

Idolatry

Idolatry means worshipping an idol.

Webster's Dictionary defines an idol as:

1. *an image or other material object representing a deity and worshiped as such.*
2. *(in the Bible) a deity other than God.*
3. *a person or thing devotedly or excessively admired.*
4. *a mere image or semblance of something, visible but without substance.*
5. *a false notion; fallacy.*

Vaisnava theology differentiates between idolatry and Deity worship:

A) Deity worship involves procedures of worship (liturgy) and forms of deities, which are delineated within the scriptures of the tradition.

B) Idolatry involves forms and procedures that have no scriptural basis.¹

From The Old Testament

Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven [carved] image of the likeness of anything that is in the sky above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth... Thou shalt not bow down to them, nor serve them; for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God. Exodus 20.3-5

In “East-West Dialogues” Reverend Alvin Hart expresses surprise that followers of the Judeo-Christian culture have developed abhorrence for deity worship based on this text, as it refers to a form lesser than the form of God rather than carved forms per se. The form of the deity of Kṛṣṇa is not a likeness of anything on land, in the sky, or in the sea rather a form of the Supreme Lord as described in scripture. (Hart and Adikari, 1989, pg. 44)

¹ Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu (1.2.101):

śruti-smṛti-purāṇādi- pañcarātra-vidhiṁ vinā aikāntiki harer bhaktir utpātāyaiva kalpate

“Devotional service of the Lord that ignores the authorized Vedic literatures like the Upaniṣads, Purāṇas and Nārada Pañcarātra is simply an unnecessary disturbance in society.”

Examples of idolatry

- Pancopasana – a form of worship practised within Hinduism, not based on scripture.²
- The golden calf of the Old Testament – a totally concocted representative of God.³
- Car worship – deification and “worship” of objects or symbols representing wealth or power within contemporary society.

² Actually their standard of worship is not according to that which is given in Vaisnava literature. We accept these personalities as demigods, but not as the Supreme Person. In the concept of *pancopasana*, because we are accustomed to perceiving forms, the impersonalists imagine that the impersonal Brahman has a form because it is very difficult to meditate on the formless - Bg 12.5 – their ultimate idea is to give up the personal concept. They see it as a tool to help them on the path to impersonal liberation.

³ ... idol worshipped by the Hebrews during the period of the Exodus from Egypt in the 13th century BC and during the age of Jeroboam I, king of Israel, in the 10th century BC. Mentioned in Exodus 32 and I Kings 12 in the Old Testament, worship of the golden calf is seen as a supreme act of apostasy, the rejection of a faith once confessed. The figure is probably a representation of the Egyptian bull god Apis in the earlier period and of the Canaanite fertility god Baal in the latter.