

view, it would be ludicrous to think that the natural world, or an object created by humans, somehow could encapsulate the divine presence. This does not exclude the role of symbols and the arts in biblical thought. Nor does it deny that God communicates what he is like [i.e. his glory] through the analogies of our experience in the world. However, we must always draw a clear line between creator and creation, and be sure never to attempt to “harness” God by representing him with physical objects.

# Isaiah

## **The first two commandments**

You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God . . . Exodus 20:3-5

## **Idolatry: an affair of the heart**

For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Ephesians 5:5

Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. Philippians 3:19

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earth nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. Colossians 3:5-6

Idolatry: Ascribing ultimate significance to a created thing rather than to God.

## Modern Idols

- Statues, crystals, talismans, "good-luck" charms
- Money and Possessions (gambling, houses, cars, clothes, computers, boats, jewelry, furniture)
- Sex (lust, pornography, promiscuity, affairs)
- People
- Success (in career, parenting, business, athletics, school, church; the idolatry of "perfectionism")
- Appearance (weight, physical beauty, fashion, looking younger, physical fitness)
- Leisure activities (TV, sports, hobbies, movies)
- Affirmation (being a people-pleaser)
- Rationalism (idolatry of one's own ideas and intellectual ability)
- Knowledge (education, books, degrees)
- Food
- Alcohol and drugs
- Fame
- Power
- Self-righteousness
- Family and upbringing
- Others? \_\_\_\_\_

### Excursus: When worlds collide

Israel's pure monotheism stood in radical contrast to the idolatrous polytheism of the surrounding cultures. This distinction in religious forms stemmed from a deep difference in worldviews.

To the pagan mind, the physical world was inextricably tied to the spiritual world. The world of the

gods, spirits and the supernatural was co-terminus with the natural world. The pagan worldview could be represented by figure 1. Gods and spirits inhabited the trees, animals, sun and moon. So it made complete sense to create a statue out of these elements in order to "harness" the presence of the supernatural.

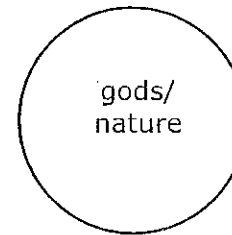


Fig. 1

The biblical worldview had a vastly different understanding of the relationship between the divine and the natural. The biblical model taught that God was the *creator*. Therefore God stood outside of the universe. The trees, sun, moon and other features of the natural world were merely creations of God and did not have any supernatural dimension.

Were the universe and the entire created order to vanish, God would remain, undiminished. The universe testified to his glory, and yet remained distinct from him.

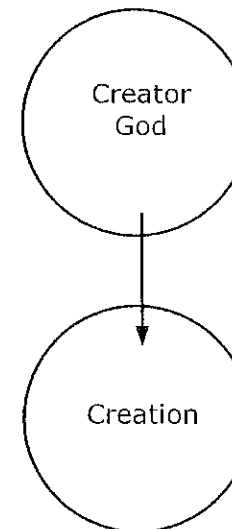


Fig. 2

This is not to deny God's involvement in all aspects of creation (see figure 2). On the contrary, the Bible portrays God not only as creator but also as *king*. He rules sovereignly over everything that takes place in his creation. So the Bible proclaims a God who is both transcendent over creation, and yet also immanent and intimately involved in that creation.

Therefore, within the framework of a biblical world-