

Is there an Idol in your Church?



By:
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a radical Christian!

Is There an idol in your Church?

What is an idol?

An idol is anything or any person that comes between the individual and God. There are all kinds of idols. The idols that I am referring to are those affecting Christians and churches. Protestant Christians often boast that they are free of idols.

But are they? As a Protestant Christian myself I was exposed in my early days to the fundamentalist approach to Christianity.¹ I was taught in my home church, then in Bible College, in my theological reading and study, and eventually preached and taught the flocks of believers that I pastored that Roman Catholicism was a religion that was filled with idols, hence was an idolatrous faith. Fundamentalist Christians accuse Roman Catholics of worshipping the virgin Mary and the saints. I'm convinced that some do, however **not every** Roman Catholic worships either our Lord's mother or those who have been canonized by their church as "saints." Nor does every Eastern Orthodox Christian "worship" the icons that fill their church buildings. My Protestant response in the past was unquestioningly the **Protestant party line** that icons and other such symbols are a violation of the Ten Commandments. Some Protestants even oppose using the symbol of the cross.

Needless to say I no longer hold the view that I once did. In fact, I have become fond of the **Eastern Orthodox icons**. I neither pray to them nor worship them. I simply view them as **symbols**. As a visual person I can now relate to the concept that at times of devotion they can become "**windows into heaven**". In my devotional life I've experienced times of feeling that I was in the very presence of God during prayer, praise and worship. This is something that I can't really explain. It needs to be experienced for oneself.

Attempting to picture the "Father-God" in visual form violates God's command. We cannot visually picture God because **God is Spirit**, hence to picture or have a statue of the **Father is inappropriate**. However, some visuals do aid in worship, adoration and exaltation of God. Our first duty, re-

sponsibility and privilege as believers is to glorify and enjoy God.



It is ironic as I reflect on the number of evangelicals and fundamentalists who come close to making an idol out of **the Bible**. Now please don't write me off as some sort of heretic. I love the Bible. I believe that the Bible was written by people who are breathed upon by the Spirit of God to write, record and in their own style present the message that God knew was needed to be heard and known by humankind. These biblical writers were divinely inspired to write what they wrote. I also view the Bible as unique and above all of the so-called "religious" scriptures that are part of the belief systems of the various religions of the world. In fact, I go so far as to believe that the Bible is **my final authority** in matters relating to **faith and practice**. Yet, I stop short of placing the Bible in a position of becoming "**a Protestant idol**." The Bible is not a book or writing of magic and/or superstition. It does not ward off demons, evil forces or warts. It's a book of words with **the special message** that God desires humankind to hear, heed and know. As I've already indicated I view the Bible as God's written Word to us with **its pinnacle** found in Jesus Christ who alone is Savior and Lord..

So what am I getting at?

With all that I've already said you may be wondering at this point, "**Well Fred what then is this booklet about?**"

Are you ready?

I am about to trample upon some **time-honored tradition**. Bucking tradition and disturbing the status quo is never popular. Nevertheless I'm not only going to wade into the water, but I'm going to take a **plunge** that will undoubtedly cause not only ripples but may even produce some waves and to some it might become a tsunami. So here we go . . .

Undoubtedly you have heard of and probably have seen pictures of the vile Nazi leader **Adolf Hitler**. He took over the reigns in Germany in the early twentieth century. He was from

¹ See the article "*My Sojourn in Fundamentalism*" on our web site.

a religious background.² He became viewed as the savior of the German nation. He was supported by the vast majority of Germans. Once he took control of that nation he quickly realized that he could maintain tight rigid control of Germany by **appealing to the German churches**. At that time both the Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches were State Churches. **Hitler** quickly went about **influencing** both the leadership as well as the ordinary members of the churches in his campaign to turn the German people against the Jews. In poisoning the minds of the German people **Hitler** liberally quoted from the German national hero, **Martin Luther**. You may or may not know that Luther during the last years of his Reformation became very vocal in his vicious, hateful attacks directed at the Jews. **Hitler used much of the Anti-Semitic rhetoric of Luther to fan and eventually bring to fruition the killing of 6 million Jews**. And sadly many professed Protestants and Catholics supported the evil deeds of Adolf Hitler. Anti-Jewish attitudes have plagued and been a part of Christendom stemming from the early Church Fathers for centuries. Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Protestantism have **all been guilty** of harboring and at times promoting forms of anti-Semitism, sometimes subtle, sometimes vocal but all vicious and unchristian.

One of the first brainwashing the lace against the Jews fostering an German was placing the



steps in German popu- as well as in unhealthy nationalism Nazi flag in the

sanctuaries of the German churches. This was a **disguised new idol** placed in the places where the church folk gathered weekly. Praise God for those Protestant and Catholic Christians **who opposed Hitler** and his duped followers and leaders, but sad to say their numbers were few and far between. Many of the nominal church people of the fatherland looked upon **Hitler as their new messiah**. Germany had been so humiliated by its defeat in World War I it was ripe to accept the promises of such a charismatic figure as Hitler.

² Hitler was originally from a Roman Catholic background. He became obsessed with the occult although he never officially left his Catholicism.

We look back on history and wonder **how could this happen** to a whole nation especially to one such as Germany that was a leader in fields of education, science, religion, etc. Yet, it did happen. **How does this all relate to American Christians? What happened in Germany could happen in our own nation** with persuasive charismatic leaders in places of power. We dare not close our eyes.

I mentioned earlier that some Protestants, especially evangelical and fundamentalist Christians, come near to making an **idol** of the Bible. It is also common for the youth to make **new idols** of so-called "**Christian celebrities**" which include: Christian athletes, Christian music 'stars', and ostentatious showy preachers that I refer to as "**stars for Jesus** with tongue-in-cheek. The personality cult is rampant in Christendom today.

You may be saying at this point, "**Fred you are exaggerating,**" **But am I?** No, we do not usually have pictures of these individuals in our church structures, nor do we pray to them, but in many respects **they become our modern idols**. Many popular preachers (pastors), especially in many of the mega-churches, come near to receiving adulation from their followers that would make the first apostles blush. **See – Acts 10:25-26**.

A good motto for disciples of Christ I believe would be: "**We would see Jesus only!**" **See – Hebrews 12:2**.

Have I lost my marbles?

Stay with me now. I am convinced that **the American flag in churches** has become or is becoming to many church folk **the same kind of an idol** that **the Nazi flag** became to the church members of the German churches. **American Civil Religion** is rapidly becoming **the adopted religion** of many, if not the majority, of American Christians. This appears to be especially so in evangelical, charismatic and fundamentalist churches.

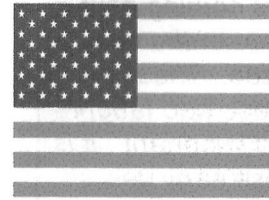
Let me digress here. **I am an American**. This is my native land. I did not choose to be born in this land but in God's plan I was born here. I love this country. I am thankful unto God for our rich heritage, although **I am also ashamed** of some of our past. **I am ashamed** of the acts of genocide that our forepar-

ents committed against the Native Americans. **I am ashamed** of the enslavement of Africans that we practiced for economic gain. **I am ashamed** of the racist attitudes that many Americans have perpetuated against African Americans, Jews, Native Americans, Eastern Europeans, the Irish, and now directed toward Latinos. **I am astonished** at those **Christians on the right** of the political and religious spectrum who imply that America is a godly and righteous nation. This nation is far from being godly and/or righteous. **I am ashamed of a nation that commits willful aggression** with governmental leaders then lying about it. **I am ashamed** of a government that closes its eyes to the torture of prisoners. **I am equally ashamed** of those **Christians on the political and religious left** who appear to forsake God's promises and eternal covenants with Israel.

Many people today long for the so-called "good old days" when this nation was a Christian nation. Friend, this has **never** been the case. Our founding fathers and mothers **gave lip service** to God and to Christian principles, however many of them did not revere God in their actions. Pick up an American history book to discover this fact. Politicians of yesteryear and of today **use churches and religious leaders for their own agendas**. This has not changed through the years. Politicians, **both Republican and Democrat** at election time, present an image of being dutiful Christians and devout church-goers, but **"by their fruit you will know them."** These were words uttered by our Lord. Personally, I am convinced that it is **next to impossible for an authentic Christian** who is seeking to live a Christlike life, to follow the guidelines of holy Scripture outlined in our Lord's Sermon on the Mount,³ to be an office holder today. You may be thinking, *"But if Christians do not run for office and hold these positions, what will happen to the nation?"*

God is in control. God can move and guide in the hearts of pagan rulers. God's will and plan will eventually be accomplished. **See – Romans 13:1-7; Acts 5:29; cp Dan. 3:16-19; Dan. Chap. 6.**

³ These principles are outlined in the Gospel of Matthew chapters 5,6 & 7.



An Idol?

Why does your church meeting place display an American flag? Why does this flag take precedence by government mandate (as to where it can be placed, on which side of the speaker it is, that it must be higher than other flags, etc.?) **Why have so many of our evangelical churches become near agents of the government? Why do our churches allow so-called "Voters Guides" to be distributed to their congregations at election time? Why do we bow down to the altar of Baal?**

We, American Christians, are quick to condemn Christians in other nations who are nationalists first, then Christian but **are not many Christians American first and foremost, then Christian?** I am puzzled by the large number of Christians who have become so obsessed with American nationalism that they appear to be unable to separate their Americanism from their Christianity. As disciples the Scripture tells us that our citizenship is in heaven. **See – Philippians 3:20.** Some of us act as if this is our final home. As believers we are simply passing through. The apostle Peter declared that we are **"foreigners and exiles"** or as another translation puts it we are **"strangers and pilgrims"**⁴ in whatever land we happen to be part of. We are to be loyal subjects to the governmental powers but our final and ultimate allegiance is to the LORD God of heaven and earth. We recognize that our Lord is **"King of kings and Lord of lords."**

Do I have something against the American flag? No! I fly the American flag at my home during national holidays. I believe we should be proud of it. It should be displayed in governmental and public buildings. But please don't bring it into "the house of prayer for all people." **When** we praise, worship and glorify our God **we are not Americans rather we are the redeemed people of God whether we are black or white, American or Chinese, Baptist or Catholic, male or female, Democrat or Republican, Jew or Gentile, etc.** Someone wrote,

⁴ 1 Peter 2:11

"Now Christians allowing cultural bias to corrupt the Christian life and even pervert the Gospel of Christ is nothing new. Even the casual reader of Scripture will be aware of the early Jewish attempts to force others to be circumcised. These believers sincerely believed, as their Jewish heritage had taught them, that the Jewish laws were necessary and important. It is easy to laugh at the strong attachment that these early Jewish Christians had for their traditions, but are we any different? You would have as much Scriptural justification (that is to say none at all) for supporting a rebellion akin to idolatrous ancestor worship concerning the Founding Fathers..."

In our quest as Americans to police the world and wage aggression toward others to accomplish our goals would not it be far more effective, as believers, if we would begin emphasizing and really believing in the **power of prayer** rather than through the power of violence? As disciples of Jesus Christ it is vital that we remember and seek to carry out the exhortation of our Lord who declared, "**Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.**"⁵



Whether you agree or wholeheartedly disagree with me, at least give it some thought and maybe even pray about it. . .ok? As followers of Jesus Christ may each of us commit ourselves to allowing him to be the Lord of our lives.

We are non-denominational, non-political ministry. Our desire is to further equip the **Body of Christ** in the things of God.

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⁵ Matthew 5:9 TNIV