

## Half-Stepping Christians

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

Some Christians can be quite smug in their knowledge of so-called pagan beliefs and practices embraced by other Christians. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses oppose the celebrations of Christmas and Easter because of their pre-Christian origins. Members of the Worldwide Church of God reject Christmas, Easter and many other beliefs and practices embraced by mainstream Christians.

However, this all raises the question: why not reject *all* of the pre-Christian myths, including a belief in God, altogether? After all, the ancient Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaton is widely regarded as the world's first monotheist. He believed that the sun was the only object worthy of worship. Conversely, the ancient Hebrews were originally henotheists that believed that there were other gods, but that their God, Yahweh, was the greatest of them all. So, why not reject the "pagan" belief in one God?

Most Christians believe in the virgin birth of Jesus. However, there were many pre-Christian gods that were supposedly born of virgins. Krishna or Krishna of India was said to have been born of a virgin, as was the Buddha, who was supposedly born to the virgin Maya, via the Holy Ghost (sound familiar?) The ancient Egyptian God Horus was said to have been born to the virgin Isis, and the Egyptian God Ra was also said to be born of a virgin. Why, then, not reject the pre-Christian belief in gods born to virgins?

It seems that practically every Christian believes that Jesus was crucified and resurrected to wash away humanity's alleged "sins." However, there were numerous crucified gods before Christ, including Osiris of Ancient Egypt, Zoroaster of Persia, Tammuz of Syria, and Mithra of Persia. If those gods are laughed at as pagan, why should the Christ myth be taken so seriously?

It is also a good idea to go back to the First or Old Testament. There were pagan stories about the creation of the universe and human beings long before the Adam and Eve myth. There were also flood stories that were prevalent, especially in the part of the world now recognized as the Middle East.

The Epic of Gilgamesh of ancient Mesopotamia contains the oldest known flood story. The god Ea tells Utnapishtim that the gods will send a great flood. Ea gives Utnapishtim the exact measurements to build a boat for him, his family, and animals. The flood occurs, and the boat eventually lands atop a mountain. Utnapishtim sends a dove, a raven and a swallow to scout the environment after the flood waters recede. (Hey! Wait a minute! This story sounds suspiciously like the biblical myth of Noah's Ark. Then why do Christians continue to believe the latter tale?)

Nothing excites Christians like the story of the Ten Commandments. The Hollywood version with Charlton Heston was great, but the book is always better than the movie. Such commandments as Thou Shall Not Commit Adultery, Thou Shall Not Steal, Thou Shall Not Commit Murder, and so on are believed by many Christians to be the foundation of morality and even U.S. democracy. There is never a shortage of conservative Christians trying to establish monuments featuring the commandments on public property, including courthouses.

However, there is nothing whatsoever original about the Ten Commandments story. The Egyptians had the Book of Coming Forth by Day, aka, the Book of the Dead. Believers were supposed to make the Declarations of Innocence, aka, the Negative Confessions, of which there were far more than 10 (42).

Here are some of the declarations that long preceded the Ten Commandments:

2) I have not done wrong 3) I have not stolen 4) I have not slain people 8) I have not told lies 10) I have not fornicated with the fornicator 13) I have not transgressed 15) I have not robbed a parcel of land 20) I have not wrongly copulated 26) I have not been violent 31) I have not done wrong 32) I have not done evil.

It is clear then, that the Bible is neither the first nor the last word on morality. This should not be surprising. On the contrary, it is insulting to claim that ancient peoples had no morality until they acquired biblical instruction. As the great 19<sup>th</sup> Century freethinker Robert Green Ingersoll said, "There have always been laws against murder, and there always be, as long as men object to being murdered."

There are many other examples of pagan origins of biblical ideas about morality, God, and so on. This should lead smug Christians to reject the very God idea itself, which is nothing more than paganism for the modern world.