

BAAL WORSHIP
ANCIENT AND MODERN

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by

STEPHEN C. PERKS

KUYPER FOUNDATION

TAUNTON • ENGLAND

2010

Published in Great Britain by
THE KUYPER FOUNDATION
P. O. BOX 2, TAUNTON, SOMERSET,
TAI 4ZD, ENGLAND

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ISBN 978-0-9522058-6-9

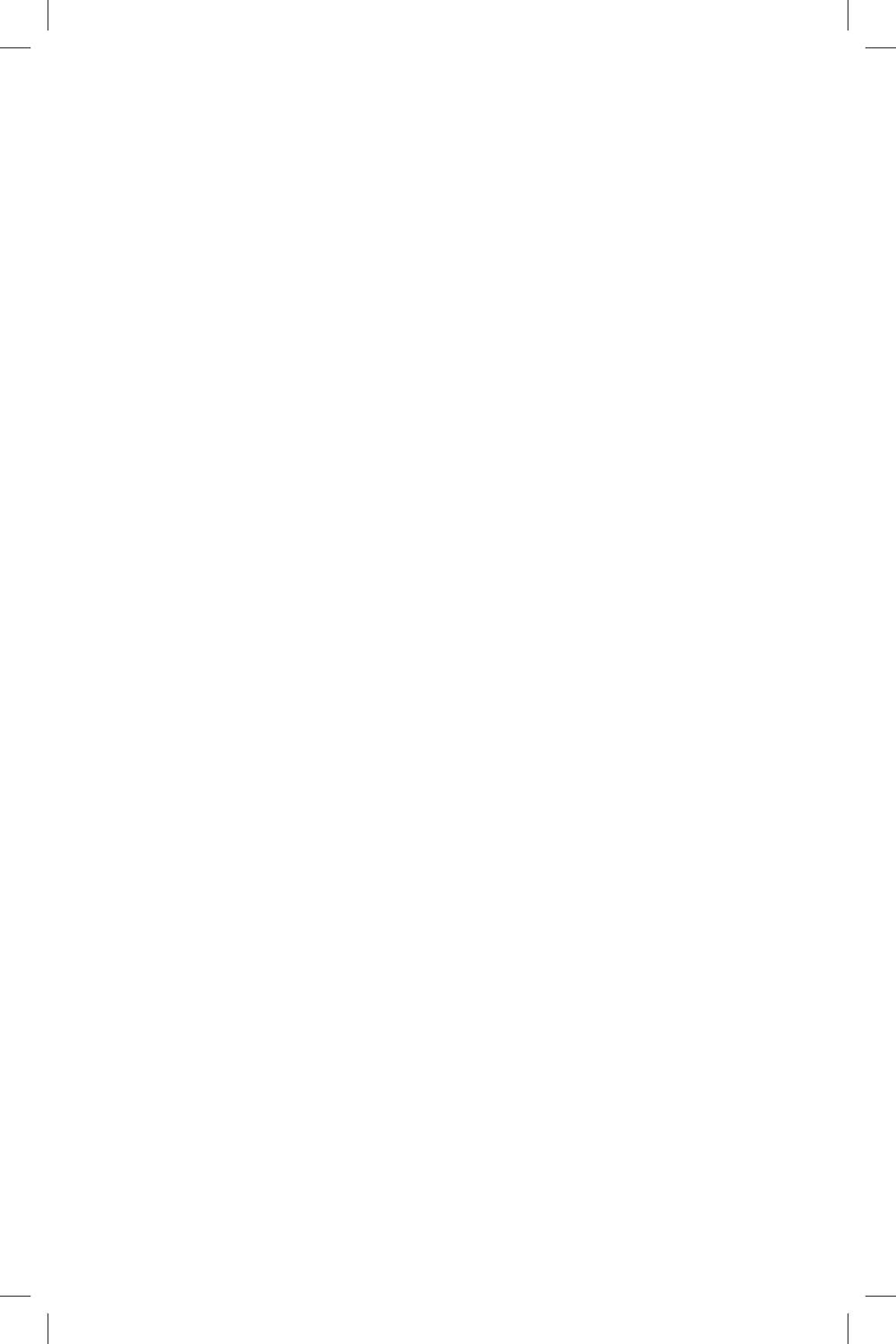
British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

Printed and bound in Great Britain

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§I

INTRODUCTION

WHEN we read through the history of the Kings of Judah in the First and Second Books of Kings we frequently meet with a particular statement, a repeated form of words that characterises a certain aspect of the rule of certain kings that are described as good kings. This particular formula, however, describes an aspect of their reigns that falls short of the general description of these kings as good kings who “did right in the sight of the Lord.” This formula runs something like the following: after giving the name of the king, his mother’s name and recounting that he did right in the sight of the Lord, we are told “But the high places were not removed: the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places.”

For example, we read of Asa, “And in the twentieth year of Jeroboam king of Israel reigned Asa over Judah. And forty and one years reigned he in Jerusalem. And his mother’s name was Maachah, the daughter of Abishalom. And Asa did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, as did David his father. And he took away the sodomites out of the land, and removed all the idols that his father had made. And also Maachah his mother, even her he removed from being queen, because she had made an idol in a grove; and Asa destroyed her idol and burnt it in the brook Kidron. *But the high places were not removed:* nevertheless Asa’s heart was perfect with the Lord all his days” (1 Kings 15:9–14). Likewise, we read of Jehoshaphat “And Jehoshaphat the son of Asa began to reign over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel. Jehoshaphat was thirty and five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother’s name was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. And he walked in all the ways of

Asa his father; he turned not aside from it, doing that which was right in the eyes of the Lord: *nevertheless the high places were not taken away; for the people offered and burnt incense yet in the high places*” (1 Kings 22:41–43).

This same formula is met with in the description of the reign of Jehoash (Joash), who did what was right in the sight of the Lord while he was under the instruction of Jehoiada the priest: “But the high places were not taken away: the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places” (2 Kings 12:1–3); and again in the descriptions of the reigns of Amaziah (2 Kings 14:1–4), who did what was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a loyal heart (2 Chron. 25:2), Azariah (Uzziah) (2 Kings 15:1–4), and Jotham (2 Kings 15:32–35). And then we have Ahaz, who failed to do what was right in the sight of the Lord completely, following the kings of Israel and making his son “to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel” (2 Kings 16:3). Ahaz was then followed by the reforming king Hezekiah, who, we are told, not only “did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did” but also “removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made” because the people had started burning incense to it (2 Kings 18:1–5). And there follows a glowing report of his zeal for the Lord.

What was happening here? Six kings of Judah who served the Lord but failed to remove the high places, followed by a king who turned away from God completely! How can it be that kings who are described as doing what was right in the sight of the Lord could fail to condemn false worship and remove the high places at which this worship was practised? How could such kings condone or at least turn a blind eye to rituals and sacrifices that were contrary to the true religion revealed to the people of Israel?

The answer to this question is that there was at this time a form of syncretistic religion practised in Judah and Israel, a hybrid Yahweh-Baal cult in which the people believed that by worshipping at the high places, by making these sacrifices and performing these

cultic activities, they were correctly worshipping the true God of Israel. They were unaware that their worship was corrupt. They were practising a form of worship that was an abomination to the Lord, believing it to be worship that was acceptable to the God of Israel. They were involved in a very severe form of religious syncretism in which the ancient fertility cults of Canaan were being fused with the worship of Yahweh.

Although the children of Israel had turned to the worship of the gods of the Canaanites not long after their conquest of Canaan in the time of the Judges, the problem we meet with in First and Second Kings seems to have had its immediate origins in the apostasy of Solomon (1 Kings 11:1ff.), who went after the Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians and Milcom, an abominable idol of the Ammonites (v. 5), and who also built a high place on the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem for Chemosh, the detestable idol of the Moabites and for Molech, an idol of the Ammonites (v. 7), which was not destroyed until the reign of Josiah (2 Kings 22:13f.). Ashtoreth, the leading female deity of the Canaanites, was a goddess of fertility and death/war associated with Baal (Judges 2:13; 3:7;¹ 6:28), the main male deity of the Canaanites,² though the plural term *Baalim* was a general term for false gods.³ Chemosh was the god of the Moabites (Num. 21:29; Judges 11:24), whose rite probably included human sacrifice (2 Kings 2:27).⁴ The high places were the sites of the pagan religious rites of the Canaanites. They were built on hills near green trees and consisted of altars on raised platforms for sacrifices, incense etc., either in the open air or inside buildings.⁵

¹ The term *Asheroth*, translated “groves” in the AV at Judges 3:7, is probably equivalent to *Ashtaroth*, plural of *Ashtoreth*. See Keil and Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on Joshua, Judges and Ruth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, trans. James Martin), pp. 268f. and 292f.

² See the articles “Asherah,” “Ashtaroth,” and “Ashtoreth” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), Vol. 1, p. 250off., 255af. and “Asherah” in James Hastings, ed., *A Dictionary of the Bible* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1899), Vol. I, p. 165a.

³ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

⁴ See “Chemosh” in James Hastings, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 1, p. 376a.

⁵ See “High Places” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 2, p. 602ff.

After Solomon's death his son, Rehoboam, reigned in Judah and Jeroboam reigned over Israel. Both were bad kings. Jeroboam set up idols, golden calves, in Bethel and Dan, in an attempt to replace the Temple in Jerusalem with more local centres of worship for the ten tribes (1 Kings 12:28–29). But under Rehoboam the people of Judah also turned away from God and followed the path set by Solomon in his idolatry: “And Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah . . . And Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done. For they also built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree. And there were also sodomites in the land: and they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the Lord cast out before the children of Israel” (1 Kings 14:21–24).

The example set by Solomon became well-entrenched in Judah during the reign of his son Rehoboam. The result was that the religion of Yahweh became confused, or rather fused, with the religion of the Canaanites practised at the high places, and this syncretistic religion became dominant to such an extent that even when later kings turned to Yahweh and sought to serve him faithfully they were unable to recognise that the worship at the high places was a corruption—or at least, if they did understand this, it had got such a hold on the people that they were unable to extirpate it from the land.⁶

⁶ The references to the high places not being removed by those kings who showed their allegiance to Yahweh has been explained by the idea that they were not high places dedicated to heathen idols at which the old Canaanite religion was practised, but rather unlawful sites for the worship of Yahweh. See for example Keil and Delitzsch on 1 Kings 15:9–24 (*Biblical Commentary on the Books of the Kings* [William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, trans. James Martin], p. 218). I find this unconvincing. I do not doubt that the Israelites imagined themselves to be worshipping Yahweh,—this is just my point. But they had fused his worship with the heathen worship that took place at the high places. Even if it were the case that a distinction could be made between the unlawful worship of Yahweh and that of the Baals, it would in the end come to the same thing anyway. W. C. Allen, who accepts the legitimacy of the worship of Yahweh at the high places prior to the building of the Temple, comments that “in the worship of the high

The term *Baal* means *owner* or *lord*.⁷ In the climate created by Solomon's apostasy and that of his son Rehoboam, it seems that the people fell back again into identifying Yahweh, their God, as their Baal and confused his worship with the worship of the Canaanite Baals, as they had done in the time of the Judges. A clear distinction between Yahweh and Baal was unlikely to have been understood in the climate of the folk religion that dominated their lives. The worship of Baal was the worship of Yahweh and vice

places itself there lurked a danger that eventually brought about their overthrow . . . Many of the important high places had been the sites of Can[aanite] shrines (Dt. 12:2, 30; Num. 33:52). With the place of worship the Isr[aelites] had also taken over the symbols of worship, the *Mazzébahs* and the *Ashérahs*. What was more likely than that the lascivious tendencies which had characterized the old forms of worship should lie hidden beneath these external symbols, and, defying expulsion, should burst forth from time to time into fresh vigour? Or, again, what was more probable than that J[ehovah] should seem to be brought down to the level of the Can[aanite] gods of whose shrines He had taken possession, and whose name He sometimes assumed, and so became confounded with them alike in outward worship and in moral characteristics?" ("High Places" in James Hastings, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. II, p. 382a). M. H. Pope hits the mark when he writes: "The Israelites absorbed the Canaanite ways and learned to identify their god with Baal, whose rains brought fertility to the land. A characteristic feature of the fertility cult was sacral sexual intercourse by priests and priestesses and other specially consecrated persons, sacred prostitutes of both sexes, intended to emulate and stimulate deities who bestowed fertility. The agricultural cult stressed the sacrifice or common meal in which the gods, priests and people partook. Wine was consumed in great quantity in thanksgiving to Baal for the fertility of the vineyards. The wine also helped to induce ecstatic frenzy, and was climaxed by self-laceration, and sometimes by self emasculation. Child-sacrifice was also a feature of the rites" ("Fertility Cult" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 2, p. 265a). The Bible provides abundant evidence that it was just these practices into which the children of Israel frequently fell, thereby bringing upon themselves the wrath of Yahweh. A clear distinction between the illegitimate worship of Yahweh untainted by corruption with the cults of Baal and Ashtoreth would have been quite meaningless for the people who worshipped at the high places.

⁷ From the verb *bá'al*, meaning *to have dominion over*. The word can be used of men to signify ownership, e.g. of a house, land or cattle. The verb also means *to take a wife* and thus *Baal* also means *husband*. When used of a god it also means *owner*. Baal was the owner, the possessor of the land, the god of the land. The word was also applied to the place that was possessed and so was used in place names, e.g. Baal-hazor—"Baal of Hazor" (Gesenius's *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, p. cxxxff.).

versa to these people. A syncretistic form of religion had become dominant.

The prophets rebuked the people for this idolatry. For example, Hosea, after denouncing the people for their idolatry with the Baals, proclaims the salvation of the Lord and says: "And it shall be at that day, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call me Ishi [i.e. 'my husband']; and shalt call me no more Baali [i.e. 'my lord']. For I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name" (Hos. 2:16–17). Nevertheless, despite the warnings of the prophets the children of Israel persisted in these syncretistic religious practices, and it was because of these practices that God gave them up to be taken captive by their enemies. In the late eighth century B.C. the ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel were taken captive to Assyria and their land was resettled by foreign peoples (2 Kings 17: 9–24). Eventually, in the early sixth century B.C., the people of Judah were taken captive by the Chaldeans and exiled in Babylonia, as the prophet Jeremiah had warned (Jer. 32: 26–44, especially vv. 29–30, 35). The city of Jerusalem and the Temple were finally destroyed in *c.* 586 B.C. by the army of Nebuchadnezzar.

§2

THE SYNCRETISTIC WORLD-VIEW

It may seem truly astonishing to us that the people of Israel should fail to recognise their idolatry, that they should fall into a state in which they genuinely believed themselves to be worshipping God by practising the Canaanite cults at the high places, and that good kings who sought to do right in the sight of Yahweh should be unable to do anything about this, perhaps even themselves fail to recognise the problem fully. It seems so obvious to us that such idolatry is contrary to the true worship of God. But although it may seem obvious to us, it did not to most of the people of Israel at this time. And we must stop and think before we point the finger, and ask ourselves whether we are, in our own way, in our own day,

guilty of compromises just as serious as these; indeed whether, with the greater revelation that we have, our own compromises are not in fact graver sins. The fact is that we recognise the idols and sins of past ages and other cultures more readily than we do those of our own age and culture. This is why syncretism is so dangerous. We fail to recognise it for what it is. And we do so because we are so unwittingly committed to the world-view that characterises our society and that produces such an idolatrous religion. This is just as true for us as it was for the ancient Israelites. But it is facile to congratulate ourselves on attacking and abominating the idols of past ages and other cultures, especially if we fail to recognise and challenge the idols of our own age and culture. Attacking past idols will not help us now in our Christian lives. We need to deal with those compromises that affect our own culture and society, and indeed our own lives.

And this is the point of our study of this period of the history of Israel. The Scriptures are given to us that we might learn from them. Do not think that syncretism just as serious as that shown up in the history of the kings of Israel is beyond the Church today. It is not. Syncretism with false religion is as much a problem for Christians in the West today as it was for the Israelites in Old Testament times. For example, Roman Catholicism is a syncretistic religion, a fusion of Christian and pagan beliefs. Those who adhere to it genuinely believe that they are worshipping and serving God faithfully by following this religion, e.g. by praying to Mary and the saints etc. They have bought into the world-view that validates these practices—usually quite unwittingly as a result of their imbibing it from early childhood. And so whenever they meet with arguments against these practices they are able to explain and justify their beliefs and actions to themselves in terms of their world-view. They can justify their beliefs and practices because their world-view is more important, more foundational, more vital to their lives, whether they know it or not, than any argument against the Roman Catholic faith or any of its particular doctrines; it forms a complex of assumptions or presuppositions that are the basis of all theoretical and non-theoretical thought,

and therefore validates their whole understanding of the meaning of life and provides the ground of all argument. Of course, they may be quite unaware of the foundational role that their world-view plays in the way they think about the faith and life generally, unaware even of the very concept of a world-view. But this does not matter. Their lack of awareness of this will only mean that the world-view in terms of which they live will be more effective in screening out any kind of challenge to their understanding of the Christian faith.

Now I am not a Roman Catholic and I do not intend to deal with Roman Catholicism here. Rather, I want to deal with the prevalent form of Protestant idolatry. I mention the Roman Catholic religion simply because it is an illustration of syncretism that Protestants are likely to understand. Most Protestants, at least Reformed and evangelical believers, will agree that the Roman Catholic religion combines elements of both Christianity and paganism.

But we need to realise that just the same kind of problem exists for Protestants, and for Reformed and evangelical Christians today in the West, because just like the ancient Israelite and the Roman Catholic, we have most likely imbibed from our early childhood a world-view that is fundamentally and in principle contrary to the Christian faith. As a result we interpret the faith in such a way that we mould it into conformity with this world-view, distorting it in the process. The same process of rationalisation occurs, and it does so because in the main we are oblivious to the way in which our world-view affects our understanding of the faith. The less aware we are of the importance that our world-view plays in our understanding of the faith and of life generally, the more effective we shall be at legitimising or rationalising our idolatry, at syncretising the faith with beliefs and practices that are contrary to the gospel. Consequently we shall fail to confront our own idols. And idols do exist in the evangelical and Reformed world, and just the same process of rationalisation takes place when evangelicals are confronted with their idolatry as when Roman Catholics are confronted with theirs, or even when the

ancient Israelites were confronted with their idolatry. There is no difference in the process of accommodation, the process of syncretisation; only the idols differ.

In just the same way, therefore, that it does not seem obvious to the Roman Catholic that Roman Catholic dogma is syncretistic or that he is engaged in a corruption of the true faith and of the true worship of God, and in just the same way that it did not seem obvious to the ancient Israelite that he was involved in a corruption of the true worship of Yahweh, so also it does not seem obvious to the evangelical when he is involved in idolatry. Modern evangelicals in the West today are often as unwilling to confront their own idolatry as the ancient Israelites were and the Roman Catholic is—and I believe that modern evangelicalism is drinking deep at the trough of syncretistic idolatry in the West today.

The modern evangelical Christian may well be scandalised at the suggestion that his evangelicalism is a corruption of the faith, a syncretistic religion in which he thinks he is serving the true God while at the same time he is deeply involved in a life of idolatry. But this is precisely my contention, and the pagan religion of which I speak is secular humanism. Now I suspect that on hearing this most evangelicals, indeed most Christians, will think that I am overstating, even grossly exaggerating, my case. But I do not believe that I am. Christians have become extremely blasé about secular humanism and take it no more seriously than the idea of a devil with horns and a pitchfork, indeed perhaps less seriously. But this is precisely my point. Secular humanism is not thought of as a pagan religion. But it *is* a religion, and it is the religion that governs most of our lives, and evangelicals are usually as committed to most of its basic premisses as non-believers are because they understand the Christian religion in terms of secular humanism's definition of it, i.e. as a belief system that is relevant only to a fairly narrow area of their life. In fact the evangelical compromise with secular humanism is in its own way every bit as bad as the Roman Catholic compromise with paganism and the ancient Israelites' compromise with the fertility cults of Canaan,

and this form of syncretism is every bit as subtle, perhaps more subtle and subliminal than the others, and therefore so much the more insidious. Evangelicals, and I include the Reformed in the use of the term here, are so convinced that they alone have the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, that only they know and understand the gospel. They are so thoroughly converted to their own sect. But the hardest people to convert are those who are thoroughly convinced that they are already converted.

I acknowledge that in some areas modern evangelicalism does have a fairly good understanding of some elements of the gospel—and I am not by any means claiming that evangelicals are not Christians because they are evangelicals and evangelicalism is a corrupt form of the faith any more than I would claim that a Roman Catholic is not a Christian merely because he is a Roman Catholic and Roman Catholicism is a corrupt form of the faith. But the evangelical understanding of the faith is limited to a fairly narrow area of life revolving around certain aspects of soteriology in the main. And this is the problem. Modern evangelicalism has a fairly good understanding of *some* elements of the Christian faith. But there is a failure to recognise the necessity of a changed life, except in a few circumstances. Virtually the whole of evangelicalism revolves around one's devotional life (one's "quiet time") and church life. When someone is converted this is where the change happens. He can carry on with the rest of his life pretty much as he did before he became a Christian, unless perhaps he made his living by selling pornography or illegal drugs. Evangelicalism is very dualistic in its understanding of the faith. One can be a perfectly good evangelical and at the same time a staunch supporter of secular humanist ideals in most things—sometimes even in secular humanism's most vicious manifestations (e.g. socialism, evolution, even abortion—yes even that!)—without realising that there is a fundamental contradiction between the Christian faith and secular humanism. One can be a committed, practising evangelical and a good practising secular humanist at the same time. And the problem is seldom understood, let alone addressed, in evangelical Churches or literature.

§3

SOME EXAMPLES OF SYNCRETISM

As examples for illustrating this point I want to look at three areas of life in which secular humanism impinges very significantly on the evangelical understanding of the Christian faith. Indeed, one could say that probably most evangelicals in Britain today follow the religion of secular humanism throughout most of their lives. Christianity is merely a cult for them, their personal worship hobby. In terms of their understanding of life beyond the four walls of the church and issues that particularly relate to the ministry of the Church—i.e. “spiritual” issues—secular humanism is the religion that dominates their lives. It is the religion of secular humanism in terms of which they live and move and have their being.

(1) *Evolution and Science*

The first area I want to discuss is science, and in particular *evolution*. I know that the evangelical world is split over the issue of evolution, that although many evangelicals are evolutionists a great many are not, and that there has been a concerted effort by many evangelicals to combat the effects of evolutionary theory. However, there are two points that need to be made about this, and what I have to say goes beyond the specific theory of evolution.

First, it is not true that all evangelicals, not even all conservative evangelicals, reject the theory of evolution. Many evangelicals find the lack of intellectual respectability that rejection of evolution brings with it among secular humanists unacceptable. They believe that they can be faithful to the Scriptures and at the same time accept the findings of “science”—or rather what secular humanists claim are the findings of science (evolution of course is not a scientific theory; it is a religion defined and defended by faith not fact, although it is generally accepted by non-believers and by many evangelicals that it is a scientific theory). As a result

“theistic evolution”—a hybrid religion if ever there was one—is now very common among evangelicals.

Second, however, there is more to this than meets the eye initially because the presuppositions that underpin this compromise with secular humanism are very often accepted even by those Christians who reject the specific theory of evolution. Creationists themselves often accept the epistemological assumptions and presuppositions upon which the theory of evolution rests, and this means, unfortunately, that they are fighting the evolutionists on their own terms. The secular humanist conception of what constitutes “science” sets the terms of engagement and the rules of the debate, and creationists unwittingly follow. But this is a battle that creationists will never win while this is the case. What do I mean?

The assumption underpinning much creationist literature and debate is the neutrality of the scientific method as conceived and articulated by the secular humanist scientific establishment. In other words, the assumption underpinning the creationist argument is the same as that underpinning the evolutionist argument, namely, the neutrality of the facts, the idea that facts speak for themselves and that when all the facts are made available, reasonable men will accept the evidence presented by the facts. All we have to do to prove the case against evolution is amass enough evidence of the creationist position and people will have to accept it as the truth. Why? Because “science”—i.e. knowledge collected by means of the scientific process—explains everything correctly. In other words, autonomous human reason divorced from the presupposition that everything in the cosmos finds its meaning in terms of the creative act of the God of the Christian Scriptures can explain the whole of existence. I am not speaking here about the beliefs of creationists regarding the Creation but about their acceptance of the secular humanist concept of the neutrality of the scientific *method*. In accepting this creationists are trying to beat secular humanists at their own game: autonomous (i.e. religiously neutral) science.

But this is naïve. Science does not explain everything. In fact,

it explains nothing independently of a set of religious presuppositions that give context and meaning to the scientist's understanding of the facts. The debate between evolution and Creation is not a debate between fact and faith; it is a debate between two contradictory faiths about how the facts are interpreted. Abraham Kuyper stated this important truth in the following way: "Not faith and science therefore, but *two scientific systems* or if you choose, two scientific elaborations, are opposed to each other, *each having its own faith*. Nor may it be said that it is here *science* which opposes *theology*, for we have to do with two absolute forms of science, *both* of which claim the whole domain of human knowledge, and both of which have a suggestion about the supreme Being of their own as the point of departure for their world-view."⁸ But this is not obvious from the evolution/Creation debate. Indeed, there are now "scientific creationists" who do not claim to base their approach to this issue on the witness of Scripture at all but explicitly claim to deal with the issue on the merits of the "scientific" case by itself. This is futile, because in reality what is involved in such an approach is not an attempt to settle the debate in terms of hard scientific fact but rather a capitulation to the religious presuppositions of secular humanism.

The facts do *not* speak for themselves. They are always interpreted, spoken about by human beings with theories about the nature and meaning of life that are necessarily religious, and this is so for the secular humanist no less than for the Christian. And as far as our witness to the non-believer concerning the Creation goes, Scripture does *not* tell us that we know the world was created by God because the evidence shows this to be the case. It does *not* tell us that the "scientific" method as conceived by secular humanism proves the creation of the universe *ex nihilo* by the God of the Bible. Rather, it tells us that by *faith* we know that the worlds were created (Heb. 11:3). In other words, *faith* is the foundation of true knowledge, and therefore no matter how much evidence we put before the non-believer he will not accept the creationist position.

⁸ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1931), p. 133 (emphasis in original).

He will always find a reason to reject it. His faith (i.e. his denial of the existence of the God of the Bible and his commitment to interpreting all things in terms of this denial) means that he cannot accept the “facts” that the creationist puts before him—i.e. the creationist’s interpretation of the facts—without first converting to the Christian faith. While he remains in his sin he will always interpret the facts in a different way. This is how original sin affects the way that he reasons about the world.

Much of the creationist approach assumes the validity of secular humanist presuppositions about what constitutes a proper scientific method, namely, that we can ascertain the truth by examining the facts in terms of neutral (i.e. autonomous) rational principles without reference to the God who created the cosmos and whose definitive interpretation of the facts is absolutely essential to a correct understanding of it. Yet secular humanism is a *religion*. This means that we fail to understand the importance of our faith for the scientific enterprise. The secular humanist conception of the scientific method assumes that the facts, interpreted without reference to God, i.e. knowledge as conceived by autonomous human reasoning, should be the foundation of faith, e.g. belief in creation *ex nihilo* by the God of the Bible. The Bible puts it exactly the other way round. It tells us that *faith* is the foundation of knowledge (Heb. 11:3): “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Pr. 1:7). The secular humanist theory of science is the very essence of original sin—namely, the idea that man will determine for himself what constitutes truth without reference to God and his word. It is folly for Christians to follow this method.

My purpose here is not to criticise the biblical doctrine of Creation. But I am critical of the epistemological method that creationists often use, because *in principle* this method concedes the whole argument to the secular humanist before any “facts” have been discussed. This is a point about how we know what we know, the theory of knowledge, and while Christians are misled about what the correct, the Christian, theory of knowledge is they will remain the underdog in the debate about evolution/Creation,

and in that debate fail, unwittingly no doubt, to give all the glory to God.

But the problem does not stop with the evolution/Creation debate. While this incorrect secular humanist theory of knowledge is accepted by Christians, as it generally is, it will continue to have an effect on all other areas of knowledge, areas that are less obviously related to issues of Christian belief, yet that are no less important for the practice of the Christian life. And this brings me to my second point of illustration of evangelical compromise with secular humanism.

(2) *Education*

The evangelical compromise with secular humanist education is perhaps the most serious of all. There are three reasons for this: first, secular education operates in terms of the same religious presupposition that underpins the theory of evolution and all other secular humanist science, namely, the belief that the world exists and can be understood without reference to God and his creative act as the source of all meaning. This religious presupposition is in principle a denial of the God of the Bible and an assertion of human autonomy from God. It is this presupposition that lies at the heart of original sin, namely the belief that man can determine for himself what constitutes truth without reference to God's word. This presupposition underpins secular humanism in all areas. Secular humanism is a religion therefore that directly and in principle contradicts the Christian faith. And secular education in all subjects proceeds upon this religious presupposition.

Of course, the secular humanist may well accept the validity of the question "Does God exist?" He may well be prepared to investigate the possibility that God exists and he may even say that he is prepared to accept the existence of God if it can be proved. It may seem therefore that secular humanism is not *in principle* contrary to the Christian faith, that it is prepared to give Christianity a fair hearing. But we must not be misled by this argument, which is based on the belief that it is possible for man to engage in reasoning

that is religiously neutral in order to determine what the truth is. This is a *religious* presupposition about the nature of man and the nature of reality. It is this religious presupposition that underpins the secular humanist theory of knowledge, and it is the secular humanist theory of knowledge that is at the heart of original sin, i.e. the desire to determine for oneself what constitutes truth without reference to God and his word. Therefore the question itself—“Does God exist?”—*in principle* denies the existence of the Christian God. Any God that is the object of such an enquiry cannot be the God of the Bible, but only a God of man’s own making. The God presupposed by this question is not the God of the Christian faith because the God of the Christian faith is the God who cannot possibly not exist. This may seem a subtle point but it is an essential distinction. Secular humanists may accept a God after their own making—a God made in the image of man—but any such God is an idol, not the God of Scripture. To ask the question “Does God exist?” is in principle to deny the God of the Bible at the outset because God is the *source* of all possibility, not the product of it. God stands behind all that is possible. It is not *possible* that the God of the Bible exists; it is *necessarily* the case that he exists. Nothing else would be possible without the God of the Bible. This point is essential to our understanding of reality, and therefore it must be an absolute presupposition of the Christian theory of knowledge and of all true science, all knowledge.

But this is the very antithesis of the secular humanist theory of knowledge. The differences between the secular humanist and Christian theories of knowledge are not minor matters, disagreements about the meaning of a few things, different interpretations of matters that we do not have enough evidence about to make better judgements on. It is not merely that we disagree over “spiritual” matters. The difference between secular humanism and Christianity is a difference that exists at the most profound level and colours the whole of human knowledge and life. The two systems are, as Abraham Kuyper argued, diametrically opposed in principle: “these two . . . systems . . . are not relative opponents, walking together half way, and, further on, peaceably suffering

one another to choose different paths, but they are both in earnest, disputing with one another *the whole domain of life*, and they cannot desist from the constant endeavor to pull down to the ground *the entire edifice* of their respective controverted assertions, all the supports included, upon which their assertions rest. If they did not try this, they would thereby show on both sides that they did not honestly believe in their point of departure, that they were no serious combatants, and that they did not understand the primordial demand of science, which of course claims *unity of conception*.⁹ It is folly therefore for Christians to imagine that they can subject their children to a secular humanist education without it having the most profound effect on their understanding of life and on their understanding of the Christian faith.

Second, the secular (State) schooling system is responsible—i.e. claims to be responsible and requires its teachers to be responsible—for the intellectual, physical, moral and *spiritual* development of the child; and this development takes place in terms of the secular humanist presupposition that the world exists and can be understood without reference to God or his word. In other words, what the child gets in school is a complete world-view, a complete indoctrination in terms of a religion that denies the God of the Bible in principle. The child does not merely get lessons in specific subjects from a religiously neutral point of view. Secular humanism claims to be religiously neutral; but such neutrality is impossible. The education the child gets at school takes place in terms of the religion of secular humanism, a religion that in principle and practice denies the God of the Bible. This is an education in terms of a complete world-view. And the socialisation of Christian children in the secular humanist society of the school makes it very difficult for Christian parents to break the intellectual and spiritual mould that Christian children are cast into by the secular schooling system. The school provides the whole ethos for their understanding of life. The State claims these children and in the school it moulds them into its own image, an image that denies that man was created in God's image.

⁹A. Kuyper, *op. cit.*, p. 133 (emphasis in original).

This does not mean that teachers in State schools are constantly denying outright that the Christian God exists or constantly contradicting the truth of the Christian faith directly. That would not work nearly as well in any case. The point is not that teachers deliberately set out to deny the Christian faith (though of course many do deny the faith). The problem exists at a more foundational level than this, the level of assumption and presupposition about the nature and meaning of reality itself, and because these assumptions are subliminal they do not need to be articulated in an explicit way in order to be effective in shaping one's understanding. In fact, a world-view works more effectively at the level of presupposition, subliminally. Most teachers would probably not think of articulating their religious assumptions directly in the course of teaching maths, music, English or science for instance. But when teaching these subjects their understanding of them will still be guided by their religious assumptions (e.g. secular humanist assumptions), which operate below the level of critical thought most of the time. It is because the denial of God exists at this subliminal, pre-critical level, at least most of the time, that it is so effective. If we deny the faith outright to a believer he will disregard the arguments we put up against the existence of God or find fault with them. But if we get the believer to accept unwittingly a set of assumptions or presuppositions that deny the faith implicitly and teach him to think about most areas of life in terms of these assumptions, the result will be that in his thought life and in his actions he will, without realising it, deny the God of the Christian faith in all those areas where he is not aware of the conflict. And given the narrow understanding of the gospel among evangelicals, the areas where these assumptions will operate will be far-reaching. He will be a practising secular humanist despite his profession of faith in Christ as Saviour of his soul. In fact he may well be a convinced and consistent secular humanist throughout most of his life, the exception being in those areas that he regards as "spiritual." This will only confirm his understanding of the faith as confined to a limited sphere defined not by God's word but by the philosophy, the world-view, of secular humanism,

which will be the religion in terms of which he lives his life most of the time.

And this is just what has happened. This is why evangelicals are usually dualists in their faith. They split reality up into the “spiritual” and the “secular.” God is relevant to the former but not the latter. And the Scriptures are read in terms of this assumption, this false dichotomy. Even Christian school teachers, therefore, are often not immune from secular humanist assumptions about life and in their own teaching they unwittingly espouse the secular humanist world-view.

This situation is insidious. One cannot subject one’s children to such an education and at the same time protect them from the influence of these secular humanist presuppositions. Their world-view will be influenced by the religion of secular humanism that they imbibe at school. If they become Christians they will still hold to a hybrid form of religion, a form of Christianity heavily compromised with secular humanism. One may get one’s children into a Church of England school or even a private school where there is a nominal commitment to the Christian faith; but even these will most likely operate in terms of a dualistic understanding of the faith, and therefore in terms of the kind of world-view that is adopted and an understanding of life generally their education will be a secular humanist education.

The education system in Britain, in the private as well as the State sector, is for the most part intimately tied up with the religion of secular humanism. Our education system is a secular humanist system.

Third, the compromise with secular humanism in the education of their children on the part of Christians has a long-term effect that seriously weakens the influence of the Christian faith in society. While Christians remain tied to the secular education system they leave a legacy of syncretism for future generations. Because Christian children imbibe subliminally the world-view of secular humanism at school, reinforced through the media (television etc.) and through socialisation in the secular humanist peer group, their spiritual immune system, so to speak, is seriously

damaged. Outside of specifically “spiritual” matters that might get discussed at home or in church they cannot distinguish between Christianity and secular humanism. They cannot discern what it means to be a Christian and how this differs from being a secular humanist in most things any more than the ancient Israelite could distinguish between the worship of Yahweh and the worship of Baal because the world-view they have imbibed (i.e. secular humanism) moulds their understanding of the Christian faith in terms of its basic presuppositions about the nature and meaning of life. They are incapable of making the necessary distinctions. They are held captive by a form of hybrid religion. If they ever realise there is a problem they will find it hard work to sort the problem out, to rid themselves of their secular humanistic world-view. But the probability is that they will never become conscious of the problem. This is why the Baal worship went on for so long in Ancient Israel. It got ingrained in the nation’s way of thinking at the folk level. Reforms in Jerusalem among the priests and kings barely touched how the people lived at the local level.

And so it is with evangelicals today. Their children get no further than their parents. But secular humanist culture does not stand still. It moves on, pushes forward, relentlessly overturning the residue of the Christian virtues in society and narrowing even further the Christian’s understanding of the scope of the Christian faith. Because the Christian accepts the basic presuppositions of secular humanism he fails to resist the inroads that secular humanism makes on the way he thinks and the life he lives. As a result the influence of the Christian religion declines further and the repaganisation of our society continues without restraint. The relationship between the growth of secular humanism and the decline of Christianity in our society is inversely proportionate, and this can be seen not only in the “world” but in the Church as well.

Because of its ascendancy this secular humanist world-view dominates far more than the scientific establishment and the education system however. And this brings me to my final point of illustration.

(3) *Totalitarianism or Statism*

The modern reliance on State education is just one example of a more widespread problem, namely, the dependence of society upon an ever growing State. This manifests itself in many ways, but perhaps the two most obvious sacred cows of this religion are the education system and the National Health Service.

We live in a society today in which the State is growing exponentially in size. It has come to dominate our society. This is so in most areas of life. For example, the modern State spends going on for 50 per cent of the GNP (gross national product).¹⁰ Not only in politics but in education, health, the economy, the family (e.g. State welfare), entertainment and the media (licenses etc.), even in the leisure and sporting world (e.g. the ban on fox hunting), the State exercises a dominating influence by direct control and regulation and also through the indirect influence it has over society, for example through the spending power it can exert and its ability to curtail activities it considers undesirable through taxation and licensing. The State is now virtually all-controlling. In fact, in principle it claims complete control, whether or not it chooses always to exercise that control. There is no area of life where the State is not perceived to be competent to act and regulate for the life of the individual and society. This bloated and overweening State is not a benign influence in society. The State has achieved this position of dominance in society by restricting individual freedom and responsibility and by the overthrow of much of our traditional common law understanding of how society should be governed—i.e. by the rule of law.¹¹ This abolition of freedom and

¹⁰ This figure fluctuates from year to year. In 1982 it was as high as 46 per cent. By 1988 it has fallen to 37 per cent. The last year for which I have calculated the figures was 1993 when it was 43 per cent. See my book *The Political Economy of A Christian Society* (Taunton: The Kuyper Foundation, 2001), p. 140.

¹¹ The Christian doctrine of the rule of law necessitates that all man-made law should conform to the higher law of God. This was the understanding of the rule of law that informed the development of English common law, which stated that “Any law is or of right ought to be according to the law of God” (cited in A. K. R. Kiralfy, *Potter’s Historical Introduction to English Law* [London: Sweet

responsibility is morally deleterious. In relieving people of their freedom and their individual, family and social responsibilities the State also makes virtue obsolete. The State has become so big and its influence so pervasive that there are virtually no areas of life now where its influence is not determinative of the way we live in some measure. But in relieving us of our liberty it relieves us also of our duty, and this leaves us with a social ethic that lacks any real virtue. After all, if I am no longer responsible for helping my neighbour because the State does it for me I no longer have the opportunity to practise the Christian virtues—and that means that I no longer have the opportunity to practise the Christian faith in its fullness. For example, if I am taxed so heavily by the State in order to support its own secular humanist welfare programmes that I barely have enough money left to take care of my own family without becoming dependent on the State I lack the means necessary to help those less fortunate than myself even if I have the desire to do so. In creating the modern secular humanist welfare system the State has stripped people not only of their liberty and prosperity but of their virtue as well.

This has a very practical bearing on the Christian life and on the life of our society. The kind of society produced by an ethic of individual freedom linked with a strong sense of individual, family and social responsibility, such as the social ethic of the Christian faith, is very different from that produced by the ethic of socialism with its insistence on everyone's right to equality based on anonymous State welfare programmes. This can only be achieved by the overthrow of the Eighth Commandment, "Thou shalt not

and Maxwell Ltd, Fourth Edition, 1958], p. 9). This statement is taken from a Year Book of Henry VII's reign. The same principle applied in equity and is enshrined in the Coronation Oath. See E. C. Ratcliff, *The Coronation Service of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, with A Short Historical Introduction, Explanatory Notes and An Appendix* (London: SPCK/Cambridge University Press, 1953), p. 38. See also my book *Christianity and Law: An Enquiry into the Influence of Christianity on the Development of English Common-Law* (Avant Books, 1993), *passim*, and my essay "Christianity and the Rule of Law" in *Common-Law Wives and Concubines: Essays on Covenantal Christianity and Contemporary Western Culture* (Taunton: Kuyper Foundation, 2003), pp. 133–149, particularly the diagram on p. 137.

steal,” by the State, which takes upon itself the right to play Robin Hood, a role the Bible never gives to the State. Even in Church ministries the deleterious influence of the State can be seen. For example, in one town where there is a small but growing down-and-out/homeless problem the leaders of a town-centre evangelical Church were approached about the possibility of providing some kind of Christian ministry to these people based on Christian work ethics (2 Thess. 3:10). Their response was that there was already a programme run by another Church that provided cheap meals for people (not what was being proposed in any case). When asked if it was a Christian programme (i.e. run according to Christian principles) the response was that it was not possible to be overtly evangelistic (which again was not what was being asked about, though such ministries ought to be openly *Christian* both in character and in terms of their operating principles) because the local council provides most of the funding. In other words the ministry had to conform to restrictions imposed by the local council that prohibited the proclamation of the gospel.

This is absurd. Even Church ministries are now being funded by the State. As the institution that funds these ministries the State demands that they refrain from being overtly Christian or evangelistic. And Christians seem to think that they are fulfilling their responsibilities as individuals and as the Church by supporting this sort of State-funded programme. What does this say about the Church today? It says we are compromised by our syncretism with the prevailing religion of the age, secular humanism, and by our infatuation with its chief idol, the modern State.

Today people in our society, including Christians, for the most part look to the State for most of those things that in a Christian society one should look to God for, including security, health, prosperity, peace etc. In Britain politicians are now telling us that it is the task of the State to make people happy. These things, the Bible tells us, are God’s blessings upon an obedient people. But as a nation we no longer look to God for these things; instead we look to the all powerful State, and we see the modern State as blessing us with its bounty in these things. In our nation the State is seen

as being there to provide society with all those blessings that we should look to God for. If this is not idolatry it is difficult to say what is. We have turned the State into a religion, into an idol, and this is particularly a problem for Christians, among whom socialism both as an ideology and as a way of life is very strong.

It is true of course that the State (i.e. the civil government) does have a legitimate sphere of operation. I am far from advocating any kind of social anarchy. The State is a God-ordained institution. But it has not been ordained by God to obliterate and usurp the functions of every other God-ordained institution, nor to relieve us of our liberty; rather, it should exist to preserve our liberty under God and protect these other God-ordained institutions—e.g. the family and the Church—so that they can serve God obediently according to his will. But this is not what the modern State does. Instead of doing this it has virtually obliterated or usurped the legitimate functions of these other God-ordained institutions by its overweening control of society and the individual. As a result its proper function, that of maintaining law and order according to a Christian understanding of justice, has been severely compromised. The modern State increasingly no longer delivers justice, is no longer a terror to those who do evil (Rom. 13:4), but often indulges and supports evil deeds (abortion is the most obscene and vicious example, but there are many others, including the indulgent treatment of criminals and persecution of innocent people who fall foul of government corruption and ideology as incarnated in excessive modern regulations, and this problem exists on just about every level of society from the denial of free speech to abolition of the right to protect oneself against assault by a criminal). Instead of delivering justice the modern State sees its role as delivering religiously neutral education, religiously neutral health care, religiously neutral welfare. But religious neutrality is impossible. What we get is secular humanist education, secular humanist health care, secular humanist welfare; and the religious values of the secular humanist State are increasingly being shown to contradict the values of the Christian faith. Instead of the freedom to live our lives under God in his service, practising the Christian virtues,

we have the all-controlling secular humanist State running our lives for us according to its own religious ideology. But this State conspicuously fails to deliver justice as understood in terms of the Christian world-view. In short, the modern secular State has become as much a god, an idol, to which people look—even for fertility in the immoral NHS fertility clinics—as any idol of the ancient world. And our modern abortion and fertility clinics place as little value on the dignity of individual human life as did the fertility cults of the ancient world. Human sacrifice is practised in both ancient *and* modern types of idolatry.

§4

THE MODERN IDOLATRY: THE STATE AS GOD

How has this situation arisen? The answer to this question takes us to the heart of the human condition. We have arrived here because we have as a society refused to acknowledge the attributes of deity and have refused to acknowledge that these attributes belong to the God of the Bible, and to him alone. We have, to use Paul's words, "worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25)—and we should observe the judgement that Paul says is the lot of a society that does this, namely the plague of homosexuality, which Paul makes plain in this passage is not the cause of God's wrath upon society but a manifestation of it; in other words the increasingly homosexualised culture we have to live with is part of God's judgement upon society for its idolatry.

This spiritual apostasy has been subtle in the way it has progressed. But it started in the Church (and remember also that the homosexual problem has been as much a clergy/Church problem from the beginning as it has been a problem in any other walk of life—God has answered the apostasy of the Church; and he has answered an effeminate Church leadership and an effeminate spirituality with an increasingly homosexual clergy). The state of our society today is the consequence of the Church's apostasy and we face as a Church and as a nation God's judgement on that

apostasy: “For the time has come that judgement must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God” (1 Pet. 4:17).

In order to explain this we need to take a look at one of the most important doctrinal issues of the Christian faith, a doctrine that has very important and far reaching social consequences, but which is seldom these days understood as having any social consequences at all, namely the doctrine of God’s sovereignty, *predestination*.

Man is a worshipping creature. He will worship someone or something because he was created to do so. He can no more deny the reality of this than he can deny himself the air that he breathes. He can deny it in mere words to be sure; but he cannot deny the reality of this in his actions. It is *never* the case that man chooses not to worship. And by worship I do not mean merely words and symbols, i.e. religious rites and ceremonies. Worship is far more than that. Worship is the dedication of one’s life in service to the object worshipped. And such worship is inescapable for mankind. Man worships with every breath that he takes. The question is, “Whom or what, and how, does he worship?” We can pervert the meaning of the worship we offer by offering it incorrectly or by giving it to the wrong object. In fact, this is man’s whole condition outside of Christ. The non-believer worships his gods daily no less than the believer, but the gods he worships are false gods, idols. He does not give the God of Scripture the worship that rightfully belongs to him and to him alone. Instead he worships some other object or objects and ascribes all the attributes of deity to these objects, which are mere creatures, i.e. aspects of the created order, whether a block of wood or stone, a demon, or an ideology of his own making, his own autonomous human reason.

But what happens in an age like our own when God is deemed to be dead, when people say they no longer believe in God? What happens in a *secular* age to the attributes of deity? It is quite simple really. They are secularised. And this is what has happened in our society today. The attributes of deity have been secularised, stripped of their association with deity, and ascribed to something

or someone other than the God of the Bible. The attribute particularly in question here is that of God's sovereignty, because it is this attribute of deity that most defines our society's understanding of and attitude towards the secular State. And this false worship of the State, this illegitimate ascription of an attribute of deity to the modern secular State, is a form of idolatry with which the modern Church is intimately involved.

Sovereignty is an attribute of God. Predestination is an inescapable concept. If we deny that God is a predestinating God, this does not mean that the concept of predestination will go away. It will not. It is an inescapable fact of life for man. Reality would be meaningless without it. Rather, when predestination is denied as an attribute of God it is merely transferred to someone or something else. In a secular age like ours it is secularised. In our society this secularised version of God's sovereignty, God's predestination, is an attribute of the State, and because the State bears this attribute people believe that the State has the right and the duty to control and regulate our lives and our society. Of course, the State in our society bears this attribute in a secularised form. It does not claim to be divine as did ancient Roman emperors, or claim to be the link between God and man as did ancient Pharaohs and the like. But this is where the difference ends. The difference exists only in the secularised form in which this idol is worshipped in our own age. The aspiration to control and dominate, to play God, is the same.¹²

The growth of the State and of "soft totalitarianism" in Britain in the twentieth century, which was enormous, and the State's increasing control over the whole of our lives and over

¹² See Denis de Rougemont's description of the phases of civilisation, in which he comments: "Order frees individuals from the anguish of being free without purpose. They are fallen in, lined up, reassured, terrorized, and flattened—as one process. It is with their dust that the state makes its cement. The state prescribes a state morality, and makes up for its want of internal principle by a vigilant repressiveness. It 'restores' the sacred—the sacred is now the state, with no magic, but not without dramatic prestige, and the state god now personally commands the army, the police, and the priests" (*Man's Western Quest: The Principles of Civilisation* [London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1957], p. 42).

society is a result of the nation's denial of the Christian God and the attribution of a secularised concept of God's sovereignty to the State. The State today is our sovereign—and it no longer acknowledges a higher law above man's law, which was the old Christian concept of the rule of law. The growth of this excessively controlling influence of the State, and the loss of liberty and virtue that has necessarily accompanied it, are the consequences of society's spiritual apostasy, of our abandonment of the biblical view of God as the sovereign predestinating God of Scripture for a secularised idol. In this secularised doctrine of predestination we see what happens when God is denied. If God is not Lord, someone or something else will be. If God does not govern our lives and our social order by his law, someone else will by means of another law. God's sovereignty will be attributed to an idol. And unlike the God of the Bible, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light (Mt. 11:30), idols are always tyrants whose burdens crush men and enslave them. For example, we now pay to the modern idolatrous State more than four times in taxes what the God of all Creation requires in tithes; and we lose our freedom in the process, whereas Christ tells us, "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (Jn 8:36). And do Christians learn the lesson? Of course not. They argue instead that we do not need to tithe to God now because the modern State performs many of the functions of the ancient tithe. Indeed it does—to our shame!—because this is not a Christian State; it is an idol and a tyrant. We are slaves to a tyrant and we fail to realise it.

Politics in modern Britain is being driven by idolatry of the secular State, which has usurped the role of God in the life of the nation. This is not a new development, and it is the inevitable consequence of the secular humanist world-view, but we are now beginning to see the tyrannical and totalitarian conclusions to which it is leading, i.e. the subordination, indeed the enslavement, of the individual to the State as the institution that defines both mankind and society and therefore recreates both in its own image. In 1953, John Macmurray warned against this deleterious trend in his Gifford Lectures: "The cultural crisis of our time is

a crisis of the personal. I need only refer to two aspects of the situation . . . in order to make clear what I mean by a crisis of the personal. One of these is the tendency towards an apotheosis of the state; the other is the decline of religion. The two are intimately connected, since both express a growing tendency to look for salvation to political rather than to religious authority. The increasing appeal to authority itself reflects a growing inability or unwillingness to assume personal responsibility. The apotheosis of political authority involves the subordination of the personal aspect of human life to its functional aspect. The major social revolutions of our time all wear this livery, whether they are fascist or communist in type.”¹³ To this we should add that the modern democratic States of the Western nations are involved in precisely the same kind of idolatry. For the modern atheist God is dead; but men cannot live without their gods and so someone or something has to replace the true God that modern men believe they can live without. The institution that has in our society, as a result of the decline of belief in God, inherited the attributes of deity, though in a secularised form, is the State, which now claims the right to control, to *predestine* society according to its own apostate ideology, its own idea of the meaning of society and of human life. We live in a predestinating State, a State that usurps the role of God in the life of the individual, the family, society at large and the nation as a whole. It should not surprise us therefore that Immanuel Kant referred to nation States as *Erden-Götter*, i.e. “Earth-Gods,” and that according to Hegel “Man must therefore venerate the state as a secular deity.”¹⁴

It is the task of the Church to proclaim the Lordship of Christ to the world, a task that, at least in Britain, she has abandoned because of her infatuation with the chief idol of the modern world, the secular State. The Church in Britain, therefore, is engaged

¹³ John Macmurray, *The Self as Agent*, p. 29, cited in E. L. Hebden Taylor, *The Christian Philosophy of Law, Politics and the State* (Nutley, New Jersey: The Craig Press, 1966), p. 414.

¹⁴ T. M. Knox, trans., *Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, [1942] 1945, p. 285 (§272 *add.* 164).

in a modern secular form of the hybrid Yahweh/Baal cult that vitiated the religious life of ancient Israel before the Babylonian captivity, and just as Israel was sent into exile for her unfaithfulness in playing the harlot with the Baals, so it seems the Church in Britain shall have to suffer the same consequences at the hands of our own Babylonian captivity.

The modern British State is part of the new secular world order that dominates international politics. Unless the Church in Britain deals with the syncretism and idolatry that presently characterises her life she will be taken captive and effectively exiled internally by the idolatrous modern State in a spiritual and cultural ghetto that will leave her without influence, relevance or the freedom to preach the gospel or even practice the Christian way of life fully. The writing is already on the wall, but few seem to understand this and many in the Church are ideologically committed, though perhaps unwittingly, to the religion of the new secular Rome that is increasingly dominating and controlling all aspects of life in modern Britain. The Church is engaged, therefore, in an extreme form of syncretism. If we are, by means of our faith (1 Jn. 5:4), to overcome the idolatry that today confronts us, as we are commanded (Mt. 18:18–20), and as the early Church overcame the idolatry that confronted her, we must deal with this syncretism and reject the idolatry that is at the heart of it. Jesus Christ is Lord, *not* the State—in every sphere of life, including politics.

§5

CONCLUSION

The Church today in Britain is as compromised with idolatry as was ancient Israel in the time of the kings when the high places were used to worship God falsely and to worship false gods by practising the fertility cults of ancient Canaan. Our high places are intellectual and ideological—but the result is the same, the denial of God's will for our lives and the worshipping of an idol rather than the true God. We send our children to be sacrificed

at the altars of secular humanist education, believing that the secular humanist conception of “science” explains everything; we call upon the State to heal us from our infirmities; we require our neighbours, through the payment of taxes (State legalised theft), to help those less fortunate than ourselves instead of being good neighbours ourselves; we ascribe to the secular State the attribute of God’s sovereignty and call upon it to control our lives and our society according to the gospel of secular humanism instead of looking to God. And while complimenting ourselves on trying to create a “caring society” by means of such idolatry we fail to see that in all these areas of life—e.g. education, health, welfare—the Christian virtues have become obsolete. Such a society is not a Christian society, nor is a Church that follows such idolatry a Christian Church. God requires something else. He requires us to do something about this. He calls us to destroy our idols, the ideological high places that have led us to this situation. Until we do, we may have saved souls, but we shall have wasted our lives.

There is a very interesting fact about the Babylonian captivity of the Israelites however. It decisively brought the Baal worship problem to an end in Israel. After the restoration we do not hear of this problem of a syncretistic Yahweh-Baal cult among the Jews any more. We can only hope and pray that our own captivity to the modern idolatrous State, which has yet to be revealed in all its vainglory and tyranny, will finally rid the Church in Britain of her infatuation with secular humanism and its most cherished idol, the secular State.

[The text of this essay is a revised and edited version of a lecture originally given in Chichester on 26th May 2001 and subsequently published in *Christianity & Society* (Vol. xi, No 4, October 2001), the journal of the Kuyper Foundation. The Kuyper Foundation is a charity registered in England (no. 327537).]





