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Modern Rediscovery: Idols That Topple & Totter

By Wilfred Hahn

“Do not make idols or set up an image or a sacred stone for yourselves, and do not place a carved stone in your land to bow down before it. I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 26:1).



Right from the beginning the Israelites were admonished not to worship idols. During their wanderings through various nations after coming out of Egypt, Moses warned: “You saw among them their detestable images and idols of wood and of stone, of silver and gold.” Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the LORD our God [...]” (Deuteronomy 29:17-28).

Prophet after prophet, priests and kings warned about the dangers and futility of following the idols of the nations made of wood, stone, gold and

other materials ... idols that cannot see or hear. Even the pagans were reprimanded and punished for praising idols. For example, Belshazzar, the last Babylonian ruler, was judged and found wanting for celebrating his idols of “[...] gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone” (Daniel 5:4, 23). Yet, the Israelites persisted: “We want to be like the nations, like the peoples of the world, who serve wood and stone” (Ezekiel 20:32).

That was a long time ago. Reading these accounts today, it all sounds so primitive ... so irrelevant to our time. Modern civilized people do not worship idols made of wood and stone.



What is an idol?
Consulting a dictionary, we will read descriptions such as this: “[...] a representation or symbol of an object of worship [...] a false conception [...]”¹ and so on. The Bible, however, provides an easy, useful definition: An idol is any object of human reliance that is vulnerable to toppling.



Ba'al with raised arm, 14th-12th century BC, found at Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit), Louvre

So we may think. We read this in the book of Revelation: “The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk” (Revelation 9:20). Here a shocking fact is revealed to the sensibilities of modern man. We see a pagan civilization worshiping material idols in the future. Yes, in the future—from our day and throughout the Tribulation period. Actually, pagan idolatry today is as rampant as perhaps never before. Do we recognize it for what it is?

Tottering Idols Require Propping Up

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this: “[...] a representation or symbol of an object of worship [...] a false conception [...]”¹ and so on. The Bible, however, provides an easy, useful definition: An idol is any object of human reliance that is vulnerable to toppling. For example: “A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple” (Isaiah 40:20). This is a most humorous depiction. After all, why worship something that we ourselves must prevent from toppling with our own hands?

Again, Isaiah tells us: “The craftsman encourages the goldsmith, and he who smooths with the hammer spurs on him who strikes the anvil. He says of the welding, ‘It is good.’ He nails down the idol so it will not topple” (Isaiah 41:7). Jeremiah, too, made the same observation: “[...] they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel. They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so it will not totter” (Jeremiah 10:3-4). God must surely laugh at mankind’s attempts to build and set up their own gods. He chuckles that mankind does not see the futility of their idols if they indeed must be nailed down and defended. Said Gideon’s father, Joash, when coming to his senses after Gideon smashed his idols: “If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar” (Judges 6:31). Anything that mankind allows to become an idol will be sure to disappoint and come up empty.

This is one of the key lessons of the recent storm of economic and financial tremors that has radiated across the world. Idols topple and totter. Many things held to be venerable emblems of mankind’s achievements and hopes have been toppling of late. Comically, they must therefore be propped up by man. Consider that some of the world’s



biggest and most swaggering companies, once revered as unstoppable global juggernauts, have needed propping up.

The largest US bank failure occurred—Washington Mutual Inc., with \$307 billion in assets. The largest insurance company needed to be rescued—American International Group. The world's one-time largest car company, General Motors, was technically bankrupt, requiring bailout financing from governments. The biggest investment banks (Merrill Lynch, Morgan Stanley) all needed government help. One of the largest and most trusted investment funds ended up utterly worthless, due to the Ponzi scheme swindle of Bernie Madoff. \$50 billion disappeared into thin air. (All of these entities were headquartered in the United States.) They could no longer stand on their own.

Not to be overlooked, of course, are the phenomenal crashes of various financial markets themselves. At one point in 2008, the entire world stock market had fallen by over 50% (measured in US dollars) from the previous year. Just what creature is so fickle about the value of its wealth? Surely, the widespread belief that modern-day financial markets—the supposed source of prosperity and wealth of mankind—would continue to rise to ever higher extremes qualifies them as idols.

Certain popular beliefs, which have been regarded as doctrinal truths to the humanist mind, have also been tottering. Consider that 2009 will likely record the largest decline in global trade since World War II. Trade



has been the central pillar of globalization and the long-promoted condition that will knit mankind into a common mutual dependency. It is believed by humanists that once mankind's prosperity is tightly interdependent globally, the required incentive for world peace will have been established. But now, many fret that the means to achieving this ideal is under threat. Indeed, globalization may take a step backward during the present worldwide economic downturn.

However, in the end it is likely that most nations will recognize that it is much too late to disengage from world intercourse. As it is, given the experience of the Great Depression of the 1930s, policymakers are today extremely wary of protectionist trade policies. There are no longer any easy exits from the road to globalism. The Bible allows us to foreknow that the nations will eventually huddle together to prop up their three favorite idols of the endtimes—the “unknown god, the “foreign god” and the “god of fortresses” (Daniel 11:38-39). (See also the article series on the “Three False Gods of the Endtimes,” *Midnight Call* magazine, November 2000–February 2001.)

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Other long-held notions are also under threat. The case for “free-market based” economics is threatened. Just what is meant by the term “free market”? It is the simple, liberal idea that people, if left to act freely in their own concepts of morality and self-interest—without much government or regulatory intervention in markets—will together achieve progress and greater prosperity for the world. This is the sure path to a world without poverty, it is thought. To no surprise, policymakers have again discovered that too many people have been acting too freely in pursuing their own selfish interests. Uncontrolled greed eventually devours its own house, weakening its very timbers and stones. That is an aspect of the curse to which Zechariah’s vision of the great flying scroll points (Zechariah 5), the result of a global commercial system built upon the cornerstones of “stealing” and “lying.” This curse “[...] will remain in his house and destroy it, both its timbers and its stones” (Zechariah 5:4).

We are not being overly harsh in our views. Why? Consider these three widely held economic maxims: “1. Man seeks to gratify his desires with the least amount of exertion. 2. Man’s desires are unlimited. 3. Man hoards consciously and systematically.”² These are not our own definitions.

These maxims of “self interest” are in fact enthroned and institutionalized as advanced, sophisticated theories today. It all represents a grisly, competitive world in which mankind celebrates the satisfaction of self. It is the worldly parallel to the terrible times that Paul sees invading the Church in the last days: “People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God [...]”(2 Timothy 3:2-4).

Propping Up the Golden Financial Idol

We live in a day where mankind has reached the highest zenith of self-determination ever in history. Today, man is in the position to seek global solutions. God, He that chose to reveal Himself through his Son Jesus Christ, is not allowed into the public square of debate for the answers to mankind’s problems. The boards and committees of cities, states, countries and transnational organizations do not think to consult Him nor observe His statutes. They choose to make their own way. They think: “He will not see us” (Ezekiel 8:12), and, “What does God know? [...] Thick clouds veil him, so he does not see us as he goes about in the vaulted heavens” (Job 22:13-14).

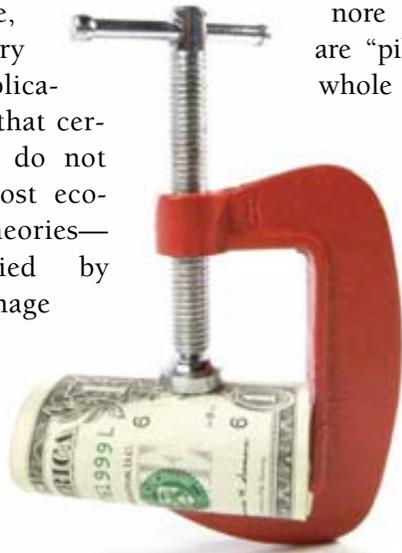
Nowhere is this attitude more brazen than in the field of economics. Why is this so? We can best understand its revolutionary “endtime” impact upon mankind’s rebellion if we see it for what it is—a religion ... a global religion. It is one of those disci-



plines that is not a science, but rather closer to sorcery in its recent globalist applications. That is not to say that certain economic principles do not have their uses. Yet, most economic macro-policy theories—ideas that are applied by governments to manage economies and societies—remain just that, theories. None can be marshaled to create a certain outcome in the future.

Yet today, the entire world awaits the wizardry of the economic guru, the modern-day seat of the false prophet. For example, the new economic advisors of the US Obama administration: Timothy Geithner, Paul Volcker, Robert Rubin, Larry Summers, and Laura Tyson—all of them very smart people—have been called in to steady the tottering economic edifice. It is expected that their recommendations of various policies of economic tinkering will overcome America’s deep troubles. They are likely to be no better than the advisors of Nebuchadnezzar’s day.

Other advisors are sought to solve challenges on a global scale. They devise ways to get the world back on the road to peace and prosperity. Most of these efforts are underpinned by the notion that future prosperity can be manufactured at will ... conjured out of mid air ... and that past sins and excesses have no consequences. No. God says He “cannot be not mocked” (Galatians 6:7). He says that whatever you sow, you will reap. It is a spiritual law as well as one that applies to the physical world. To the extent that the world’s policymakers and economists ig-



nore this admonition, they are “pillow prophets” ... the whole lot of them. Against their high imaginations, God says: “I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things” (Isaiah 45:7).

Change Expected in the Millennium

In the present dispensation, the Prince of the Air continues to rule the earth. Though God is on His Throne and Jesus Christ remains seated at his right side, Satan still is allowed great influence in the world of man. While God clearly has the uppermost power, declaring that it is He who sets up and deposes rulers (meaning also under His allowance), Satan is still able to entice key people with “the kingdoms of the world and their splendor” (Matthew 4:8).

Nebuchadnezzar—the most illustrious of all the Gentile potentates that the Bible informs us about—pictured as the head of gold, finally bowed down to the God of the Bible. After being deposed from his throne and punished for seven years, he came to his senses, acknowledging, “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything He does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble” (Daniel 4:37). His experience serves as a foreshadowing of that future seven-year Tribulation. At the end of it, mankind will finally ac-

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Eventually mankind will come to the point where their idols of gold and silver will be thrown into the streets. “In that day men will throw away to the rodents and bats their idols of silver and idols of gold, which they made to worship. They will flee to caverns in the rocks and to the overhanging crags from dread of the Lord [...]” (Isaiah 2:20-21).

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In the Millennium age, a new economic system will prevail, which will be based on completely different doctrines. Yet, they are doctrines of old, long counseled by the Scriptures. They are based on the one surefire strategy that will never fail. One little, three-word verse unlocks this key, and is found in 1 Corinthians 13:8: “Love never fails.” Both Royal Laws are extensions of this doctrine: one directed toward God and the other to our neighbors without favoritism (James 2:9). When the Lord returns and restores all things (Acts 3:21, Matthew 17:11), surely the world under his rule will be based on these Royal Laws, not today’s worldly economic maxims that focus on self. Regrettably, various teachers who identify themselves as Christian today endorse this veneration of self.

Thoughts to Ponder

Do we recognize the idols of wood and stone today? They may be robed in the supposedly sophisticated concepts of our time; therefore, they are much more deceptive. At the same time, these idols are as arrogant and deadly as ever.

You can either choose to serve God or Mammon—the spiritual entity incentivized by money and the harbor of all idolatry. This is a Bible verse that we have all often heard (Matthew 6:24). But do we really understand what it implies for the world in which we live? It speaks of a polarity that gives rise to a great struggle and the ultimate curse. We can choose to serve the One; yet the other is always seeking our affections. Our eyes wander between them all too easily. No

matter our best intentions and devotion, idolatry is always only a hairbreadth away ... perhaps a brief flicker of wandering affection. Yet, in repentance, we are saved from our sins.

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Referring again to the polarity between God and Mammon, the disciples were gravely puzzled by this apparently irreconcilable chasm. Jesus said: “I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, ‘Who then can be saved?’ Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible’” (Matthew 19:23-26). We therefore trust in the God of the Impossible, accepting His salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ. (MC)

ENDNOTES

- 1 Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary
- 2 Economic Axioms. San Francisco School of Economics. <<http://www.sfschoolofeconomics.com>> Accessed January 30, 2009.