

Personal reflection on Prof Peter Jones' talk on 28th Mar 2009

by Daniel Chew

On the 28th Mar 2009, Dr. Peter Jones, adjunct professor at Westminster Seminary California, gave a talk in Singapore held at True Way Presbyterian Church. The talk was organized by STEMI and occurred from 10a.m. to about 2:30p.m, with the title being *The Paganization of the West and the Global Challenge to Christian Truth*. The talk was good and informative, and it was interesting hearing such a presentation from a Reformed theologian as opposed to the multitudes of evidential apologists who sometimes sound more alarmist than inspirational, and definitely less biblical.

Prof Jones' talk was split into two sessions, predictably one before lunch and one after lunch. In the first session, Prof Jones describes the pagan worldview and its challenge in today's society, while in the second session, he exegetes Rom. 1:18-28 to answer the challenge of paganism.

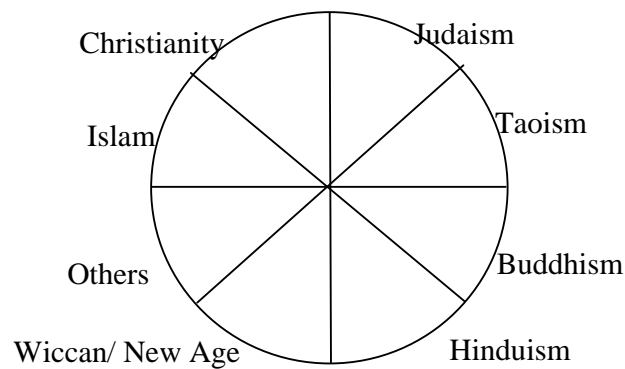
Paganism comes from the Latin word *paganus*, which can also be translated peasant. Paganism therefore is linked to the soil or the earth, and thus is linked to earthly matters, with high days such as the Spring and Autumn Equinoxes, and the Summer and Winter Solstices. Intricately linked to paganism is philosophical monism, the notion of "all is one". Paganism can be summed up in five points as follows:

- 1) All is one
- 2) All humanity is one
- 3) All religions are one
- 4) There is one problem
- 5) There is one solution

All is one: This refers to the fact that all reality is actually one reality. Everything including God is reduced to being in the same circle, and therefore there is no fundamental difference between all. Good and evil, right and wrong, all are thought to be embraced in the same circle of being, with only surface differences existing at the outward circumference of the circle. God and Man are actually in the same circle, and therefore Man are actually God in the fundamental aspect of being, with the Creator-creature distinction totally eradicated.

All humanity is one: Since all is one, all humanity is one. God and Man in the same circle means Man is God. All persons are not only born good, they are actually all "God". There is no right and no wrong, but all is "right".

All religions are one: Since all is one, all religions must be one too. The surface creeds and confessions and dogmas are the on the peripheral of the one circle of being and thus appear contradictory. However, for monists, we must transcend these surface differences and go to the core of all religions, which meet in the center of the circle and are all thus the same, as shown in the figure below:



Points on the circumference represent the various creeds and beliefs in each religion, while at the center point of the circle at each pie lies the core of all religions, a point which monists are striving to reach by transcending all religions.

There is one problem: There is simply no getting away from the fact that all is not currently one. There is something fundamentally wrong with the world, and there is no way to get around this issue either. You can explain it away as *maya* or illusion, or as the result of being uneducated as the Enlightenment Modernists do, but explain you must. Philosophical monists explain this problem as we have forgotten and lost our sense of oneness, of being gods and goddesses on this earth. The world is fragmented in us human beings, and such fragmentation creates the mess in the world we now live in.

There is one solution: Since the problem is not sin but forgetfulness, the solution is that we must re-discover back our sense of oneness. Similar to the image of the circle, the oneness lies in the center of every small circle (human beings) and it is in our innermost being or true self that we can re-discover the oneness we have and re-center ourselves. Unfortunately, there are way too many distractions in the world which distract us humans from the inner life, which explain our fragmented experiences. The influx of [Eastern] spiritual disciplines and spiritual formation such as Yoga and Transcendental Meditation are thus needed to bring us back to the path of mystic oneness and peace, by putting the mind in neutral so that we would stop thinking and thus the “spirit” can take over.

Prof Jones shared with us also his research into the growing popularity of Paganism in its key aspect of Philosophical Monism in the West, coupled with his growing alarm at the growing infiltration of this belief system into the Church (i.e. “Christian” Yoga) under the guise of Spirituality.

As opposed to Monism is Theism, Paganism as opposed to Christianity. At the core of Christianity is “Two-ism” or Dualism, though Prof Jones does not like to use the particular term “dualism” because of the connotations it has through its usage in Gnosticism among others. (He later states that Gnosticism is simply Dualism operating on a Monistic worldview plane or circle, and therefore is not truly dualistic). In Christianity, God and Man are separate from each other, with the Creator/creature distinction observed. God is other and using Van Tillian terminology, incomprehensible. God is above, we are below, and apart from God’s condescension and revelation, we can never know God at all.

Such beliefs act out practically in various ways. One impact of Monism can be seen in the rise of Homosexuality and other sexualities as alternative valid sexualities. These arise from a rejection of the binary of sexes as ordained by God. Since all is one, all sexuality is fundamentally one too, and there are no fundamental differences between male and female. In fact, the ideal sexual state is that

of androgyny, which basically means male and female in one single person¹. Paganism therefore is a key ingredient in the rise of homosexuality and other sexual deviations, and without the adoption of paganism, homosexuality will lose its coherence².

The differences between the two systems that I have remembered from the talk are as follows:

- Paganism/ Theism
- Monism/ Two-ism or dualism
- *paganus/ alienus*
- All-is-one/ All-is-two
- Sexual plurality/ Sexual Binary
- Feminism/ Patriarchy
- Mysticism/ Revelation
- Relativism/ Absolutes
- Internal/ External
- Esoteric/ Exoteric
- Homo-cosmology/ Hetero-cosmology³

Paganism looks within through the practice of spiritual disciplines to connect with their inner divinity, while Christianity looks to an external God for communion with Him. The look within leads to subjective mysticism, whereby what is “true” is the experience is connection with the common divine, while the look without leads to receiving objective revelation from God.

In closing the first session, Prof Jones calls for a difference in presenting the Gospel in such a pagan worldview. It is simply inconceivable to present the Gospel through starting with “God loves you”, upon which Prof Jones dryly remarked that the pagan would very well respond with “Yes, I do”.

Due to some technicalities, the morning session started late so the finishing up of the first session was done in the afternoon after lunch. Following which, Prof Jones went into the second session, exegeting the text of Rom. 1:18-28 which shows the genesis and judgment of paganism by God. Rom. 1:25 was used as the focal text for his exegesis.

because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (Rom. 1:25)

There was and is a truth exchange involved in paganism. Man through general revelation was confronted with the truth of God, yet rejected it because of his sin. Instead of the truth of God, God gave them over to a lie, a single lie which destroys them in their sin. The Creator who is blessed forever is exchanged by the unregenerate with the creature. Two exchanges with a single disastrous result. Having rejected God, they substituted God with idols of their making in line with the creaturely world, as Prof Jones shows in contrasting the sequence of mention of created things in Rom. 1:23 with Gen. 1:26

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” (Gen. 1:26)

¹ Greek: *aner* (ανηρ) + *gune* (γυνη) = Man-woman

² Of course, homosexuality et al can exist without paganism, but it has no root at all unless paganism is assumed

³ Homo-cosmology: Worldview of similar things, Hetero-cosmology: Worldview of different things

and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. (Rom. 1:23)

Instead of exercising dominion as a steward of creation, Man elevated them to be his gods. The Creator-Man-creature relationship is turned upside down by rebellious humanity who irrationally rejected God and glorified the creature instead in an act of defiance against God. Their minds are made futile, heart darkened (v. 21) and minds finally debased (v. 28). Such a role reversal is judged by God who in turn gave them over to destruction. Instead of mastering their desires, the lusts of Man's hearts mastered him and lead him into destruction. Sexual promiscuity abounds as shown in verse 24 and this leads to the emergence of blatant sexual pervasion in homosexuality, both male (v. 27) and female (v. 26), active and passive (c.f. 1 Cor. 6:9)⁴, in which the divinely instituted difference between male and female are ignored and deliberately snubbed. Of course, this leads to further and more wicked sin as shown in verses 29-32 in which every imaginable and deplorable sin was exhibited by such men in one form or another.

Rebellion against God in the hearts and minds of mind thus lead to irrationality and gross idolatry first, before resulting in multiplication of sin and growing in wickedness and lust, ending with sexual pervasion and collapse into utter wickedness. Ultimately, sinful Man and entire societies trod this path of destruction, unless they turn back to God. In the USA of course, the rank apostasy of the churches in embracing Liberalism at the turn of the 20th century has opened the way for sexual degradation in the 1960s followed by the near mainstreaming of Homosexuality at the turn of the 21st century. In the end, the fight is clearly between Christianity/ Theism and Paganism/ Monism, with the other options being distortions and mixtures of one of the following

With this, we come to an end. The only way back for individuals and societies is to repent of their rebellion (humanism) and subsequent idolatry (paganism). Those who refuse to do so will destroy themselves and even societies. History has shown that any civilization which embraces immorality of which homosexuality is one example will sooner or later be destroyed from the inside out. And they do so when their idolatry has run its spiritual course of degradation into moral degradation.

In the subsequent Q&A session, I asked Prof Jones a question relating to Eastern spirituality, or more particularly Eastern Orthodoxy and their idea of *theosis* (θεοσις). Prof Jones stated that he thinks that the EO's idea of *theosis* is very dangerous, in light of the need to preserve the Creator/creature distinction. Another person asked a question regarding Descartes' idea of Cartesian Dualism, of which Prof Jones is not too sure about, and I too (being more a modernistic philosophical question rather than a theological question anyway).

One question which I should have asked is with regards to the current "evangelical" fascination with spiritual disciplines and Contemplative Meditation as promoted by the Quaker Richard Foster. In light of the New Spirituality, such spiritual disciplines seem to be the Trojan horse of the Pagan worldview into Christianity itself. Christians who would disavow the New Age would nevertheless be open to such "ancient monastic practices", as if anything found within any part of Church Tradition is biblical by default or are to be "innocent until proven guilty". Looking within for spirituality comes from the Monist or Pagan worldview, while the Christian worldview looks without to the Bible: the absolute, objective Word of God.

⁴ Active homosexual = (Gr.) αρσενοκοιται (*arsenokoitai*) from root αρσενοκοιτης (*arsenokoites*); Passive homosexual = (Gr.) μαλακοι (*malakoi*) from root μαλακος (*malakos*)

In conclusion, the talk by Prof Peter Jones was a good one, and in fact something much needed in the churches. It is a pity that so-called evangelical churches are more interested in “redeeming culture or the marketplace” and of being “healthy and wealthy” instead of preparing the troops for battle against the darkness of this world for the salvation of souls and the building up of the Church. May God open the eyes of the churches and bring reformation and revival to them, for otherwise we would be unprepared for the coming darkness. Amen.