

History, Images, and Courts

Pagan Mysticism versus Word and History

1. The pagan worldview rejects the biblical distinction between Creator and creation and assumes the continuity of all Being.
2. Truth, reality, and divinity all lie outside the stream of time and matter.
3. Ultimate reality is silent: only non-rational imagination and emotional experience can lay hold of it.
4. These are best stimulated by images, drugs, sex, and the mindless repetition of formulas: together, these make up the liturgy and ritual of the pagan world.
5. Myth and ritual point beyond the rational and historical to the real, but only vaguely and inadequately.
6. History is irrelevant; "God-talk" is non-sense; other people can be ignored or used and discarded (cf. the heretics of 1 John).

Word versus Image

1. The Triune God is uncreated Spirit (Gen. 1:1; John 4:24): He is by nature (tri-) personal, immaterial, invisible, and intangible.
 - a. He transcends created reality (2 Chron. 6:18): None of His creatures contains Him, fully expresses His nature, or serves as a point of contact with His Being. ("He is not it, and it is not He.")
 - b. But God is by nature self-revealing: the Father exhaustively reveals Himself in His *Logos*, His Word. Christ is the very image of God (John 14:9; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3).
 - c. God in Christ necessarily reveals Himself in all of creation and in every creature to some degree (Rom. 1:18-20), but only man is truly His (created) image (Gen. 1:26-27).
2. God in Christ meets with man, not by mystical absorption, but by condescending grace; not through magic, but in a personal, historical, and ethical relationship revealed and defined in His word; that is, through **covenant**.
3. Man in his sin seeks to abolish God and enthrone himself; he hates, distorts, and rejects God's words.
 - a. The natural man substitutes images for the written word of God.
 - b. He imagines in his own heart what "God" is or ought to be like (Jer. 13:10; Isa. 44:9-20; Ezek. 8:12 [see Calvin here]).
 - c. He objectifies the imaginations of his own heart through the work of his hands (Hos 13:2).
 - d. He then worships himself in that work (idol).
 - e. The image will never initiate communication or respond in any way: it is wholly passive.
 - f. The man will receive from his idol-worship only what he puts into it: his relationship with his god is wholly imaginary.
 - g. Idols, then, are spiritual pornography, images that substitute for personal relationship (cf. Ezek. 16:17; 23:16).
 - h. And this is why God abhors idols and hates idolaters (Deut. 7:25-26; Ex. 20:4-5; Lev. 26:30).
 - i. Any attempt to portray God in visible terms must necessarily misrepresent Him; any picture of God is necessarily a lie (Rom. 1:25); any attempt to bypass God's revelation in Christ is sorcery (Deut. 18).

God's Words: Revelation in, through, and about History

1. The God who speaks His Word eternally speaks truly, accurately, and authoritatively to men using normal human language.
2. These words enter our history and speak to us of the God who orders our history and of His great acts in history.
3. The Bible is a book of sequenced historical events linked together by an explicit chronology.
4. Scripture interprets these historical events in terms of God's eternal purposes in Christ.
5. The gospel itself is a summary of specific historical facts as God interprets them in Scripture (1 Cor. 15:3-8).
6. When the early Church summed up its faith in the *Apostles' Creed*, it spoke primarily, not of grand ideas, but of historical realities.
7. Whereas pagan mysticism would draw us out of history into self-deification, the gospel tells us that God entered our history to redeem it and us.

God's Courts: Submitting to God's Image

1. The gospel that brings us to God through Christ also brings us into covenant relationship with other people (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4).
2. These relationships require mutual submission (Eph. 5:21-6:9).
3. Part of this submission involves the recognition of the authority structure of God's three covenantal institutions: family, church, and State.
4. God appoints human authorities to represent Him and apply His word within limited jurisdictions with sanctions limited and delineated in Scripture (cf. Rom. 13:1-7).
5. Scripture distinguishes between civil and ecclesiastical courts, but the most basic court is that of the home.
6. God's people are to submit to these courts when they act biblically, *even if they do not act perfectly*, for they are the ministers of God to us for good. See *Heidelberg Catechism Q & A 104*.