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GOD - SUBSTITUTES

D. B. KNOX

"THE CHRISTIAN FAITH"

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The human race is incurably religious, but at the same time we are self-centred and self-willed. True religion means glad submission and obedience to God our creator, and complete trust in His goodness and in His promise to provide for us in every circumstance. But our self-centredness stops us making God the centre of our lives as we ought to. We want to be that, yet our religious nature needs expression, and so we create substitute gods who do not make the demand on us of obedience. In the ancient world, and it is still true today in non Christian countries, man made idols and directed religious activity towards these statues. A moment's reflection would show that it is absurd to think that an idol is God, yet it is extraordinary how universal idolatry was.

In Christendom the pagan gods were abolished, but the human tendency of refusing to give obedience to the true God still remained. Idols could no longer be used as a substitute for God and so the saints and particularly the virgin Mary became the centre of religious devotion. You don't have to obey the virgin, and so we can express our religious feelings without having to give up our own self-will. It should be remembered that there is no suggestion in the Bible that prayers should be offered to the saints, and there is very little indeed about the mother of our Lord, and in all but one of the few times she is mentioned in the narrative of our Lord's ministry there is an implied rebuke. The Bible teaches that we should not pray to any creature but only to God. Jesus taught that we should worship God and Him only. God is our Heavenly Father, Jesus is our Lord

and it is to Him that we should direct our prayers because He gives us His Spirit in our hearts so that we know Him as our friend as we read His word.

In our modern secular world neither pagan idols nor Christian saints play any part, but the same tendency to find a substitute for our creator God is of course present in our society. It finds expression nowadays in deifying nature. Nature is said to be the cause of the beautiful world we see around us. This is just as unlikely as to think that the idols created the world, but it is a religiously held tenet these days to think that everything has evolved automatically and accidentally. Such a theory means that we do not have to obey God or give Him thanks. When the theory of evolution is abandoned, as it must be in due course, for all the evidence is against it, the human heart will find some other substitute to avoid having to acknowledge the true God and relate ourselves to Him in love and obedience. But God is real and our lives should be based on reality. God is a loving God and has come among us in Jesus Christ and we ought not to go on any longer without relating ourselves in love and obedience to Jesus.

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