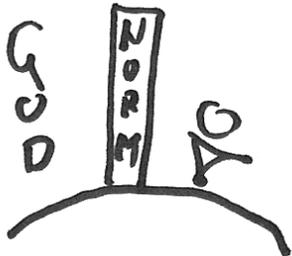


FOUR TENDENCIES OF WORLD RELIGIONS

**Shrink "god"
down to size**



**Replace "God"
With a Norm**

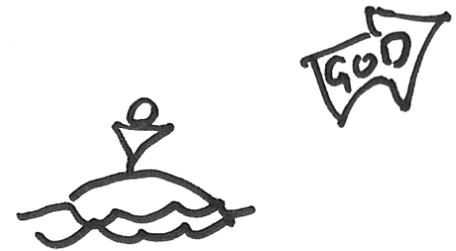


**What Have You
Done with God?**



**Because man is
in the image of God
and is part of His created world,
no matter how hard man tries
to push God out of the picture,
he cannot escape the fact
that God is all around him
and God is the Creator.**

**Exalt "God" till
He fades away**



**Turn "God" into
unknowable "It"**



Four Tendencies in World Religions In Fleeing from the God of the Bible

1. The Cosmo-centric approach – Shrinking “god” down to size by identifying “God” or the “gods” with the with the cosmos or the powers of nature. “*God*” becomes a part of the duality of heaven and earth - with man in the middle. God becomes identified with the world and the world includes God within it so that man can lay hold of God and subordinate Him to themselves.” (cf Rom 1:23) “The primitive world picture draws God so close to itself that God is lost in the embrace, and all that remains is the world, and in the world, man. God the creator, ruler and king, is dissolved in the haze of mystery that permeates this wonderful world. God is absorbed into the cosmos, the cosmos is deified and God sinks away behind the smog of human effort and fancy.” (cf Isa 40: 21-22)

“This cosmic-centric world picture has offshoots in our modern civilization ... the theoretical or practical naturalism and materialism of our century ... God is also dissolved here; he is completely eradicated. He is no longer visible and he is no longer felt. Man’s world, the world he can control, this is his God. God is absorbed into the world, he has faded into the sunset, all mystery is gone, gone forever. Man can no longer pray, he can no longer worship; he can only grit his teeth and seek to conquer the last obstacle to his power.”

2. Pushing “God” into the shadowy where he fades away by emphasizing his “highness” as creator, but setting him aside from the natural forces; retaining his name in times of need, but life is no longer vitally related to Him. “God” is pushed out of the sphere of ordinary life and made into a marginal concept - a bleak vague form which we sometimes tremble before, but as a rule we keep outside the horizon of our daily life. These religions have a focus on the highest beings, who are so distant that lower spirits or ancestors or the intercession of a king is needed. A vacuum remains to be filled with spirits and souls, saints or magic, and only a shell remains of the word. When “God” exits the picture, man is left alone. (Psalm 109:7)

3. Losing “God” behind the Moral World Order, replacing him with a Norm which he supposedly established. The moral order with its numerous commands and prohibitions is then hypostatized into an independent entity, and God is made an appendage, as supplement who appears only to reward or punish. He becomes merely an observer. The Moral norm controls religious and social/cultural life. It is broken in thousands of external commands. Man appears to set his feet on the path to “God”, but instead it leads him away as he is too pre-occupied with himself (The “I”) to humble himself before God. (Confucianism, Buddhism, Pharisaism, Islam)

Within the Christian Church, this tendency sees the Christian life not in terms of the joy of grace, as a life in the glory and power of God, but shriveled to a deadly monotonous observance of an endless number of ordinances and rules - in which one cannot recognize the friendly countenance of God.”

4. God the Primeval Ocean – where “God” becomes an “it” rather than a person. Undifferentiated being, a mysterious “It” that is in, behind and under everything – man’s aim becomes a mystical losing of self in “god” or finding “it” within. Absolute rest – the unity beneath diversity, we somehow abandon our individuality in “it” but there is no place for prayer or service, no maning or guilt, no love, purpose, or future. Just a withdrawal from the vanity and illusions of existence. A mystical, irrational experience pervades much of modern thought as well.

(Based on notes from J. H. Bavinck, Introduction to the Science of Missions,
and The Church between Temple and Mosque)