan in nature, and that the movement self-consciously seeks to destroy or deny the distinction of creature and Creator.

Also included is an update on the Ezra Institute’s recent and forthcoming activities. In the face of increasing hostility toward the Lord Jesus and His people, we seek to equip Christians to understand and advance the truth, beauty and freedom of the gospel in all its varied implications. By encouraging and intellectually resourcing Christian engagement with culture, we believe that biblical truth will once again captivate hearts and minds, and shape our future to the glory of God (Phil. 1:7; Col. 1:15-20).

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1 That is, having to do with the nature of being.
CHRISTIANITY IS INHERENTLY conservative, in the true sense of word. The Apostle Paul wrote two letters to his young disciple, Timothy. In both letters, he charges Timothy: “guard the good deposit entrusted to you” (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1.14). The good deposit is apostolic teaching, the Gospel which Jude says was “once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). The apostles were those “who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with [Jesus] after he rose from the dead” (Acts 10:41). They had a unique apostolic vocation to preach the Gospel. As they carried out their apostolic ministry, they recognized the need to ordain faithful men in the ministry of Gospel preservation and promotion. Their testimony about Jesus Christ – the incarnate Son of God, who was crucified for our sins and resurrected in glory on the third day – had to be preserved and passed on. Paul not only charges Timothy to guard the good deposit, he also instructs him to entrust it “to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). Thus, the apostles established an institutional pattern, by which the faith would be faithfully preserved and passed on, from generation to generation.

In the second century, two generations removed from the era of the apostles, a counterfeit gospel appeared in the church and threatened to rob the good deposit entrusted to her. This counterfeit gospel circulated under the names of the apostles and was peddled by various false teachers. The teaching itself was quite diverse; however, it can be broadly labelled under the umbrella term “Gnosticism.” The following article provides an introductory account of Gnosticism in the early church and how Christians contended for “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). First, I answer basic questions about Gnosticism: What is Gnosticism? Who were the Gnostics? What was the appeal of Gnosticism?

Second, I present the Christian response to Gnosticism. In particular, I consider the way in which Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, defended the Gospel. He did so by defining doctrinal, institutional, and scriptural boundaries, which distinguish orthodoxy and heresy.

Gnosticism is a word derived from the Greek word for knowledge, “gnōsis.” Gnosticism is a religious movement that emerged in the second century among certain groups of Christians who called themselves “knowers” (gnōstikoi). These Gnostics left behind a significant body of literature.1 It’s difficult to navigate these Gnostic texts, not to mention modern scholarship on Gnosticism. Gnostic literature is quite diverse, representing a broad spectrum of religious and theological doctrines. So what are we talking about when we’re talking about Gnosticism? Christoph Markschies provides a helpful model for identifying this ancient religious phenomenon. Gnostic religion is characterized by the following features:2

1. belief in a distant and unknowable supreme god (bythos) and a network (plēroma) of intermediate divine beings (aeons) who inhabit a divine realm;
2. dualism which sees the world and matter as evil, and which leads to a sense of alienation in the world, because the divine realm is our true home;
3. belief in an ignorant or evil creator god, usually identified with the Platonic term demiaurgo, who made the material world;
4. belief that a divine element or “spark” has fallen from the divine realm of the plēroma into the evil material realm, where it slumbers within some human beings and waits to be

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awakened and liberated;
(5) an explanation of the above state of affairs
by means of a mythological drama;
(6) belief that salvation comes through
knowledge (gnōsis) of the divine element or
“spark” within;
(7) belief that this knowledge is given through
a redeemer figure (Jesus) who descends from
the divine realm, reveals this secret/saving
knowledge to human beings, and then ascends
again to the divine realm.

Markschies’ summary description provides a
generic portrait of Gnosticism. Anyone reading
the Gnostic texts themselves will find all kinds
of variations, but they are variations on these
themes.

Gnostic teaching and literature was intentionally
couched in Christian terms. The redeemer figure
is usually identified with Jesus Christ, who did
not come to redeem us from the curse of sin and
death, but to enlighten us through the revelation
of secret knowledge. Gnostic texts dismiss the
incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection as
an absurdity. Why would a divine redeemer
associate with the evil material creation? Thus, in
one Gnostic text, Jesus declares, “But I was not
afflicted at all.... And I did not die in reality but
in appearance.”

The Gospel & Gnosticism

Gnostic teaching not only subverts the biblical
narrative, it also supplements the biblical narrative.
For example, it gives marginal characters a central
role as recipients of divine revelation (e.g., Seth and
Shem in the early chapters of Genesis). Gnostic
texts also provide prequels and sequels to the biblical
story. The mythological drama about the divine plēroma, the creation of the
material world by the demiurge, and the fall
of the divine spark into human beings supplements
the biblical account of creation in Genesis 1-3.
The various so-called ‘Gnostic Gospels’ claim to
present Jesus’ teaching of secret knowledge to his
disciples in the days before his ascension. What is
more, many Gnostic texts claim to be written by
apostles (Peter, James, John, Paul, Phillip, Silas,
and Thomas) or other biblical figures (Adam,
Seth, and Shem).

WHO WERE THE GNOSTICS?

The Gnostic system of belief appears to be totally
foreign to biblical Christianity; however, it was not
a religious movement that threatened the church
from without. It emerged from within the church.
By all appearances, the Gnostics were regular
churchgoers, who saw themselves as belonging to
an elite group of “knowers” (gnōstikoi) within the
church. They saw themselves as the true church
and true Christians.

Gnostics tended to be urban and educated.
Their gatherings were similar to the philosophic
schools in Late Antiquity, which formed around
charismatic teachers. The Gnostic teacher
recounted the mythological drama and shared
various esoteric discourses, which expressed
the doctrines outlined above about the divine
realm, the evil material world, the divine spark
of divinity within, and the redeemer who came
to enlighten us.

WHAT WAS THE APPEAL OF GNOSTICISM?

Gnosticism was an attempt to make Christianity
palatable by making it fit the popular Platonic
sensibilities of Late Antique religious culture.
Many people in the Greco-Roman world
accepted Platonic dualism, which distinguished

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between intelligible and sensible realms. True knowledge meant insight into the underlying structures of reality, which were transcendent and intelligible. The early Christians taught a Hebraic view of the world and reality, which was grounded in the sensible realm of human history. The grand narrative that provided meaning to all things was the biblical narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation, which climaxes in the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of the Son of God.

The Gnostics could not swallow the earthiness and historicity of Christian doctrine. Gnosticism was appealing because it was compatible with widely accepted religious and philosophic ideas. In particular, it appealed to urban intellectuals, not only because it fit popular sensibilities, but because it was low-risk. As Marksches notes, Gnostic religion was privatized religion, which meant the Gnostics avoided conflict within the church by viewing themselves as a higher form of Christian, and they avoided conflict with those outside the church by accommodating a popular religious and philosophical outlook.

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH: IRENAEUS’ RESPONSE TO GNOSTICISM

How did the early church respond to Gnosticism? Various early Christian theologians and teachers wrote against the Gnostics (e.g., Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement and Origen of Alexandria). Irenaeus’ response is, perhaps, the most well-known. He wrote a five-volume critique of Gnosticism and defense of Christianity, which comes to us under the English title Against Heresies. In volume four, he provides a definition of true knowledge (gnōsis):

This is true Gnosis: the teaching of the apostles, and the ancient institution of the church, spread throughout the entire world, and the distinctive mark of the body of Christ in accordance with the successions of bishops, to whom the apostles entrusted each local church, and the unfeigned preservation, coming down to us, of the scriptures, with a complete collection allowing for neither addition nor subtraction; a reading without falsification and, in conformity with the scriptures, an interpretation that is legitimate, careful, without danger or blasphemy. (Adv. haer. IV.33.8)

Irenaeus’ description of true knowledge has three primary aspects: (1) the teaching of the apostles, (2) the ancient institution of the church, and (3) the Scriptures. Thus, he contends for the faith once for all delivered to the saints by defining Christianity along doctrinal, institutional, and scriptural lines, which demarcate orthodoxy and heresy.

THE DOCTRINAL BOUNDARY

The first boundary is doctrinal: the teaching of the apostles. For Irenaeus, this teaching is the good deposit of the faith, which was handed down from the apostles and entrusted to faithful men. By the second century, the teaching of the Apostles had been codified in a short doctrinal statement or confession, known as the rule of faith or the rule of truth, which Irenaeus cites in volume one of Against Heresies:

The church, dispersed throughout the world to the ends of the earth, received from the apostles and their disciples the faith in one God the Father Almighty, “who made heaven and earth and sea and all that is in them” (Ex. 20:11), and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, incarnate for our salvation, and in the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets predicted the dispensations of God: the coming, the birth from the Virgin, the passion, the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension of the beloved Jesus Christ our Lord in the flesh into the heavens, and his coming from the heavens in the glory of the Father to “recapitulate all things” (Eph. 1:10) and raise up all flesh of the human race... (Adv. haer. I.10.1)

The rule of faith is simply a summary of what the Bible teaches about the Triune God, creation, and redemption. It’s a summary of what the apostles taught and entrusted to faithful men, who were charged with guarding this doctrine and faithfully passing it on.
The word “rule” is a translation of the Latin word regula and the Greek word kanōn (canon). The rule of faith or canon of truth was a doctrinal statement which regulated or canonized Christian teaching and faith. Think of how we use a ruler. We use it to measure things and we use it to draw straight lines. The rule of faith functions the same way. Various ideas, truth claims, and interpretations of Scripture can be measured by the rule of faith and can be proven straight (or crooked) by their alignment with it.

The rule of faith regulates biblical interpretation. Irenaeus writes that the Gnostics try to prove their doctrine by “changing the interpretations and twisting the exegesis” of Scripture (Adv. haer. I.3.6). He uses an analogy to illustrate this twisting exegesis. He compares Scripture to a mosaic portrait of a king. Looking at isolated passages of Scripture can be like looking at individual stones or tiles in the mosaic; however, when you step back, you see that there is a logic and an ordering to the stones, which together present the portrait of the king. The rule of faith is analogous to the image of the king. It’s the picture we see when we look at the biblical message as a whole.

What the Gnostics have done, however, is taken the various stones of the mosaic and rearranged them, producing the image of a dog or a fox. They quote Scripture, but they twist it to promote their own false doctrine: “Such is their doctrine, which the prophets did not proclaim, the Lord did not teach, and the apostles did not transmit. They boast that they have known it more abundantly than anyone else, citing it from unwritten sources…. They contradict the order and the continuity of the scriptures and, as best they can, dissolving the members of the truth” (Adv. haer. I.8.1). There is an order and continuity of the Scriptures, which provides the basic structure and content of biblical doctrine. When the order and continuity of Scripture is recognized, the image of the king is seen. He cannot be mistaken for a fox. Genesis 3 cannot be read in such a way that God is made out to be a “malicious grudger.” It’s the rule of faith that provides the basic outlines of the image of king. Any other doctrine claiming to be derived from Scripture must be measured by this rule, so that the image of a fox cannot be substituted for the king.

**THE INSTITUTIONAL BOUNDARY**

The rule of faith is the doctrinal boundary that demarcates true and false teaching; however, for Irenaeus, a statement of faith on its own is insufficient. The rule of faith is the faith passed down from the apostles and confessed by the catholic church. By denying this faith, the Gnostics were abandoning the institutional community which preserved and passed it on. In so doing they forfeited any claim of belonging to the Christian community. Thus, Irenaeus draws a second institutional boundary: membership in the apostolic and catholic church.

Evangelical and Protestant eyebrows may now be raised. Some of us get nervous when we see the words church, institution, apostolic, and catholic appear together in the same sentence. Irenaeus was worried when people talked about the church without using the words institution, apostolic, and catholic. He recognized that the apostles had set up institutional structures to ensure the faithful preservation and propagation of their Gospel teaching. Paul ordained elders in various churches, whom he charged with teaching and caring for the flock (cf. Acts 14:23; 20:28ff). He charged Timothy, “guard the good deposit entrusted to you” and “entrust it to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (1 Tim. 1:14; 2:2).

These faithful men were ordained elders and bishops—men like Polycarp of Smyrna, who was a disciple of the apostle John. Polycarp then entrusted what he had received from the apostles to faithful men, who could then teach others. Irenaeus was the disciple of Polycarp. Thus, an institutional structure of apostolic succession was put in place for the preservation and propagation of Gospel teaching: “this is why one must hear the presbyters who are in the church, those who have the succession from the apostles, as we have shown, and with the succession in the episcopate have received the...
The Gospel & Gnosticism

The Gnostics tried to introduce a new doctrine with new Scriptures, which they claimed to have apostolic origin; however, the apostles’ teaching already had an objective and authoritative status.

By means of this institutional pattern, the Gospel was both protected and propagated throughout the Roman Empire (cf. Adv. haer. III.3.1). It was not just the church in Smyrna and Lyons that held the apostles’ teaching. The apostolic church is also the catholic church (i.e., the universal church). For it is “the church, dispersed throughout the world to the ends of the earth” that received the rule of faith “from the apostles and their disciples” (Adv. haer. I.10.1). Apostolicity and catholicity are also the basis of the church’s unity:

The church, having received this preaching and this faith, as we have just said, though dispersed in the whole world, diligently guards them as living in one house, believes them as having one soul and one heart (Acts 4.32), and consistently preaches, teaches, and hands them down as having one mouth. For if the languages in the world are dissimilar, the power of the tradition is one and the same. (Adv. haer. I.10.2)

Irenaeus goes on to list various regions and languages in which the church’s faith is confessed with one voice. Catholic diversity is unified by the rule of faith.

THE SCRIPTURAL BOUNDARY

The church is that community of believers which is led by the successors of the apostles (bishops and elders), confesses the rule of faith, and possesses the Scriptures. The bishops and elders are simply recognized Bible teachers and the rule of faith is a summary statement of biblical teaching. Thus, Scripture governs and defines both the church’s leadership and doctrine. For the most part, the New Testament was collected, read, and preached in the second century. The canonical status of a few books had not yet been established; however, the four Gospels, Acts, Paul’s letters (including Hebrews), James, 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation (in most places) were recognized as Scripture along with the Old Testament. The Gnostics tried to introduce a new doctrine with new Scriptures, which they claimed to have apostolic origin; however, the apostles’ teaching already had an objective and authoritative status. It was already inscripturated: “For we have known the ‘economy’ for our salvation only through those through whom the Gospel came to us; and what they then first preached they later, by God’s will, transmitted to us in the scriptures so that would be the foundation and pillar of our faith (1 Tim. 3:15)” (Adv. haer. III.1.1).

The church is sustained by its possession and exposition of Scripture. The church’s apostolicity, catholicity, and unity is founded upon its affirmation of biblical veracity and authority. The Gnostics rejected the Bible and so cut themselves off from Gospel truth and fellowship. Irenaeus pleads with his readers:

We must flee from their doctrines and carefully avoid being harmed by them, but take refuge with the church and be nursed by its breast and the scriptures of the Lord. For the church has been planted in the world like paradise. ‘You will eat the fruit of every tree in paradise’ (Gen. 2:16), says the Spirit of God; that is, eat from every scripture of the Lord. (Adv. haer. V.20.2)

CONCLUSION: THE CHURCH AND THE GOOD DEPOSIT

Gnosticism was an attempt at cultural accommodation. The Gnostics adopted pagan assumptions about divinity, the world, and redemption, in order to make Christianity more palatable to the wider Greco-Roman culture. They claimed to have special revelation and knowledge and a higher form of religion. They subverted biblical teaching with twisted exegesis and supplemented the Scriptures with counterfeit scriptures. Irenaeus was a bishop, that is, he was a pastor and teacher, who was...
ordained to preserve and faithfully preach the Bible. He took to heart Paul’s charge to Timothy: “guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called ‘knowledge,’ for by professing it some have swerved from the faith” (1 Tim. 6:12-13). And again, “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.” (2 Tim. 4:1-4).

Irenaeus guarded the good deposit of the faith by appealing to doctrinal, institutional, and scriptural boundaries, which define true belief and the true church. We live in an age when it’s all too easy to accumulate teachers to suit our own passions and soothe our itching ears. The spirit of our age is anti-creedal, anti-institutional, and anti-biblical. Irenaeus’ position would not be popular today; however, I think he’s right. The church needs creeds (the rule of faith) to define doctrine and guide our reading of Scripture. As Paul exhorts Timothy, “By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you” (2 Tim. 2:14). Wherever the good deposit is guarded, the grace and ministry of the Holy Spirit is active. Churches that depart from biblical doctrine are not Spirit-led; rather, they have abandoned the Spirit. They have forsaken “the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jer. 2:13). As a pastor, Irenaeus warned his flock to stay away from teachers who promised a higher form of knowledge and spirituality: “We must flee from their doctrines and carefully avoid being harmed by them, but take refuge with the church and be nursed by its breast and the scriptures of the Lord. For the church has been planted in the world like paradise. ‘You will eat the fruit of every tree in paradise’ (Gen. 2:16), says the Spirit of God; that is, eat from every scripture of the Lord” (Adv. haer. V.20.2).22

Finally, Irenaeus rightly recognized the relationship between the institutional church and the presence and work of the Holy Spirit:

“For in the Church,” it is said, “God hath set apostles, prophets, teachers,” (Eph. 4:11) and all the other means through which the Spirit works; of which all those who are not partakers who do not join themselves to the Church, but defraud themselves of life through their perverse opinions and infamous behaviour. For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of grace; but the Spirit is truth. Those, therefore, who do not partake of Him, are neither nourished into life from the mother’s breasts, nor do they enjoy that most limpid fountain which issues from the body of Christ; but they dig for themselves broken cisterns (cf. Jer. 2:13) out of earthly trenches, and drink putrid water out of the mire, fleeing from the faith of the Church lest they be convicted; and rejecting the Spirit, that they may not be instructed. (Adv. haer. III.24.1)21

Irenaeus rejected any claim to a higher spirituality or Christianity apart from the church or the Bible. Faithful biblical teaching in a local church is a mark of the Spirit’s presence and ministry. As Paul exhorts Timothy, “By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you” (2 Tim. 2:14). Wherever the good deposit is guarded, the grace and ministry of the Holy Spirit is active. Churches that depart from biblical doctrine are not Spirit-led; rather, they have abandoned the Spirit. They have forsaken “the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jer. 2:13). As a pastor, Irenaeus warned his flock to stay away from teachers who promised a higher form of knowledge and spirituality: “We must flee from their doctrines and carefully avoid being harmed by them, but take refuge with the church and be nursed by its breast and the scriptures of the Lord. For the church has been planted in the world like paradise. ‘You will eat the fruit of every tree in paradise’ (Gen. 2:16), says the Spirit of God; that is, eat from every scripture of the Lord” (Adv. haer. V.20.2).22

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is slightly paraphrased. Markschies argues that "Gnosis" is a better term than "Gnosticism" (see his discussion in Gnosis, 13–16).


<sup>5</sup> Markschies, Gnosis, 54.

<sup>6</sup> Markschies, Gnosis, 85.

<sup>7</sup> Gnosis, 117.

<sup>8</sup> An older translation of all five volumes is available online: http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.html. Robert Grant has translated excerpts from the five volumes (Irenaeus of Lyons, The Early Church Fathers [New York: Routledge, 1997]). An updated translation of volumes 1-3 is available in the Ancient Christian Writers series.

<sup>9</sup> Grant, Irenaeus of Lyons, 121.

<sup>1</sup> Grant, Irenaeus of Lyons, 70–71.

<sup>11</sup> Grant, Irenaeus of Lyons, 47.


<sup>13</sup> Grant, Irenaeus of Lyons, 50 (translation slightly modified).

<sup>14</sup> Grant, Irenaeus of Lyons, 119.

<sup>15</sup> Grant, Irenaeus of Lyons, 119.

<sup>16</sup> Grant, Irenaeus of Lyons, 54.

<sup>17</sup> Grant, Irenaeus of Lyons, 54.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Irenaeus’ defense of the four canonical Gospels in Adv. haer. III.11.8-9.

<sup>19</sup> Grant, Irenaeus of Lyons, 93.

<sup>20</sup> Grant, Irenaeus of Lyons, 129–30.

<sup>21</sup> http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.ix.iv.xxv.html.

<sup>22</sup> Grant, Irenaeus of Lyons, 129–30.
THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY

I REMEMBER THE 2004 publication of a book by former Anglican priest, Tom Harpur, called The Pagan Christ: Recovering the Lost Light. Its predictably Gnostic thesis was that true Christianity is really a beautiful ancient mystery cult that was grossly distorted by the early church because they deified a literal man, resulting in the alleged historical disaster of Western Christendom. The cure for history’s ills, according to Harpur, is found in re-paganising the world through a grand syncretistic mystery religion that will bring about world peace. For Harpur, nature is our teacher and guide, not God in His Word, and he laments that the exaltation of Christ has undermined true spirituality. He claims:

While showing the deep relevance of the Jesus story, and the persona of Jesus for the life and spiritual growth of every Christian, this fresh view of the faith leads to an escape from the false religion involved in the current idolatrous cult of a “personal” Jesus. By showing him to have been deeply true in the mythical sense rather than literally as God, the vast theological offense currently given to the majority of other faiths, particularly Islam and Judaism, is not simply mitigated – it is entirely removed. Thus lies open a way to interfait understanding that otherwise can never exist. This has enormous potential for world peace...²

He elsewhere explains his profound discovery through the words of a friend, “I have discovered...I don’t need an external, allegedly historical figure to experience God. But I do need the story of Jesus, the mythos, to bring home to me in power the meaning of the struggle and destiny of my own soul.” Setting aside the fact that both Muslims and Jews believe Jesus was a real historical figure – thus rendering Harpur’s claim that a mythical pagan Jesus would remove offense to other faiths absurd – Scripture is clear that such an heretical declaration is the very doctrine of anti-Christ and anathema. The apostle John wrote, “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist” (2 John 1:7; cf. 1 John 4:2). In 1 John 2:22 the apostle states further, “Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the anti-Christ who denies the Father and the Son” (cf. Gal. 1:8-9). Yet pagans like Harpur, under the guise of Christianity, claim their Gnostic version is more authentic than that of Jesus’ own disciples. For him, the Jesus story is

Environmental neo-Marxism and evolutionary faith meet pagan spirituality in Harpur’s eclectic mystery cult. Shortly after its publication, I was asked to debate Harpur about his popular book on the radio and agreed, but he refused to come on air at the same time to discuss the matter. Nonetheless, Harpur makes bold claims for his pagan version of Christianity:

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nothing more than a morally inspiring spiritual allegory for the soul.\textsuperscript{4} The gospel of Christ, for people like Harpur, must be transcended by a return to a more ‘ancient wisdom’ going back to the dawn of time that teaches a hidden secret. For, “While literalist Christianism tends to rely on a supernatural...view of life and the universe, the ancient wisdom presented here as a matrix out of which true, spiritual Christianity emerged is entirely holistic and rooted in a natural reality that comprehends the entire cosmos.”\textsuperscript{5} It is in fact man, as an aspect of nature, that is truly divine for the mystery religions and so it is really man and natural spiritual forces that are to be worshipped. So, for Harpur, Orion of the zodiac is the real heavenly Christ and the moon every month tells the story of our incarnation and ultimate resurrection (or ‘recycling’ in the grand circle of universal oneness).\textsuperscript{6} It is to the world-unifying character of Orion that we will return shortly, for this personage speaks to the ancient mystery of iniquity with its roots in Babylon (2 Thes. 2:7).

IN SEARCH OF SYNCRETISM

Such a current illustration from popular religious literature published in the name of true Christianity (and this is just one among many) goes some way to explain why it is common to hear in our time that there are many paths to God, many roads to enlightenment, and many routes to spiritual fulfillment – even from professing Christians. In fact according to the Christian Post North America, 1 in 3 millennial ‘evangelicals’ do not believe Jesus is the only way to God.\textsuperscript{7} The emergent church movement, which is less a topic of conversation today because it has gone mainstream in wealthy white Protestantism, preaches a religion-less and creedless Christianity, favoring ‘social justice,’ symbols, and esoteric experience, that include prayers to God as mother.

Unsurprisingly, running parallel to this, we find that the modern Western state is keen to sponsor this freedom of ‘worship’ (not freedom of religion for the public square), and welcomes what it calls diversity, multiculturalism, toleration and the ‘equal’ contributions of all religions to the tapestry of the social, cultural and political fabric. In short, there are many ways up the mountain of spiritual truth that \textit{all lead to the top} – to ‘god.’ The first obvious problem with such a conviction, however, is the pretended location of the observer of this religious phenomenon. Where would one need to be located to know that all paths on a mountain lead to the top? The only location that would allow such a perspective is high above the mountain. So the humble assertion of modern religious syncretism amounts to an objective claim to an absolute divine perspective without special revelation from the living God.

To put it another way, if all the beliefs, spiritualities and worldviews of the world are akin to blindfolded people all feeling a different part of an elephant and insisting that their description of what they feel is the true one – since one feels a tusk, another the trunk, another the tail etc. – then clearly all religions are in fact feeling the ONE divine truth, but from different perspectives. This would seem for some to establish the truth of pluralism or syncretism. But in what epistemic position does the teller of this story need to be? Clearly the religious syncretist believes he occupies a position of true objectivity, possessing absolute knowledge without any blindfold on! As such, this approach to religion not only dashes to pieces the real and historical claims of biblical faith (and of other historical faiths) by relativizing them, but also presupposes an absolute, divine perspective on truth for the syncretist. This actually constitutes the basic claim of contemporary religious pluralism – that pluralistic man has a divine perspective \textit{because he is divine} – and is implicit in all efforts at promoting \textit{religious syncretism} which urge that we all ‘just get along.’ There is inherent in this goal a shift of the locus of revelation and authority from God to man. As one cultural theologian has put it:

\begin{quote}
For humanism [paganism] man’s religious consciousness and man’s psychology is the real source of religious knowledge and revelation. The true word comes out of man, and therefore man’s experience needs to be developed. Religion then ceases to be “Thus saith the Lord,” the word of God, but rather becomes “Thus say I,” the word according to man.\textsuperscript{8}
\end{quote}
This cultural motive that has deeply affected the church should not surprise us. Human beings, having been made in the image of God and in terms of his purpose, even when they rebel against God in religious revolution, cannot but represent God’s purpose in a deformed fashion. As a result humanity seeks to create paradise, increase in knowledge and exercise dominion in each area of life, but without the living God. Particular effort is put forward, since man is a religious creature, to find religious unity as a prelude to socio-political unity apart from the Word of God. However, true religion in biblical faith is God-centred and not man-centred. As the psalmist makes clear:

Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory,
for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!
Why should the nations say, “Where is their God?”
Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.
Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands.
They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see.
They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell.
They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk;
and they do not make a sound in their throat.
Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them. O Israel, trust in the Lord!
He is their help and their shield. (Psalm 115)

In humanistic or pagan religions, the purpose of the gods is uniformly to please man. In biblical faith, our purpose is to please and glorify God.

In his religious quest, the humanist refuses to look beyond himself for his god. The more he intensifies his quest, the more he becomes like the idols described by the Psalmist, speechless, mindless and senseless. Not surprisingly, the heart of mysticism...is the same speechless, mindless and senseless experience. The mystic calls for the exclusion of the external world, doctrine, revelation, and outer experience for total concentration on an inward blankness. The Hindu mystic declares, “Thou art That,” i.e. the mystic is himself one with the ultimate power and is ultimate power.9

If man speaks the word of truth from his own consciousness (the new revelation) then he must also have the power to fulfil that new word. As such, interfaith syncretistic advocates of mystery religion typically believe that they can overcome war and hatred and inaugurate world peace through a new global religious order. This kind of pluralism and inclusivism has so invaded the contemporary church that many young evangelicals think that Gandhi, the Dalai Lama and Buddha have much to teach Christians. In this article I am going to trace the original source of pagan mystery religion and argue that it is inescapably present in the interfaith, syncretistic urge of our culture, both inside and outside the church. In conclusion I want to offer some thoughts regarding the nature of true unity in the kingdom of God.

AXIOLOGICAL REBELLION

The syncretistic error begins with the radical assertion of human autonomy — the notion that man is totally free, a law unto himself, and independent of God and his word. Human autonomy is an axiological rebellion10 because it is a rejection of God and his moral and creation order — the good, true, beautiful, and right as God has declared them — seeking instead to redefine good and evil in terms of man’s will and desire. As such, the exaltation of the triune God is seen as inhibiting man’s true spirituality and the realisation of his own divinity. However, this
rebellion, as we have already seen, inescapably takes place within the framework of God’s creational pattern, so that it is expressed in an attempt to establish community or kingdom without God. This requires syncretism - bringing together the would-be gods into an organised community.

To understand this rebellion better we must go back to the original rebellion expressed in an ancient building project. From the beginning of creation God established a holy society or city, which, after the Fall, was reflected in the institution of sacrifice, seen in Abel, Seth, Noah, Shem and Abraham. However, as St Augustine argued, there was the parallel historical development of a society of Satan that was proclaimed after the flood at Babel:

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.” And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. And the Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.” So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth (Gen. 11:1-9).

Here, sinful man thought he could create a good, religiously united society. This religious monument was an act of rebellion because it actually sought a closer unity of men against God. A great community thus settled in the area of Shinar, later known as Mesopotamia, and later again called Babylonia. The tower they constructed was almost certainly a stepped pyramid called a ziggurat. The top floor was likely used for astronomical and astrological purposes and as a centre for the rulers who had reached the highest degree (spiritual attainment). With its ‘top in the heavens,’ it was not intended to resemble a skyscraper but rather a power centre equalling God that probably sought to develop a new religious system involving the self-deification of men, by corrupting the meaning and purpose of the constellations, identifying them with spiritual beings and pre- and post-diluvian ancestors. It is of interest to note that the Bible tells us that the name Babel means confusion, whereas in the ancient Akkadian it means ‘gate of god’ (bab-ilu); God’s interpretation of the Tower was different than man’s. By his own power, man was seeking to re-interpret all things and make himself the new god over the earth. True religion would be the product of man’s consciousness and self-deification.

It is noteworthy that the expression, “let us make a name for ourselves,” literally means to ‘define, fix and establish’ authority, by self-defining, and naming everything else. This project was instituted in part to avoid being scattered, or separated in the earth, which for man implied division. Equally important for pagan man is the thought that ultimate power cannot be a divided power, so every effort was put forth to compel human unity in the name of this new faith in man’s religious self-consciousness. We see in Genesis 11 that God’s concern with this presumption was that, so united, with an evil imagination, man’s dream of total power (his religious project and unity being for him the very gate of god) would mean an attempt at total government and control. Thus God undermined the idolatrous project and reduced them to confusion. Ever since Babel, a peculiar mark of judgment on all pagan mysteries is spiritual, ethical and sexual confusion.

By way of contrast, in the biblical view, the unity of the human family was predicated on the unity of God’s relational being and man’s inward covenantal unity with God, creating a geographically diverse community worshipping the living God.
Abraham typified this faith and the promise to his descendants was its outworking, ultimately in Christ (Gal. 3:16). Babel, on the other hand, was a heaven-defying project building a false outward unity by force; the fear of being scattered indicates the inward separation rebel man already felt from God. The Babylonian world-monarchy which followed was Babel continued. And so there stand two views of the Babel project in history. One sees it as a place of confusion, the other as the gate of god, resting on the satanic promise ‘you shall be as gods.’ The tower was not only anti-god, it was in reality an indictment of God.

Tellingly, this early period after the flood was perceived by many of the ancients as the rebirth of humankind, a kind of second creation. Leading British Egyptologist, David Rohl, has argued that Nimrod (later deified as the Mesopotamian hunter-god Ninurta) was the priest-king of Uruk, whose name derives from a Hebrew verb meaning ‘to rebel.’ Genesis 10:9-10 tells us that Nimrod, son of Cush, was a mighty hunter before the Lord and that he was a great empire builder, beginning with Babel. According to Rohl, one of his first acts was to adopt the goddess Inanna as the patron deity of a great religious complex, the E-anna or ‘house of heaven.’ Inanna was a mountain goddess, ancient Sumer’s favored deity, because she represented fertility. Again Rohl suggests she was the ancient earth-mother-goddess who is recognizable as a deified Eve, ‘the mother of all living.’ The original home of this goddess was across the northern mountains in a Sumerian Kingdom, a paradise-land located in a place called edin – the Bible’s Eden. The Babylonians later called her Ishtar and the Canaanites Astarte. She is likewise the Ashtaroth of the Old Testament and the Isis of the Greeks. In an early form she was worshipped as the lady of heaven (possibly Virgo).

We know from Scripture and history that Nimrod was the actual Father of the gods, as being the first of deified mortals.” He goes on to show in extensive detail that most of the gods down through the centuries, from various cultures, trace their genesis to Nimrod – from Hercules to Cupid, Kronos to Osiris, Bacchus to Orion, to Krishna and Thor, they are all shown to be identified with Nimrod:

One remarkable and comprehensive work on this critical subject is that of Alexander Hislop in his classic, The Two Babylons (1858), which extensively documents the worship of Nimrod and his wife or consort, sometimes also depicted as mother and son. He identifies Cush (father of Nimrod) as the first ringleader of apostasy but also as Hermes or Mercury, for Hermes is an ancient Egyptian synonym for ‘Son of Ham.’ So, the first prophet of idolatry was Hermes (Cush) who fathered Nimrod. Hislop agrees with Rohl in identifying Nimrod with Ninus and as the builder of Nineveh. Hislop shows that the god Baal was probably Cush, known to antiquity as ‘the confounder’ who divided the speeches of men, and is associated with chaos or confusion. Hislop’s meticulously-researched work suggests that Nimrod’s father was likely the founder of Babel and Babylon, whilst Nimrod was the heroic builder of them. Nimrod is then quickly deified and adored. Hislop writes, “Nimrod was adopted into the Western world pantheon initially as Ninus; by the Phoenicians as Adonis; by the Greeks as Dionysus and by the Romans as Bacchus, and was identified with the constellation Orion. Rohl goes so far as to argue that all goddess worship stems from the deification of Eve who is later made consort of Marduk (Nimrod) and that many of the male gods, including Baal (meaning Lord) of the Old Testament, are none other than a deified Nimrod, the first potentate on earth. Ancient historian Bill Cooper largely concurs, and argues that he was not only the most notorious man of the ancient world, but that he is the essential founder of paganism (syncretism), including the practice of magic arts, astrology, and human sacrifice – moreover, that he was deified and worshipped under numerous names from antiquity.

And so there stand two views of the Babel project in history. One sees it as a place of confusion, the other as the gate of god, resting on the satanic promise ‘you shall be as gods.’ The tower was not only anti-god, it was in reality an indictment of God.”
Thus from Assyria, Egypt, and Greece, we have cumulative and overwhelming evidence, all conspiring to demonstrate that the child worshipped in the arms of the goddess-mother in all these countries in the very character of Ninus or Nin, “The Son” was Nimrod, the son of Cush. A feature here, or an accident there, may have been borrowed from some succeeding hero; but it seems impossible to doubt, that of that child, Nimrod was the prototype, the grand original. The amazing extent of the worship of this man indicates something very extraordinary in his character.... Though by setting up as king, Nimrod invaded the patriarchal system and abridged the liberties of mankind, yet he was held by many to have conferred benefits upon them that amply indemnified them for the loss of their liberties and covered him with glory and renown ... for this very thing he seems to have gained, as one of the titles by which men delighted to honor him, the title of ‘emancipator’ or ‘deliverer’ [Phoroneus meaning to cast off or apostatize]... and hence in one form or another, this title was handed down to his deified successors as a title of honor. All tradition from the earliest time bears testimony to the apostasy of Nimrod. How great was the boon conferred by Nimrod on the human race, in the estimation of ungodly men, by emancipating them from the impressions of true religion and putting the authority of heaven to a distance from them.

Moreover, Orion, the giant and mighty hunter celebrated by Homer is none other than Osiris and thus Nimrod. It was held he was translated to heaven and added to the stars. Hislop’s work not only reveals the traces of this same worship in the paganism of China and India, but shows that Nimrod was worshipped as a god because he was thought to be the woman’s promised seed – Zero-ashta:

In almost all nations not only was a great god known under the name Zero or Zer, “the seed” and a great goddess under the name Ashta or Isha, “the woman,” but the great god Zero is frequently characterized by some epithet which implies he is ‘the only One.’ Now what can account for such names or epithets? Gen. 3:15 can account for them; nothing else can.”

Zoroaster, history shows, was an Assyrian and the founder of the idolatrous system of Babylon and was therefore Nimrod. The traces of the primeval promise of deliverer are found in nearly all nations. Hislop writes:

There is hardly a people... on earth in whose mythology it is not shadowed forth. The Greeks represented their great god Apollo as slaying the serpent Pytho and Hercules as strangling serpents while yet in his cradle... the adversary of the Egyptian god Horus is frequently figured under the form of a snake, whose head he is seen piercing with a spear. The same fable occurs in the religion of India where the malignant serpent Calyia is slain by Vishnu in his avatar Crishna; and the Scandinavian deity Thor was said to have bruised the head of the serpent with his mace.

The bruising of the heel or foot of the god is seen depicted in Hindu images with Krishna’s foot on the great serpent’s head. He is then fabled to have died after being shot by an arrow in the foot. It seems evident from these studies that the seedbed of all pagan mystery religion with its idolatrous sacrifices, secret symbols, astrological fatalism, the orgies on the mountains, the deification of men and man’s worship of state, kings, pharaohs and emperors, finds its genesis in Nimrod the great apostate. Man decided he would be his own deliverer, would restore paradise by his own power and deify his religious consciousness. The mystery of iniquity, Babylon the mother of harlots, is the deification and worship of man, and that original apostate, that great prototype of man’s own messianic claims is readily seen in Nimrod, the rebel kingdom builder.

The importance of this survey is to notice first, that man’s gods are largely his rebellious ancestors conflated with spiritual powers and identified with nature. Moreover, that the basis of all interfaith syncretism with its purported ‘ancient wisdom’ traces back to that notorious rebel Nimrod, who, given the common origin of all humanity and the confusion of languages at Babel, has gone by many
different names since the beginning of human civilization. We shall return to the culmination of Nimrod’s project later. However, it is crucial we are aware that the historical genesis of polytheistic and pantheistic one-world religious objectives is this historic and original rebellion against God.

ONTLOGICAL SUBVERSION

From this historic axiological rebellion of Babel proceeded an ontological subversion of truth in the development and dissemination of occult and psychological religion – man’s idea, not revelation, asserted as the basis of truth. Now just as there is a correspondence between the mythological characters of antiquity rooted in an historic original, a study of ancient cosmology shows there is also a remarkable similarity and correlation between the origin accounts of the ancient world and their deities (Genesis being the exception). Henry Morris observes:

This remarkable similarity of the cosmogonies of many different nations of antiquity, as well as their respective pantheons of gods and goddesses, is obviously more than coincidence. The nations and their religious systems must have had a common origin.19

The ancient cosmologies all begin with a universe already in existence in a formless, watery, empty state (nature). Then the forces of nature, typically personified as gods and goddesses, act upon it. Given the global deluge and a cleansed earth emerging from the water, this phenomenon is not at all surprising. We know, and it is generally agreed by anthropologists, that all the nations and tribes do have a common origin. The Greeks actually acknowledged their religious philosophies were derived from the ancient Egyptians and Sumerians. The Greek and Roman pantheons have an essentially one-to-one correspondence with each other and also with the Babylonians and Egyptians. Amongst these gods, the supreme Babylonian god was Marduk, who we have seen was almost certainly Nimrod. Somehow this rebel man is also placed at the foundation of pagan cosmogony, not just imperial history. It was the Enuma Elish myth (perhaps the oldest of the pagan myths) that was adapted by the later Greek philosophers for their own systems by Hesiod, then Thales and Anaximander. Thus, there in early Babylonia or Sumeria we trace back to the one-world religious leader Nimrod, the rebel, a world that also gave us the foundational myth that all the others of Rome, Greece and India have been constructed upon. It is this paganism that is again beginning to flourish in the West and its evil root is truly ancient – Babylon is striking back in our time.

The great cosmogonic myths of the world have this common historic origin, and yet the geography of the myth is not the earth, but the heavens, and the actions are those of celestial bodies (principalities and powers both human and demonic). Pagan myths or mysteries thus passed on a body of astronomical and astrological knowledge. It is possible that the zodiac, its meaning reinterpreted, passed on a creation account as told by the ancients, one perhaps originally intended for a godly purpose. Those heavenly bodies in Scripture refer to both angelic and human powers throughout the prophetic literature. This is the mystery of “Babylon the Great, the mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth” (Rev. 17:5) from where the entire complex of pagan religion soon emerged.

Man’s rebellion therefore developed a new religious ontology that deteriorated from an original monotheism, to pantheism and polytheism and then into crude animism. There can be little doubt for the Christian who takes Scripture seriously that Nimrod was an occultist in communion with demonic spirits. More modern counterparts of the spirit of Nimrod like Carl Jung in the twentieth century repackaged this psychological religion. Jung himself was deeply enamoured by pagan ontology and cosmology, and was, by his own confession, introduced to his ideas by demonic powers – he spoke in his ‘Red Book’ of his own spirit guide who had been with him for years called Philemon.

Leaving ancient history for the classical world of the New Testament, amidst the religious syncretism of Athens, we find Paul confronting the Epicureans and Stoics with their pantheon of ancient gods. The Stoics, viewing all reality as pervaded by an
intelligent divine force, were deeply involved in divination, a practice common throughout the Roman world, linked to these ancient astrological beliefs and tied to a pantheistic doctrine of fate. It is therefore no surprise that as we turn back to paganism in our time, all these occult arts are again being practiced widely in the culture; and in interfaith and even ecumenical circles, prayers are being offered to ‘our mother who art in heaven.’ Various occult practices and goddess worship are very much back with us. Moreover, as Richard Tarnas points out:

The existence of the world-governing reason has another important consequence for the Stoic. Because all human beings shared in the divine Logos, all were members of a universal human community, a brotherhood of mankind that constituted the World City, or Cosmopolis, and each individual was called upon to participate actively in the affairs of the world and thereby fulfil his duty to this great community.20

Here we see the kingdom-building vision of Nimrod in a world city of great community of divine-humanity. The philosopher Anthony Kenny points out that the culmination of the philosophical theology of the ancient world was found in Plotinus and his vision of the ONE – the One, Spirit and Soul. This unholy trinity is not made up of equal persons like the Triune God but constitute emanations of the One which is utterly simple. Kenny writes:

If the One is beyond being, it is also beyond knowledge. [quoting Plotinus] ‘Our awareness of it is not through science or understanding as with other intelligent objects, but by way of a presence superior to knowledge.’ Such awareness is a mystical vision..., because the One is unknowable, it is also ineffable.... Plotinus elsewhere says that we cannot even call the One ‘it’ or say that it ‘is’.... We have to conclude that there is only a single soul..., thus at the end of our journey we reach the One and only One.21

These are simply philosophical expressions of the lifeless and dumb idols of Psalm 115 where man, stirred by a demonic realm, worships images of himself as a god. The collective rebellion of Nimrod at Babel thus leads to a pantheistic theological and philosophical vision that is able to embrace all the ‘gods’ (man’s psychological religion of self-deification) into a social order where the world city has a priestly function for man, incorporating him into the divine whole. As a result a new religious system of worship of creation (see Romans 1) developed, centering on man as a god or goddess. The animals, the stars and forces of nature are then also seen as aspects of the divine with celestial and demonic powers influencing and shaping the future. From the cosmogony of Babylon emerges the ontology of paganism as everything emerges from one primeval chaos in a great continuity of being. Religiously and philosophically, this connected man with the gods and enabled him to claim divine status or sanction for his politico-religious empire building that requires an enforced unity. This was the philosophical atmosphere into which the early church was preaching the gospel and it is again increasingly the atmosphere we face. It was an expression of the ancient lie, ‘you will be as gods,’ and the political corollary of this ontological subversion was not toleration for Christians.

POLITICAL TOTALITARIANISM AS THE ‘END’ OF SYNCRETISM

Babylon was geographically what we today call Iraq, but Revelation identifies Babylon, ‘the great whore’ with ancient Babylon and Rome, but also with Tyre, Jerusalem, and every other nation and empire that dreams of dominion and religious unity apart from God. What Babylon depicts is an ideal of unity, peace and brotherhood which mimics the kingdom of God, under a false messiah or ‘deliverer,’ tempting man with a counterfeit, and is therefore properly called a whore. Spiritual whoredom happens when people seek to find or know God by sidestepping the fact of sin, the righteousness of God and his law, and circumventing the necessary atonement of Christ at the cross. It is completely logical, then, that all syncretistic visions of religion seek to accommodate man’s self-justifying idolatrous psychology into a broad definition of spirituality – they are mystery cults. Man’s own route to God in this view is not a
surrender before the living God and entrance into the kingdom by repentance and faith, but instead is via a self-realization of the divine within. Here, I am the logos and so all my problems and difficulties, guilt and shame are not due to sin, but are products of my bad environment, lack psychological freedom and the false exaltation of that man Jesus Christ. As a result, the one thing that cannot be tolerated in this religio-political alliance is biblical faith. The eculusmical world of interfaith syncretism, as Tom Harpur’s book adequately shows, has no place for biblical Christianity and so neither does its counterpart, the modern pluralistic state. It therefore becomes absolutely necessary for mystery cults to replace Christianity to build religious and social unity in society. With each person an expression of the divine, the self is the source of truth, and so to challenge someone’s psychological reality with the gospel is heresy – tolerance and relativity are thus required for the political order.

Following Nimrod, that ancient rebel still unwittingly adored by the masses, autonomy means there is no right or wrong. Rebel man will express the god within through whatever spirituality and sexuality he desires and will pray to whatever, god, spirit or goddess expresses his inner being. As the expert in pagan thought, Peter Jones, has noted:

In this great expanse of energy, divinity and truth, no religion can claim exclusive truth. Because orthodox Christianity commits this unpardonable sin, it is the major obstacle to the religious and social harmony of the planet. Religions must blend into a global, unified syncretism... the various creeds are interchangeable and spiritual experiences are in communion with the same occult reality. The Parliament of the World’s Religions in Chicago in 1993 was a pre-programmed happening of monistic spirituality. Conferees were to discover behind their external differences a shared human experience of the divine within.

There is, and always has been, an alliance in paganism between the mystery religion and political life. Roman syncretism was made possible by the universal spread of the Greek language and culture (like Babel), the development of a large free trade market, a growing sense of unity for the human race, and a cultural openness to the spirituality of the East. The result was the emergence of a religious syncretism in Rome on a Babel-like scale. Though outwardly diverse in the melting pot of the Greco-Roman world (just like today), these cults came together in a synthesis, unified by the view that behind these pagan ideas was the same divine spirit.

Many different gods were housed in the same temple in the classical world, which is why St. Paul found the temple filled with numerous idols at Athens – including an altar to the unknown god (Acts 17:16-34). Moreover it was believed then, just as it is today, that this syncretism was the answer to world peace. Jones has noted that the Emperor Valentinian in AD 384 proposed a policy of religious tolerance:

We gaze at the same stars, the sky belongs to all, the same universe surrounds us. What difference does it make by whose wisdom someone seeks the truth? We cannot attain to so great a mystery by one road.

Politics and pagan spirituality inescapably came together and are very much coming together again. Political power, pantheistic religion, occult spirituality and various expressions of ‘alternate sexuality’ merged in the Roman culture to make this pagan colossus seem essentially impregnable to the Christian message. Again, Jones correctly notes that “totalitarian political power joined with a syncretistic, all-tolerant world religion to insist on religious peace.” But this peace was only possible if you conformed to the religio-political powers that ruled. Osiris and Isis were welcome, but Jesus Christ the Lord was not. Hold-outs were stamped as enemies of the state and social order.

THE TRUE DELIVERER AND PRIEST-KING

It is interesting to note that the Hebrew commonwealth stood alone in the ancient world in divorcing priesthood and kingship in human authority; these were only to be united
ultimately in Jesus Christ. His coming shattered the pagan view of priesthood, because he alone is the emancipator and mediator between God and man. However, as seen first in Nimrod, the pagan king was viewed as divine and as a human god – the eternal and temporal mingled in his office by the commingling of heavens (stars and planets as deified men) with earth, having all emerged from primeval waters. In Rome, Julius Caesar was the democratic champion, assuming divinity, and was honored by the Greeks of Asia as the offspring of Mars and Venus – a saviour for the human race. Octavian likewise claimed to be the son of God; Augustus Caesar made the same claim in the time of the early church. For these men there was a continuity of all being, and deification was the height of that continuity. Roman kings typically represented the god Jupiter (probably a corruption of Japheth). The power of such political authority rested in their claim to be able to control, order and govern outcomes and the future. The priestly realm of political power was thus the kingdom of ‘god’ on earth. In Israel, by contrast, God was King (even when Israel introduced a monarchy), ruling from his sanctuary. The Holy of Holies was his throne room and all the earth his dominion. The Christian gospel announces the arrival of this great king in history in the person of Christ, who came preaching the kingdom of God, and the apostles declared this message openly (Acts 17:1-8; Phil. 2:5-11).

The Roman world tried to meet the challenge of the claims of Christ and his church in several ways; syncretism, extermination and a kind of denaturalisation (meaning to destroy the quality of), where they were ready to grant ‘freedom to worship’ so long as the church recognised the right of the state to ‘permit freedom.’ It was very much like the religious freedom offered in the modern West – freedom to worship privately but not freedom from the state. In our time the dominant strategy of anti-Christianity is syncretism with denaturalisation. This interfaith perspective enforced by the state is necessary to destroy uncompromising allegiance to the living God and his revealed Word. Human autonomy therefore entails political totalitarianism because by it man creates a rival theological order in rebellion against God’s rule. As one theologian has noted:

The state has unlimited jurisdiction, because it is that order in which man realizes himself, the order in which man expresses his collective divinity: vox populi, vox dei, the voice of the people is the voice of God, in this collective of democratic consensus.25

This result is inescapable where the faith of Nimrod prevails, because it lacks a concept of transcendence (only found in Trinitarian Christianity). If man’s soul is deified as logos, totalitarianism is the result, because power and authority become immanent concepts. Political liberalism without Christ is therefore a development of theological liberalism, which is merely the religion of Nimrod. As the West abandoned God, it transferred sovereignty from God to man and so democratized authority as the basis of all political life. In this view truth and right are merely a product of the psychology of the people, not what God says they are. Liberty under God and his law is thus replaced by the liberty of ‘nature’ and the development of man’s rights to express total autonomy from God.

Syncretism (theological liberalism) separates the state from any obligation to God’s theological order and in so doing reduces Christianity to little more than a private psychological preference to be expressed as social justice or humanitarianism. Consequently God’s moral law is repealed in terms of ‘human rights,’ for Nimrod’s order cannot allow the existence of a higher law to be a critique of the state’s implicit claims to divinity. Syncretism is the democratization of religion and within it is man’s assumption of divinity in the political order. We are currently experiencing the reality that freedom for the individual is only transitional in this revolution, because the source of truth, law and authority is moving from God to the state as the immanent god, beyond which there can be no appeal. The rights of the people (collective) become divine rights and so politics becomes inescapably totalitarian. The revelation issued by this new god today is that the family and church are institutions that must be set aside, and enforced syncretism or egalitarianism (the political counterpart of syncretism) are the weapon of choice. This disaster all stems from our first point,
human autonomy, revealing that religious syncretism and political totalitarianism are one.

It is important as Christians to be reminded, however, that because there is no other God but the Lord, the pretensions of Babel were destroyed by God himself. Scripture reminds the covenant people that we win: "for of the increase of His government and peace, there will be no end" (Is. 9:7), and 'the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea' (Is. 11:9) There is only one potentate (1 Tim. 6:15), whose name is above every name, to whom every knee will bend in heaven and earth, the true priest-king. Jesus Christ, God’s own Son. We have seen that pagan worship began with a kingdom vision – with Babel, Cush and Nimrod – a false human-divine king at its centre, set in rebellion against God. This ancient conspiracy is only a satanic counterfeit of the real kingdom of God, which shall prevail (Rom. 8:37-39; Rev. 1:5-8).

Scripture makes plain that Jesus Christ was sent as covenant head of a new race that would build a new world (2 Cor. 5:17-20; Rom. 8:18-25). In Adam the original kingdom was lost through sin, but Christ, the second Adam, is building a kingdom that, as the uncut stone, shatters all the false syncretistic empires of men and spreads to fill the whole earth, a kingdom enduring forever (Dan. 2:44-45). Christ’s death and resurrection introduced a new world that brought to an end the false powers and claims of the old one. Certainly the battles of history rage as everything is shaken, but the war is already won (Heb. 12:26-29).

One critical event often overlooked in this regard was the giving of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-41). This was not merely a ‘religious event’ to give a spiritual experience to the disciples, it was a change in the history of the world as the Father and Son sent the Holy Spirit upon the church to inaugurate a new covenant for the new creation. The immediate effect of this was the breaking of the curse of Babel. The curse on the false unity of Babel was confusion, so that they could not build for they could no longer understand each other. A shared meaning or unity was lost. Amidst today’s ‘unifying’ pagan worldview, the irony is that men are everywhere at war and disunited; the syncretism of Satan has always failed. But at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit fell, people from all over the known world of various languages all heard the gospel of the kingdom preached in their own language as the apostles spoke in other tongues! Here the true principle of unity was set forth by the Spirit, the kingdom of God under the reign of the true priest-king and only potentate, Jesus Christ.

Through his indwelling, the Spirit unites God and man, bringing man into the covenantal fellowship of the Trinity...we could not be truly one with God unless we were made to be like Christ – not an ontological likeness, but an ethical one; not a likeness that eliminates individuality but a likeness in love by which our individuality is fully developed.26

When Jesus told us the kingdom was near he was referring to the restoration of the kingdom given to man at the beginning of creation, a kingdom he promised to build, where Satan and his lie and all its expressions from Babel (the mother of all harlotry) to the present, would be overthrown and the kingdom restored to man in Jesus Christ. We lost the kingdom in deep history, but in Christ the Lord, by the Spirit, we are receiving it back! Christ’s death and resurrection defeated our enemy, and as he now reconciles all things to himself (Col. 1:19-20), his kingdom age is come and he is building a new temple from his seat of authority at the right hand of God (Luke 22:69). The prince of this age is cast out and his rule is passing away (1 Cor. 2:6-8), for all power and authority in heaven and earth now belong to Christ (Matt. 28:18ff) and he sends us out to conquer in his name, in light of his unambiguous claim to kingship (John 8:54-58; Mark 14:61-62).

Our gospel is a message that destroys the satanic false semblance of unity and offers instead the Kingdom of God, a covenant community of grace, enfolded in the loving embrace of the Triune God. The intellectual absurdities, philosophical emptiness, spiritual bankruptcy, moral and sexual confusion of Babel, produces only broken lives and cultures, whereas the kingdom of God is
“The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). It is this that the true Christian must preach and live. Only in this glorious hope can we confront the broken Babel of our age and say with Paul, “Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world...? The foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Cor. 1:20-25). And his strength shall be shown complete and perfected in our weakness.

2 Ibid., 189.
3 Ibid., 176.
4 Ibid., 189.
5 Ibid., 188.
6 Ibid.
10 Axiology concerns values and goodness, encompassing all moral questions.
12 Rohl, 397.
13 Bill Cooper, After The Flood: The early post-flood History of Europe traced back to Noah (USA: New Wine Press, 1995), 189-190, 199.
15 Ibid., 50, 52.
16 Ibid., 59.
17 Ibid., 60.
18 Ontology concerns being and the ultimate foundations of life and thought.
24 Ibid., 32.
26 Ralph. A Smith, Trinity and Reality, An Introduction to the Christian Faith (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2004), 144.
NOT GOOD TO BE ALONE:
ROB BELL & SCRIPTURE

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE IS ONE of the most divisive, burning issues in contemporary Western culture. It is important to get it right.

On a recent episode of the Oprah Winfrey Show, Kristen and Rob Bell (ex-pastor of Mars Hill (mega) Church in Michigan) made lavish use of “values language,” to justify same-sex marriage. Kristen stated: “Marriage, gay and straight, is a gift to the world because the world needs more, not less, love, fidelity, commitment, devotion and sacrifice.” Who does not want to see more love in the world? But terms like “love,” “commitment” and “sacrifice” need more careful definition. The millions watching Oprah need a better defense of biblical sexuality from people to whom they look for guidance. Indeed, the “made-for-TV” superficiality of these arguments is staggering and is part of the trend in certain “evangelical” circles to accept the homosexual agenda on very flimsy, sentimental, even non-existent grounds as perfectly in line with the true meaning of Christianity.

How far the Bells have moved from their evangelical roots (having met as students at Wheaton College) is indicated by Kristen’s comment to Oprah that she now begins each day not with Scripture but with the Oprah/Deepak Chopra guided meditation method. According to a reviewer of this method, this meditative program is part of the present Eastern spiritual revolution or global shift of consciousness that is “a move away from traditional religious institutions with their dogmas and hierarchies to a more integrated, interfaith spirituality that seeks to tap into the common spiritual truths that lie at the heart of all of the world’s religions.”

Ding dong! The once-hetero, once-gospel-holding preacher, Rob Bell, provides his own, equally misleading, defense of same-sex marriage. Irresponsibly picking and choosing between Bible texts that agree with him and those that do not, he dismisses Paul’s two thousand-year-old letters that no longer apply — then blithely chooses a 3500-year-old text with which he thinks he agrees, namely Genesis 2:18. In this verse God declares: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” In a purely sentimentalizing interpretation of this foundational text for human civilization, Bell launches into an emotive appeal for the benefits of companionship, perfectly suited to his Oprah-taught audience:

One of the oldest aches in the bones of humanity is loneliness… Loneliness is not good for the world. Whoever you are, gay or straight, it is totally normal, natural and healthy to want someone to go through life with. It’s central to our humanity. We want someone to go on the journey with. Bell argues that the Bible, in tune with all warm-blooded normal human beings, is, in principle, opposed to loneliness, and thus implicitly and inevitably in favor of all forms of “marriage” — heterosexual, homosexual or poly-sexual, that solve this enormous human problem.

One clear implication from Bell’s interpretation is that he can therefore see no place in Scripture for singleness or celibacy—even though the spirituality the Bells now embrace, namely, Hinduism, has a large place for singleness. Bell is also separating himself from the Jesus he once confessed, for Jesus puts great value on God-given singleness (Matt. 19:11-12).
Let's look more carefully at the Genesis text (2:18) Bell employs to defend his view of homosexual marriage. For him, this text is really just a pretext that creates an aura of objectivity, apparently lending weight to his idiosyncratic opinion. But it is not an inspired text to be studied seriously for its own sake. Bell expresses his real view of Scripture during the interview when he says: “The church will continue to be even more irrelevant when it quotes letters from two thousand years ago as their best defense.”

Does Genesis 2:18 actually say what Bell affirms? Perhaps Bell does not care, but the text does reserve a big surprise for those interested in what this Scripture actually teaches. There are three key terms – “alone,” “[not] good,” and “helper,” that need to be examined.

1) “ALONE”

Bell understands the term “alone” in the phrase, “it is not good for man to be alone,” to express emotional loneliness (“one of the oldest aches in the bones of humanity”) from which to be delivered. I took the time to examine the 204 occasions where the word “alone” (Hebrew, bad) is used in the Hebrew Old Testament. I can confidently say that it is never used of psychological or emotional loneliness and is certainly not the meaning of the term in this text. At best, Bell’s interpretation, for a once-professional interpreter of Scripture, is superficial and careless, to say nothing of being plainly wrong.

The Bible uses the term “alone” to mean something as distinguished from something else. There is no emotive attachment to the word. In the story of Joseph and his brothers, for example, we read: “They [the servants] served him [Joseph] by himself [literally, “alone”] and them [the brothers] by themselves...” (Ex. 43:32). See also Genesis 47:26 and Exodus 24:2. All the brothers were “by themselves” or “alone,” but not in the sense of “loneliness,” since the brothers, at least, were in a group!

“Alone” is also an expression of Old Testament monotheism: “O LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth” (2 Kings 19:15; see also Ex. 22:20).

“Alone” also means that which is unique. This meaning well describes Adam, who, at the moment of God’s declaration, was the only human being that God had then made. The Bible is not telling us that Adam was suffering from emotional isolation, especially since he had God as his companion, but that he was the only human being on the face of the earth.

There was more for God to do. Here, the term clearly does not mean psychological loneliness but that Adam was the only one of his kind, and that something/someone was lacking in God’s creative project. The situation of creation “was not good” only because it was not yet finished. In constructing a three legged stool, a carpenter could well say, with only two legs completed, the stool was “not yet good” as a functioning, dependable stool.

2) “GOOD”

So we have come to the term “good.” The creation account is replete with references to the “good.” Seven times in chapter one of Genesis, the word “good” is repeated, after every major creative act, and what makes everything good is the divine act of “separation.” Light and darkness, seas and dry land, the many “kinds” of plants and animals, are distinguished from each other, all producing a functioning, creative symphony of unity in difference. Where there is no separation, it is not good. The cosmos, “void and formless” (Gen. 1:2) needed separation into useable forms. When such distinctions are in place, things are declared good.

This goodness has cosmic significance. Twoness describes the relationship of God to creation, two distinct kinds of being, united in a common purpose. Indeed God as Trinity is Twoist in this sense, because in God there is both unity and distinction. Little wonder that structures of distinction serve as God’s model for his creative work, making distinct things, like day and
night, water and dry land, but uniting them in a common purpose to produce life.

But something is holding back the final overwhelming expression of goodness; something is lacking, not yet good. The process awaits its crowning moment. Adam is still “alone.”

In the final act of creation “God created man...male and female he created them.... And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:27, 31). When male and female are in place, as the pinnacle of this distinction-making creative process, the “not good” disappears and everything is not only good, but very good. As soon as Eve appears, “the mother of the living” (Gen. 3:20), things will live, and everything becomes “very good.” The heterosexual binary now established constitutes the wholesome key to a functioning God-honoring, moral, gospel-revealing cosmos.

The situation was not “good,” not because there was sin or emotional suffering in the world but because the process of creation had not yet been completed. For the moment, this situation made Adam not yet effective for a role he was called to play in the future.

A perfect example of this principle of ineffectiveness of function is found in the ministry of Moses as judge of the people, recounted in Exodus 18:14–23. Interestingly, this text contains two of our key words, “not good” and “alone.” Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, sees him toiling and not accomplishing his task. The text reads:

When Moses’ father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, “What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?”...Moses' father-in-law said to him, “What you are doing is ‘not good.’” (Ex. 18:17)

Notice that it is the inefficiently-exercised function that is “not good.” That Moses is alone and unaided prevents him from doing his job correctly – with “not good” results. He is not psychologically lonely; indeed, there are too many people, making him unproductive and exhausted. Jethro adds:

You and the people...will certainly wear yourselves out.... You are not able to do it alone...look for able men from all the people..., and let them judge the people at all times... God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace. (Ex. 18:17-23).

3) “HELPER”

Moses got help. In Genesis 2:18, Eve is identified specifically as a “perfectly-fitted helper” (Hebrew, ezer) for Adam. She is not merely the answer to a loneliness problem that could have been met by another man. She is, specifically, as woman, an essential participant in Adam’s creational vocation.

In other places in the Old Testament, this term ezer is used for God as “helper,” not for emotional support against loneliness but for military assistance in the life and death defense of Israel from her enemies (Deut. 33:26–29). As Moses stated in naming his son, “The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh” (Ex. 18:4). For this role of God as the mighty deliverer, Israel raised to the Lord a monument, an eben-ezer, “a stone of help” (1 Sam. 7:12).

Ezer is also used to express needed assistance for a specific task, as in 1 Chronicles 15:26 where it is stated that “God helped the Levites who were carrying the ark of the covenant of the LORD.” The case of Moses the judge, mentioned above, is an example of this kind of help. Though the term ezer is not used, God provides “helpers,” “men able to judge,” to aid Moses in the task to which he was called.

In the same way, to provide an “appropriate helper” for Adam’s present but temporary ineffectiveness, God goes to the trouble of creating, not another able-bodied male friend to help Adam with various tasks of husbandry and animal care, or to solve the problem of loneliness, but a whole new human being in female form,
an incredibly specific complement to Adam, perfectly fitted for him, enabling him to do the specific job he was called to do. That demanded heterosexuality, not same-sex, loneliness-ending companionship. Indeed, if we only had the latter, there would be no one reading this article.

To make this abundantly clear, this same term, ezer, used in the Genesis 2:18 text with regards to Eve, is used two verses later, and reads as follows: “The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper (ezer) fit for him” (Gen. 2:20). When compared to the animals and what they could offer, Eve’s “help” takes on a very specific function for which animals or other men were useless, totally unfit. The help intended was not to lift Adam’s endless sense of loneliness, (though companionship is a wonderful secondary aspect of marriage) but to take up the massive task of the creation mandate, formally given to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” To solve the “not good” situation, God creates the “very good” heterosexual structure of marriage, in which man and woman are perfectly fitted:

…the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Gen. 2:20-24)

The future of humanity, for which the Bells show little concern in their rush to downgrade the male/female distinction, and to justify homosexuality, depended not on the elimination of solitude by any kind of companionship but on the heterosexual companionship of physical marriage that produces babies, according to the cosmic formula, egg + sperm = civilization.

Ironically, the biblical text Bell misuses comes around to bite him. For this text is not proof of the correctness of same-sex marriage, but actually gives unequivocal support for what Bell attempts to undermine, namely, God-designed, cosmically-essential, heterosexual marriage.

There is something a lot worse than emotional loneliness. Life must be desperately lonely for highly visible, once-Christian, spiritual leaders who still have the woeful task of teaching about the essential issues of life, but now from purely subjective inward-looking meditative states. How do you satisfy the longing of people who rely on you, who have aches in their bones to know with assurance what God has truly revealed about the essential issues of life? How do you do it without the support and authority of divinely-inspired Scripture?

After Jesus’ resurrection, two of the disciples, one named Cleopas, felt lonely and abandoned, “looking sad,” as the text says (Luke 24:17). The answer to their depressed state was obviously meeting the Risen Jesus, but also, as they note, when Jesus, “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” This Bible study led by Jesus “caused their hearts to burn within them….when he opened the Scriptures to them” (Luke 24:32).

This is what Scripture is meant to do. It is written for our encouragement (Rom. 15:4) and our “instruction” (1 Cor. 10:11; 2 Tim. 3:15). We ignore what Scripture teaches about God’s intention for human sexuality at our peril. We will end up in the lonely place of an imploded cultural wasteland with only pagan-inspired spiritual navel-gazing, “without hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). That is the dreadful state of metaphysical loneliness.

1 Rob and Kristen Bell, interview by Oprah Winfrey, Super Soul Sunday, OWN, February 15, 2015.


4 Rob and Kristen Bell interview.

5 What is the role of celibacy in Hinduism?” Patheos Library(n.d.) states: “In general, celibacy in Hinduism is associated with increased physical power, strength, concentration, well-being, and longevity and is also associated with the control of desire (and ultimately the control of oneself).”

THE Gospel ACCORDING TO yoga

PAMELA FROST

We constantly hear the phrase “spiritual but not religious” intoned as a cultural mantra, implying a vague spiritual experience that claims more authenticity than organized religion, particularly Christianity. People like to feel spiritual but they don’t like the idea of their accountability to God and their need for a Saviour outside themselves. They’d rather imagine the divine as a universal presence they can control and manipulate for their own desires by turning within. Yoga was designed to facilitate this very experience, following the principles of the Hindu philosophy of Vedanta, a form of Oneism,1 which is rapidly influencing the Western mind.

We live in an era when the propositional truths of Christianity are increasingly dismissed as oppressive and outdated. Belief in the Creator God who is distinct from His creation, who in the person of Jesus Christ made blood atonement so lost sinners could be reconciled to the Father – belief in this truly Good News is increasingly rejected as not only irrelevant, but intolerably divisive. In its place, many embrace the alternative view of the divine as a universal spirit or energy within everything. Thus, many are turning to spiritual techniques to “get in touch with their inner divinity,” in what essentially amounts to a religion of the Divine Self. Yoga is one of these techniques. But while yoga has been historically recognized as a Hindu religious discipline for self-realization (the Hindu version of the “gospel”), skillful marketing has rebranded it as a popular fitness program with the result that yoga has become ubiquitous in the West for the fitness of body, mind and spirit. A growing number of Christians are also turning to yoga for exercise, stress reduction and even as a means to draw closer to God, with “Christian” yoga programs gaining popularity.

One of the most popular “Christian” yoga programs is Holy Yoga; its founder Brooke Boon reasons, “We know that yoga is a spiritual discipline much like fasting, meditation and prayer that cannot be owned by one specific religion.”2 Her justification for Christianizing yoga blurs the distinction between the Christian’s unique privilege to draw near to God by the blood of Jesus and the “spiritual but not religious” impulse to tap into a universal spirituality accessible to all religions. This line of reasoning is more compatible with interfaith mysticism than biblical Christianity.

As the West progressively rejects its historic biblical foundation, the wider culture is steadily exchanging the biblical distinction between Creator and creation for the divine cosmos. This is particularly expressed in the West’s embrace of the Hindu religious philosophy of Vedanta (all is divine) and the practice of yoga (the art of experiencing universal divinity).

VEDANTA IN AMERICA

In fact, interfaith minister Philip Goldberg, author of American Veda, asserts that the religious philosophy of Vedanta has effectually become the new default spirituality of the West and he credits the practice of yoga as America’s bridge to Vedanta. Says Goldberg, “…the yoga masters who came here, regardless of their orientations and specialties, created a foundation for the wider dissemination of Vedic teachings as a whole. Students may come for a workout, but their minds stretch and bend too.”3 In other words, while yoga is presented as a “spiritual but not religious” fitness program, it really functions as a slow conditioning process softening Western sensibilities toward the Hindu religious philosophy of Vedanta,4 which exchanges the distinction between the Creator and creation for the Hindu version of “god” as an ocean of impersonal, universal divinity – a kind of force, energy or essence – called Brahman.
SO WHAT IS YOGA? SOME HISTORY
THE VEDAS:

According to the apostle Paul, when men suppress the truth in unrighteousness, refusing to worship the Creator outside them, the only option left is some form of nature religion (Rom. 1:18, 25). When nature is divinized, “god” becomes an impersonal energy that exists within everything, and the only way to interact with the divine is through mysticism and magic. This is evident in the four Vedas, the oldest of Hinduism’s foundational sacred texts, which form the basis for yoga.

Veda means “knowledge,” but not in the sense of education. Vedic knowledge is esoteric – that which is received directly from the spirit world. Dating somewhere between 1500 and 1000 bc, the vedas record a complex mythology of personified nature deities and the religious rituals required to invoke, propitiate and manipulate them. These involve chanting mantras as prayers (such as “om,” the divine vibration of brahman), ritual animal sacrifice, magical prayers and incantations, and spells, charms and magic.5

ORIGIN OF YOGA

The word “yoga” is derived from the root word yuj, first recorded in the rigveda, the oldest of the four vedas, where it refers to the yoking of horses to the chariots of the vedic gods. But it also conveys the metaphorical idea of yoking inner consciousness with the universal principle in order to transform humanity into divinity. A commentary on the katha upanishad,6 where the term “yoga” is first recorded, explains: “…yoga literally means to join or to unite the lower self with the higher self, the object with the subject, the worshipper with god [brahman].”7

Yoga represents a version of salvation that defines the “gospel” not as redemption from sin, but as realization that a hidden, inner self is “god.” This gives the sense of immortality, which is believed to secure freedom from the wheel of reincarnation as one transcends consciousness of material existence.

PATANJALI

The Vedic sage Patanjali systematized classical yoga around AD 150 in his Yoga Sutras as an eight-limbed (ashtanga) path to mystical absorption in divinity:

1. Yama: moral code of non-violence, non-lying, non-stealing, sexual continence, non-attachment
2. Niyama: ascetic disciplines like fasting to near starvation or raising an arm for several months, Vedic study, devotion to the divine
3. Asanas: postures designed to still the body and mind in preparation for meditation
4. Pranayama: channeling the breath as divine energy to transcend distinctions
5. Pratyahara: meditation to suppress the senses because the body and mind are deemed impediments to higher consciousness
6. Dharana: gazing at a fixed point between the eyes or an image of a deity in order to “kill” the thinking mind
7. Dhyana: deep meditative trance state
8. Samadhi: absorption in universal consciousness – the mystical “gospel” of yoga

HATHA YOGA

Hatha yoga emerged around AD 900 when classical yoga was synthesized with Tantrism, a religious philosophy that “joins the opposites of good and evil in order to transcend them” through the exercise of godlike autonomy. Sexual ritual is central to Tantrism and in hatha yoga it represents the union of the goddess Shakti (female principle of divine energy) and her male consort Shiva (destroyer of distinctions), joining feminine and masculine energies into androgynous divinity within the yogi’s body. Renowned yoga scholar Georg Feuerstein elucidates:

“The sexual symbolism [of Shakti and Shiva] conceals a sweeping cosmic reality: the eternal play between feminine power and masculine consciousness, which are always united on the transcendental level but are experienced as separate on the empirical level.”

“People like to feel spiritual but they don’t like the idea of their accountability to God and their need for a Saviour outside themselves.”

“As the West progressively rejects its historic biblical foundation, the wider culture is steadily exchanging the biblical distinction between Creator and creation for the divine cosmos.”

“Yoga literally means to join or to unite the lower self with the Higher Self, the object with the subject, the worshipper with God.”
Twentieth-century religion scholar Mercia Eliade recognized the same principle, explaining that during the practice of yoga, “…the union of the divine pair [Shakti and Shiva] within his own body transforms the yogin10 into a kind of ‘androgyne.’”11

HOW IT WORKS: THE SUBTLE BODY

Hatha yoga is designed to awaken the “Subtle Body,” a transcendent Self that arises from within to take over the physical body and thinking mind through the union of Shakti and Shiva. It is not empowered by the Holy Spirit but by fallen angels masquerading as the divine energy of Hindu deities (1 Cor. 10:19-20).

According to hatha yoga theory, the physical body and thinking mind obscure an inner non-corporeal Subtle Body conceptualized as a matrix of psychic energy channels (nadis), which intersect the spine to form energy centers called chakras. It is theorized that the serpent goddess Shakti/Kundalini is coiled dormant at the base of the spine until activated by yoga’s postures, breathing and meditation techniques. As the serpent ascends, she opens the chakras as lotuses of enlightenment, progressively silencing the mind into passivity as subject/object distinctions begin to disappear. The process culminates with the union of Shakti/Kundalini and Shiva in the crown chakra above the head. At this point, the Subtle Body is realized as the Divine Self, indicating the yogi is under the total control of Shakti/Shiva consciousness in the mystical state of androgynous bliss called samadhi.

INCARNATING THE “GODS”

Following yoga’s Vedic philosophy, the postures are designed to incarnate the gods and goddesses, embody the power of sacred animals and experience unity with the divine cosmos. Mercia Eliade elucidates, “The yogin stands both for a Cosmos and a pantheon; he incarnates in his own body both Shiva and Shakti.”12

One popular posture illustrates the point. In performing the “Lord of Dance” posture the yogi assumes the form of the Hindu deity Shiva as he dances destruction on the “ignorance” of subject/object distinctions, joining the opposites into enlightened consciousness of universal divinity. The posture represents a radical shift in worldview from worship of the Creator to worship of creation.

Since yoga was developed as the Hindu “gospel” of the Divine Self, we need to understand how its practice has come to have such great influence in the West.

KRISHNAMACHARYA

In order to do that, we need to understand Krishnamacharya, the man credited as the father of modern postural yoga. During the 1930s and 1940s, under the patronage of the raja of Mysore, Krishnamacharya incorporated elements of British gymnastics and Indian wrestling into his yoga practice.13 Many claim this period marks the advent of yoga as a non-religious program for stretching and strengthening intended solely for therapeutic health benefits, which is a major argument for the free practice of yoga for anyone, regardless of their religious beliefs.

But Krishnamacharya was an accomplished Vedic scholar and deeply devout Hindu of the priestly Brahmin caste who worshipped the idol of Hayagriva, the horse-headed avatar of the Hindu deity Vishnu.14 When he borrowed from other sources, he adapted them into the style of yoga15 for the express purpose of expanding the religious techniques for union with the universal spirit. In fact, his yoga classes were really religion classes, each opening with prayers to Hindu deities before commencing the religious training of his students. Topics covered Patanjali’s eight-limbed path to samadhi (absorption in divinity to escape reincarnation), Vedic rituals, daily puja (ritual worship), the proper intonation and chanting of Vedic mantras, awakening of the serpent Kundalini and opening the chakras for enlightenment of the universal. When teaching the postures (asanas) to his students, Krishnamacharya insisted they first offer prayers for the blessing of Adisesha, the thousand-headed serpent deity of Hindu mythology, to
ensure their success. Every aspect of his yoga instruction was directed by his Hindu faith.

Among Krishnamacharya’s most well-known and influential devotees were disciples such as B.K.S. Iyengar and K. Pattabhi Jois, both devout Hindus of the priestly Brahmin caste.

KRISHNAMACHARYA’S LEGACY

Iyengar and Jois carried Krishnamacharya’s yoga legacy to the West, giving special weight to the postures and breathing techniques for purported health benefits such as flexibility and stress reduction. While the West was not ready to embrace Hinduism per se, the postures appealed to American pragmatism, opening a door of influence for yoga’s religious philosophy without calling much attention to itself. Thus yoga became an effective means to spread the Hindu Vedanta in the West.

B.K.S. Iyengar is credited as the guru most influential in popularizing hatha yoga in the West through the 1966 publication of his book Light on Yoga. Forty-nine years later, it is Amazon’s number one best-selling book on yoga. Drawing from the classic Hindu text, the Bhagavad Gita, Iyengar explains that the end of yoga is “a soul cleansed of sin” and thus liberated from reincarnation. But it takes many lifetimes to reach such perfection and the practice of yoga is essential to the process. The book is thus replete with photos of Iyengar demonstrating over 200 postures emulating elements of nature, sacred animals, mythic heroes and “gods of the Hindu pantheon.” Among them is the “Lord of Dance” posture in which Shiva dances cosmic destruction on the Creator/creation distinction until all is perceived as one in the state of samadhi, described by Iyengar as “A state in which the aspirant is one with…the Supreme Spirit pervading the universe.”

K. Pattabhi Jois is known for his brand of Ashtanga Yoga, which uses energetic flow movements between postures in what some consider an aerobic form of yoga rather than a religious discipline. Yet Jois was a religious Brahmin who followed Patanjali’s classic path to realization of the “Universal Self,” and ascribed to some of the postures the power to overcome sin, a clear counterfeit of the true gospel of Jesus Christ. Jois’ religious devotion centered on the Hindu deity Shiva and his book Yoga Mala dedicates his practice of yoga to Shiva with this traditional prayer, “To Shiva, the lord of the yogis… I bow again and again.” The book also explains the importance of worshipping the sun god Surya through the postures and prostrations of the Surya Namaskara (Sun Salutation) sequences in order to gain the blessing of good health. Jois’ yoga classes begin with traditional prayers chanted in Sanskrit, said to be the language of the Hindu gods and goddesses.

Jois was also a devotee of Ganesha, the elephant-headed son of Shiva. In fact, a statue of Ganesha has a place of honor in each of the numerous yoga shalas (studios) Jois established in Europe and America. During the grand opening of the Jois Yoga Shala in Encinitas, California, a Hindu priest performed a complete puja (worship) ceremony to Ganesha. During the process, prestigious guests, such as the heads of the Jois foundation (renamed the Sonima Foundation), participated in the worship of multiple Hindu deities.

Despite the blatantly religious nature of Ashtanga Yoga, the Sonima Foundation has a goal of introducing the practice into 100 American public school districts as a non-religious fitness program. So far, they have succeeded in getting their yoga program into fifty-five schools by claiming to have removed all the religious elements, reducing the program to simply the physical exercise of the postures. But according to Jois, the postures alone have the power to effect a deeply religious transaction by awakening an energy that changes you from within, even touching the soul “until the mind assumes the form of Brahma.” This produces the deceptive experience of attaining immortality through yoga, which Hindus believe results in freedom from reincarnation. Yoga really represents a path of works-righteousness, a pagan substitute for the gospel of Jesus’ blood atonement for sinners.

“Yoga really represents a path of works-righteousness, a pagan substitute for the gospel of Jesus’ blood atonement for sinners.”
The Gospel According to Yoga

CHRISTIAN YOGA?

HOLY YOGA

Despite yoga’s deeply pagan religious nature, “Christian” yoga programs are becoming increasingly popular in many churches. “Holy Yoga” is probably the most widely practiced brand of “Christian” yoga, boasting a training program turning out hundreds of certified Holy Yoga instructors annually. Holy Yoga posts an evangelical statement of faith on its website and incorporates Bible verses into its practice. But is this sufficient to remove the underlying Hindu religious nature of yoga? Or does this represent a form of syncretism in which biblical meaning is subtly reinterpreted along more Hindu-leaning lines?

Holy Yoga’s founder Brooke Boon insists that her practice of yoga is entirely Christ-centered and biblical. In fact, she considers Holy Yoga to be a ministry platform to preach the gospel. But her two books on yoga, written after her conversion to Christ, reveal significant Vedic influence. For example, her first book, Hatha Yoga Illustrated, which she co-authored, tries to dispel yoga’s association with Hinduism while acknowledging that yoga is “…recognized by Hindu orthodoxy as a valid representation of Vedic truth.” Let’s not forget that the Vedas expound a full-orbed pagan religion that forms the basis for Hinduism. In reality, yoga is one of the six orthodox Vedic schools of Hinduism and it cannot be separated from Hinduism.

Boon’s book further acknowledges that “…three philosophical traditions now form an essential core within contemporary yoga: Classical yoga, Advaita Vedanta, and Tantra.” Classical yoga is Patanjali’s path to absorption in the universal spirit; Advaita Vedanta teaches that all is one and all is divine; Tantra joins the opposites of good and evil in order to attain divinity. Hatha Yoga Illustrated describes Tantra as the “…radical acceptance of the body and all of life as divinity incarnate.” In other words, yoga is designed to transform the yogi into a divine incarnation of Brahman. The book also traces yoga’s modern lineage and popularity in the West from Krishnamacharya, Jois and Iyengar, all devout Hindus seeking yoga’s goal of absorption in divinity.

Problems arise when we try to build Christian practice on a pagan foundation. This is evidenced in Boon’s second book, Holy Yoga, which has a more Christian flavor but still follows Patanjali’s path to samadhi. The book also refers readers to Hatha Yoga Illustrated as a resource “…if you’d like to discover more about yoga…or about Christian meditation.” It needs to be clarified that the biblical idea of meditation is based on the meaning of Scripture studied in context. But the section on meditation Boon refers readers to suggests Hindu techniques such as chanting the mantra “OM,” which is the creational vibration of Brahman, and “…visualiz[ing] your chosen deity – a god or goddess.” Holy Yoga entangles Hindu techniques and religious philosophy with Christian terminology yet Boon asserts it is through the practice of Holy Yoga that “…we become more authentic people, able to hear God and experience Him in previously impossible ways.” This implies that Christ’s work is incomplete, that the Holy Spirit and Scripture are insufficient, and that real depth of Christian knowledge is dependent upon yoga.

While yoga actually adds nothing to true Christian knowledge and experience, it does have the power to confuse and deceive by shifting worldview. In a devotional video on the Holy Yoga website, Boon explains that she includes a section on the “energy portion, the chakra portion” in her training of Holy Yoga instructors. In yoga, the energy and chakras refer to the occult Subtle Body energized by the serpent goddess Kundalini, as already mentioned. Yet Boon bases her teaching of the “energy and chakra portion” on John 1:1-5, which she misinterprets to mean that Jesus, as the word, is the creational vibration of God, the “…frequency of how God emulates Himself.” But Jesus is a distinct person, God incarnate, not the energy of creational vibration. It’s yoga that is based on the creation myth in which the divine vibration of Brahman emanates the divine essence into creation. The pagan cosmology of yoga cannot be synthesized with the Creator who is distinct from creation.
Philip Goldberg’s observation is right, that “Students may come for a workout, but their minds stretch and bend too.” There is nothing spiritually neutral in yoga. While the body is bending, the mind is reshaping its worldview.

CONCLUSION

What Christians need to understand is that yoga’s claim to be a non-religious fitness program for body, mind, and spirit is a complete misrepresentation. Yoga was designed to join the opposites by transcending the distinction between Creator and creation until the divine is experienced as the universal spirit, energy, or vibration of nature. When the primary distinction between Creator and creation is destroyed all others perceptually disintegrate of necessity. Gone are the biblical distinctions between man and nature, male and female, and good and evil. From ancient to modern times, the gurus have called this yogic process the “science of consciousness.” Now modern brain science is bowing to the gurus.

BRAIN SCIENCE

The new frontier of brain science believes that the true essence of being is pure consciousness beyond distinctions, just as the gurus have always claimed. Meditative techniques such as those practiced in yoga and Buddhist mindfulness meditation are being detached from their religious roots and rebranded as therapeutic models for brain health.

Sam Harris, one of the elite New Atheists, has recently come out in a “spiritual but not religious” kind of way as a practitioner of mindfulness meditation, which is also a component of yoga. A Stanford-trained neuroscientist, Harris views mindfulness as a means to evolve consciousness on a purely scientific level. He thus interprets spirituality as the “enlightening sense of connectedness” that transcends individuality as the mind evolves to perceive interconnected consciousness beyond thought.37 This idea of universal consciousness is being aggressively pursued as the cutting edge in brain science.

This camouflaging language is increasingly applied to both yoga and Buddhist mindfulness meditation as a means to slip them into schools and even churches without opposition. This is because they have been successfully rebranded as scientifically proven therapeutic techniques. As such they are Trojan horses conditioning the Western mind steadily towards the Eastern mystical worldview in which all Biblical distinctions are vigorously denied. They are effective because they are not spiritually neutral but tap into forbidden occult powers set on influencing our minds.

Though yoga is packaged as a non-religious program for physical fitness and stress reduction, nothing has actually changed in yoga. It is still Hinduism’s “gospel” of the Divine Self. And we have to remember that it was the serpent in the Garden of Eden who tempted Eve with just such false “enlightenment.”

As believers committed to the biblical gospel, we need to understand the pagan core beneath the deceptive packaging. And we need to take yoga’s power to condition the mind away from biblical distinctions, and thus the real gospel of Jesus Christ, seriously. “Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good,” (Rom. 12:9).

1 The terms Oneism and Twoism were coined by Dr. Peter Jones to describe the two worldviews contrasted in Romans 1:25. We will either worship the God who is distinct from us (Twoism) or we will divinize nature and worship the creation (Oneism).

2 What we believe,” Holy Yoga, https://holyyoga.net/about/what-we-believe.

3 Philip Goldberg, American Veda, (New York: Harmony Books, 2010), 209, [emphasis added].

4 The foundational religious texts of Hinduism are the Vedas. The Vedanta, meaning “end of the Vedas,” represents the culmination of Vedic religious thought and is recorded in the Upanishads.

5 The details of these pagan practices are recorded in the four Vedas: Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda.
6 The Upanishads are collectively called the Vedanta, “end of the Vedas.”


10 The term “yogin” is the traditional term for a male yogi. The female counterpart is traditionally called a “yogini.”


12 Eliade, The Two and the One, 119.


15 Sjoman, The Yoga Tradition, 61.

16 Mohan, Krishnamacharya, 146.


18 Iyengar, Light on Yoga, 42.

19 Iyengar, Light on Yoga, 529.


21 Jois, Yoga Mala, 126.

22 Jois, Yoga Mala, 3.

23 Jois, Yoga Mala, 34.


25 “Jois Yoga Shala Grand Opening.”


27 Boon, Hatha Yoga Illustrated, 4-6.

28 Boon, Hatha Yoga Illustrated, 6.

29 Boon, Hatha Yoga Illustrated, xiv.


31 Boon, Holy Yoga, 209.

32 Boon, Hatha Yoga Illustrated, 22, 23.

33 Boon, Hatha Yoga Illustrated, 23.

34 Boon, Holy Yoga, 9, [emphasis added]


36 Boon, “To Om or not to Om.” Holy Yoga, accessed April 9, 2015.

IN 2 CORINTHIANS 2:14-17 the Apostle Paul writes of the work of God in Christ who is leading his people in triumphal procession. God’s children we are told, in possession of precious knowledge of God, now give off a sweet fragrance everywhere. This fragrance of the Gospel is unchanging as it is the aroma of Christ. To some, those that are being saved, it is received as the source of life and liberty. To others, those who are perishing and at war with God, it is rather the smell of death and loss. With all that could be said on this, note that no one is left unaffected. No one is immune from the fragrance. Faithful testimony in Christ, in both word and deed, or faithful preaching and teaching, always has an effect on the hearer. To the person being saved by grace, it is the power of God unto salvation and gives rise to thanksgiving, godly obedience and a desire that God alone should receive glory (2 Cor. 4:15). To those perishing it is foolishness and a stumbling block (1 Cor. 1:23) giving rise only to ungodly hostility and behaviour.

It is the fact of this hostility that is at the center of the developing scorched earth policies of the progressive left. Incensed by public demonstrations of faithfulness on the part of a relatively few Christian bakers, florists, photographers and others, these open-minded illiberal architects of our freedom have intensified the shift towards making illegal any and all culture-shaping (outward) expressions of religious belief. In more militant quarters, the content of sound doctrine, i.e. what the church can believe and teach, is now in view as a target of censorship. For example, Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, speaking at the annual Women in the World summit in New York, recently said that “Rights have to exist in practice – not just on paper…. Laws have to be backed up with resources and political will. And deep-seated cultural codes, religious beliefs, and structural biases have to be changed.”

Indeed, why do the nations rage?

Because the Lord in his great mercy has never left the church without a faithful witness in history, I propose that this hostility will eventually have a positive outcome. By that I simply have in mind that the absent, or oft bewildered and confused sounding response by the broader evangelical church to this cultural moment has served to lay bare what I suggest is a decades-long crisis of faithful leadership and courage in so many pulpits. See Isaiah 56:10-12 for the biblical term. This deficit of courage will become an increasingly difficult feature of the church to ignore going forward.

Against this backdrop, the work of the EICC, directed primarily as it is at pastors, church leaders (present and future) and the most thoughtful of lay people, is steadily growing in demand. So much so that resources of people and finances are stretched thin. In particular, 2015 is the first year that the EICC will operate without the major support of our partner church and the resulting increase in financial need looms large. We do continue to covet your prayers and support.

We are praying the Lord would send 30 additional families to become committed Monthly Builders of the EICC to enable us to continue our work. We believe that the EICC is filling a critical need for biblically faithful teaching and scholarship at a time when the foundations are being shaken.

ABOUT THE EICC

The EICC is a confessional evangelical organization committed to the furtherance of the gospel of Jesus Christ as contained in the ecumenical creeds of the church and the totality of biblical revelation. The gospel of the kingdom, resting upon Christ’s declaration of Jubilee, is all-encompassing in scope, impacting every area of life and thought. Regarding this comprehensive truth of full-salvation, Jesus declared, ‘if the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed.’ Because the gospel brings true freedom, the EICC is dedicated to two great objects. First, the advancement and preservation of the truth, liberty and beauty of the Gospel, and second, the renewal of culture in terms of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
One of the greatest evangelical leaders, the English reformer William Wilberforce, pointed to what he called the “grossly fallacious assumption, that a man’s opinions will not influence his practice.” Because ideas have far-reaching consequences, the EICC aims at recovering a distinctly biblical system of thought and practice for socio-cultural life, so that Christ’s kingdom will be extended as leaven through a loaf in every sphere of society.

In the last 6 months we have conducted two leadership roundtables for pastors and leaders, have held our annual Mission of God conference on Social Justice, have published two issues of Jubilee, have delivered keynote addresses in no less than two dozen events both domestically and abroad, including two week-long training academies for future leaders, have reworked our website home page for easier access to resources, have developed a monthly email to highlight key resources, and have begun to highlight the expository pulpit ministry at Westminster Chapel as a means of encouragement and strengthening of the broader church.

The fruit of these labours is most encouraging. The demand for resources is constant, as both books and web-based materials are touching many lives and impacting leaders across Canada and in various parts of the world. The input of the EICC is being requested by legal, medical, educational, political and training organisations, as well as by church leaders in Canada, Europe and the USA who are seeking to faithfully engage culture with the gospel and an authentic biblical witness, applying the faith to their vocations. To give one small, practical, everyday glimpse into the impact of the EICC on the lives of leaders and emerging leaders, consider this brief extract from a letter we received from a young Canadian pastor just a few weeks ago following our recent Leadership Roundtable on education:

I wanted to let you know how fruitful our conversation, and I pray response, was following the EICC round table event the other week. Along with me I had one of our elders, our pastoral intern, a women’s ministry leader, and a seminary student/potential future elder. We ended up at a table by ourselves so over lunch were discussing implications [of the teaching] for our lives. On the way home, we discussed the implications for our church. My fellow elder acknowledged that he had not given nearly enough thought to the issue of education with his own children, two of whom are now in university. We identified together that it had never been addressed in the churches he attended. Our pastoral intern spoke about how he needed to ensure that the parents of the students he engaged with weren’t farming out their responsibility for discipleship to him. When we arrived back at the church I prayed with the seminary student about how we should respond for our community while we stood in the parking lot. They were all blessed and challenged by your ministry. I’ve already heard that those who have attended have been sharing what they learned with others, which a group of our men was praying about this past Wednesday... Hearing you both again on the subject has been very helpful in framing my thoughts... If you’re like me, when you labour in preaching and teaching, as you come to the end of what you said, it’s really the beginning. The reformation and transformation of lives is what I hope and pray for. I know the Lord doesn’t always give us windows into how that plays out but I’m always encouraged when He does. I hope this may be a small one into how we are being stirred as a result of our day together, that you may know your labour is not in vain.

Planned for the balance of 2015 is our annual Mission of God conference where we will tackle the question, what is the Gospel. We are excited to welcome Michael Nazir-Ali, Bishop of Rochester, as our keynote speaker at this event. Also scheduled are a second leadership roundtable, and a week-long youth training camp. We will also deliver keynote addresses at several events, including the Blackstone Legal Fellowship in Phoenix, and the Wilberforce Academy in Cambridge, UK. These week-long training programs for gifted and motivated young men and women are critical if we are
to sow faithfulness to the Gospel into the next generation. We will be addressing students, Christian leaders, pastors’ conferences, denominational General Assemblies and professional groups in Canada, England, the USA and South Africa on the culture-transforming work and power of the gospel. Finally, we will publish another issue of Jubilee, and continue to develop the most effective ways to provide access to teaching resources.

In closing, we offer our sincere thanks to each of you who supports the work of the ministry in prayer and or with financial partnership. Against what at times can seem a daunting task the Apostle Paul offers us these words:

“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” (1 Cor. 15:58) “Do not be deceived: God will not be mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.” (Gal. 6:7)

Yours in Christ,

Randall S Currie, Board Chair
**How Then Shall We Answer - Hardcover**

This book represents Joe Boot’s summa apologetica. Bold, imaginative and instructive, it is written for a general audience rather than for a specialized one. The prose is remarkable not only for evident wisdom in the field of apologetics but also for the distinctive way the author does it. With various imageries and anecdotes, Joe provides a clear, engaging articulation of a fresh set of perspectives on several topics. Full of biblical and theological insights, and written with an evangelistic heart, this book serves to nourish the faithful, stimulate good arguments for the seeker and build a strong rational basis for the causative relation between faith and reason, the former being the presupposition of the latter. With rigor and relevance, Joe constitutes a seminal apologetic that enables readers to grasp the signs of divine transcendence, and to apprehend, or rather to be apprehended by the beauty of Christ. (Dennis Ngien PhD, from the foreword)

**Why I Still Believe - Softcover**

In Why I Still Believe, apologist Joe Boot provides a readable introduction to presuppositional apologetics for the average layperson. This approach assumes that the Christian and non-Christian come to the discussion of faith with worldviews—sets of presuppositions—that are miles apart, so that there is little common ground on which to build an objective argument of rational proof. In this conversational survey of his own intellectual and spiritual journey, Boot invites the non-believer to step inside the Christian worldview to see whether or not it makes sense. Along the way he builds a coherent argument for the truth of Christianity. He also examines the non-Christian worldview, showing how it ultimately fails to make sense of the world.

**Searching For Truth - Softcover (also available in Urdu)**

This book provides reasonable answers to questions asked by people who have vague but deep longings to know God. Starting with basic human convictions about the world and moving ultimately to the need for salvation through Jesus Christ, Boot also addresses questions about suffering, truth, morality, and guilt. He offers answers to those asking for a credible and logical explanation of the Christian faith.

**How Then Shall We Answer Conference Series 2011 - CD**

Complete audio content from the second conference in the ‘How Then Shall We Answer’ Series. In this six disc audio CD package, Dennis Ignatius, Jeffery Ventrella, and Joe Boot tackle the question of Christianity and culture. Track titles are: The Meaning of Culture; Living in Sin...Well; Christ and Culture; The Greatness of the Great Commission; and the Closing Charge. Also included is an impromptu Q&A session with Jeffery Ventrella and Joe Boot.
How Then Shall We Answer Conference Series 2010 - CD

The audio for the first conference in the ‘How Then Shall We Answer’ Conference Series. Topics covered in this six-disc set include: an understanding of the family in the context of God’s sovereignty and social design; the family’s calling under the Great Commission; the family’s history in Canada; bio-ethical issues, such as genetic engineering; the relationship between the Law of God and civil law; and the role of the State according to the Bible.

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