

## Modern Seductions in Christian Thought

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The conviction behind this article is that, in the modern Church, there is a fatal flaw in our thinking about the existence of the True, and Living God, and that flaw leads to errant thinking and unfortunately these incorrect thoughts are what is being communicated in some of the modern Church's.

In many cases the modern Church is living without the Biblical *content* of God, and the absence of the presence of God, can be seen in the logical conclusions of how many Christians are living today. The conclusions can be observed in three areas:

- (i) The Christian mind is conformed to the culture, and thinks with a cultural mind-set.
- (ii) The Christian mind is conformed to the world and the culture, because it does not have as its reference point, The Living God, the complete work of the Incarnate Christ, and His resurrection as *the object* of its witness.
- (iii) There is a visible demonstration of religion and Church going, but they are void of the presence of the personality of God, and Christ, His holiness, and any spiritual health.

The word “**God**” has become a religious cliché—a stereotype expression. The study of God begs the question; shouldn't the Christian Faith, and worldview center on the Being, and Nature of God? It appears that, behind every manifestation of unrest in the lives of Christians, and in some Churches today, looms this question of the Being of God.

One of the cancers in modern Church-thought, is that Church men/women have sentenced themselves to stumble, and blunder through the Christian life while wearing a blindfold. This is true, because there is a blatant disregard for the Study of the True God.

A belief in God, or gods of some kind is central to the great majority of the world's religions, and religious people. The question that comes to mind is a logical one: “Is it reasonable to believe in God, and if so, what kind of God should be believed in?”

There are a great *number of views* about God, which vary in details; there are, of course, many interesting variations in each view. The views of God can fall into a number of types:

An *abstract* God – an abstract God is neither real, nor personal. An abstract God is ultimately an idol. An abstraction is what remains when Man draws away all that is real and concrete concerning God, and all that remains are the *Idols* of: relationships, wealth, fame, materialism, and status, etc.. An abstract God is cold, unloving, and impersonal. This concept of God leads to a silent atheism, and this idolatry exists in the lives of many people both in and out of the Church, today.

A *mystical* God – someone, who is *impersonal*, and unloving, and is also accepted as *a force*. In the movie *Star Wars* the phrase “*may the force be with you*” is mentioned several times. A force has **no** personality. Take for example, nature’s powerful forces such as; Volcanoes, Earthquakes, Hurricanes, Typhoons, Floods, Tsunamis, Tidal waves, Tornadoes, Forest Fires, etc., --all these are forces of nature, but they have no personality—no life. They leave utter destruction behind them! A force has no love, joy, peace, mercy, patience, compassion, etc., but the infinite-personal, living God does have these attributes! A force cannot forgive our sins!

A *transactional (to transact, or conduct business activities) kind of God*, or a *Cosmic Santa Clause*. The idea namely, is, relating to God for things and more things. It concerns having a God to meet all my *expectations; so I can find meaning* in things and toys, etc. This way of thought relates to God by submitting to commands in exchange for comfort, prosperity, etc., —where the actual goal of the individual is the accumulation of things and toys, in order to obtain happiness —this also is idolatry!

The *essence of idolatry* is replacing God with tangible and observable things, and self. (Engaging in sin, such as pornography, the gratification of the senses, fornication, adultery, alcohol, the use of tobacco, and the use of drugs —these things give one pleasure and gratification of the **physical** senses, but give no meaning to life!)

Next, a God who *can be known only*, through *feelings and through the senses* hence; through subjectivism, or through human experiences. There are three great dangers here:

(i) All questions, and answers about God are raised in the context of feelings and experiences, and not through divine revelation. For these people, God is accepted and seen through feelings and subjectivism.

Subjectivism is the doctrine that all knowledge is limited to human experiences, and that the good and right can be distinguished and judged only be individual feelings.

(ii) **There is also the** danger of rejecting Scriptural revelation; that is rejecting the living God Who speaks, and acts for Himself in the flow of history, through creation, through Biblical revelation, and through the light that is in the “conscience of man.”<sup>1</sup>

(iii) **The** danger that exists in the modern Church involves using the phrase: “*Just Believe,*” rather than developing a deeper relationship with the Living God through a study of His Word.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 2:14-15

<sup>2</sup> 2Timothy 2:15

Perhaps we can ask Church members a question, *what* is one called to believe about God? Are Christians called to believe in a Person, or in a God who is impersonal? The Bible calls people to believe, and place their faith in The Living, Personal God, Who exists:

*“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists, and that He rewards those who seek Him.”*<sup>3</sup>

In his book, *Your God Is Too Small*, the English author and theologian, J. B. Phillips describes some of the common gods that people manufacture. Here is a short summary of his comments:

*“One is the grand-old-man [god], the grand-fatherly, white-haired, indulgent god who smiles down on men and winks at their adultery, stealing, cheating, and lying. Then there are the resident-policeman god, whose primary job is to make life difficult and unenjoyable, and the god-in-a-box,-god, the private, exclusive, sectarian god. The managing director god is the god of the deists, the god who designed and created the universe, started it spinning, and now stands by far away watching it run down.”*<sup>4</sup>

Man-made [gods] are idols, they are [gods] of fear, of dread, of graven images, and of appeasement who demand much, promise little, and provide nothing! Man makes and serves his gods to assuage, and pacify his guilt, to cover his true guilt—which he seeks to stifle!

Men who deny the existence of the real God, generally accept one of two opposing hypotheses with respect to the existence of God: the *first* is: ***Wishing God into Existence***, and the *second* is: ***Wishing God out of Existence***.

(Remember, a hypothesis is a position, or set of positions, set forth as an explanation for the occurrence of some specified group of phenomena, either asserted merely as a provisional conjecture to guide investigation, or accepted as *highly probable in the light of established facts*).

The *first* hypothesis was suggested by the Vienna psychiatrist, Sigmund Freud, (1856-1939), in his book, *The Future of an Illusion*. He argues that religion is merely the *projection of a wish*. Actually, he says, there is nothing “out there,” meaning that there is no God.

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<sup>3</sup>Hebrews 11:6.

<sup>4</sup>J. B. Phillips, *Your God Is Too Small*, Published by, MacMillan Publishing Company, [New York; New York], 1961, pp. 15-59,

Freud believed that man, because of his fears, developed the idea of a protective father. He believed that man created God, rather than that God created man. He went on to develop three chief causes which led man to project the idea of a protective heavenly father. But his ideas are just ideas and not actual evidence or proof. **We would ask, “Does the fact that man needs God and wishes for God actually disprove that God exists?”**

Consider *an opposite* hypothesis: Man wishes God *not to exist*. I believe that I can make a strong case for the idea that modern man really wishes that there were no God. Dr. Baxter, said it would go something like this:

*“Modern man possesses great pride in himself and in his accomplishments. He looks about himself and rejoices in his ability to cross the oceans and the continents. He is master of even the highest mountains and the deepest seas. He can brave the cold of the Antarctic, and the heat of the Sahara. In fractions of a second he can speak around the world and send pictures to the far corners of the earth. He can reach out into space and land on the moon, a sophisticated accomplishment almost beyond the comprehension of most men. Man can transport himself under the earth, on the sea, on land, through the air and even through space with great efficiency, and with great speed. He can build great skyscrapers, huge bridges, (cell phones), intricate computers, and countless other machines to do his work for him. . . .Through the use of advanced medical science he can cure many diseases, substitute organs in the human body for those that are worn out, and in general extend his life span. He can think, invent, and construct. There is almost no limit to what he can do. Therefore, there is a tendency . . . for man to feel that he is self-sufficient, independent, and without any need for God.”<sup>5</sup>*

Modern man can care for himself and almost for his every physical need. So man’s pride leads him to substituting God, for his own man-made god, and that leads to self-worship; with an inclination to make himself his own [god]!

To modern Man, in both his pride and his accomplishments, he is then left with an image of God, and his image of a God who is dead. So he has surrendered to a:

*“New atheism, which maintains that man has now reached a position of such power and independence that he needs no God in whom to trust.”<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> B. B. Baxter, *I believe Because*, Published by Baker Book House, (Grand Rapids; Michigan) 1971, p. 34-35.

<sup>6</sup> David H. C. Reed, *Whose God Is Dead, The Challenge Of The New Atheism*, Published by, Forward Movement Publications, [Cincinnati; Ohio], 1966, p. 13.

The brilliant English philosopher Bertrand Russell, penned his words on life, pain, and the existence of God. He wrote:

*“The life of Man is a long march through the night, surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, toward a goal that few can hope to reach, and where none may tarry long. . . . That Man is product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man’s achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand.”<sup>7</sup>*

Frederich Nietzsche (1844-1900), an avowed atheist, and philosopher, who wanted to look at life, and the world with no personal God in it to obstruct his vision. He looked at life, and the world without God, and the picture for him without God in the universe, was one of despair, insanity, and meaninglessness.

Nietzsche concluded in his despair, and in his insanity, and wrote in his parable called, *The Mad Man*.

*“. . . I’m looking for God, I ‘m looking for God!” “Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? Or emigrated?” . . . “Whither is God?” he cried. “I shall tell you. We have killed him—you and I. All of us are his murderers. . . .” “Do we not hear anything of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell anything yet of God’s decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, comfort ourselves?”<sup>8</sup>*

Nietzsche, came to understand Christianity, and he *“came to scorn and despise Christianity, and the scandal of the Cross.”* He understood the demands of Christ, all too clearly, and he viewed Christianity as a decadent religion of piety and sympathy; Jesus’ Cross therefore, epitomized the decline of life rather than the giving of life.

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<sup>7</sup>Bertrand Russell, as quoted by B. B. Baxter, *I Believe Because*. p. 78.

<sup>8</sup>Ravi Zacharias, *A Shattered Visage, The Real Face Of Atheism*, Published by, Baker Book House, (Grand Rapids; Michigan, 1990), p. 20-21.

*“For Nietzsche saw that Jesus taught his followers to give up their wealth to feed the poor, to sacrifice themselves in service to the weak and dispossessed. He saw that Jesus called people to empty themselves of power and identify themselves with the lowly. Nietzsche opposed Christianity vehemently; he nonetheless understood clearly the call of Jesus and the meaning of the cross. He understood the Christian view of God’s infinite concern for the weak, the poor, and the oppressed of the earth. He found it distressing, to be sure, but he understood it.”<sup>9</sup>*

Nietzsche understood all too well where people end up when they leave God out of life. Insanity is the only philosophical answer when man removes the personal-God from all of life.

To Nietzsche *God was dead*, and he himself was left with meaninglessness and despair; therefore, he was left with no content and no answers for life.

The true knowledge of God, as revealed in the Bible, leads to the awareness of His true existence. His created universe points to the inescapable conclusion that He exists; and He is never pleased, nor will He ever be pleased, with any of the idols man makes as a substitute of Him.

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<sup>9</sup>C. Leonard Allen, Richard T. Hughes, and Michael R. Reed, *The Worldly Church*, Published by Abilene Christian University Press, (Abilene; Texas, 1991), p. 66.

**Conclusion:**

*“Within the Church the process of abstraction has been going on. An abstraction is what remains when we have drawn away all the concrete, real and particular. Thus we have been taught not to think of God in human terms as a God who does nothing at all. The abstract God is eventually an idol.”<sup>10</sup>*

The Bible presents a rational, logical view of God, the infinite-personal, living, loving God—Who is revealed in Creation, and in The Bible. This view of God is called *Theism—the belief in One God*. This is the dominant view of God that is held by three of the world’s religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. But the Judeo-Christian worldview of God is very unique—because God is personal, and Man can know Him!

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, and worldview, there has emerged a well-defined, and reasonable list of attributes, and characteristics of God, that are seen, and that are understood to be essential to ‘Who’ God is, and how He has revealed Himself. (These attributes about God, are not seen and revealed in other religions, and religious books). The attributes revealed in the Bible, play a key role in revealing the theistic concept of God.

The belief-system of The Bible, acknowledges the existence of God, and His existence is not contingent, or dependent upon any material thing. God exists by His own power and by His own sufficiency. The God of The Bible, has revealed Himself; plainly and clearly in this world for everyone to see, to understand, and to know. (He has revealed Himself in Creation, and in The Bible). He lives, and He is not silent!

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<sup>10</sup> David H. C. Reed, *Whose God Is Dead, The Challenge Of The New Atheism*, Published by, Forward Movement Publications, [Cincinnati; Ohio], 1966, pages, 21-22.