



A Totem Tale

A parody is a comic caricature, a ludicrous likeness, an absurd analogy, a ridiculous representation which exposes a particular reality by comparing it to another of a different order. Parodies can be a very useful verbal or literary tool to expose the “red herrings” of diversions which distract attention from real issues; to expose “hobby horses” whereby men keep reverting back to repetitive over-emphasis without critical thought; to expose inane traditions which become familiar ruts wherein we fail to recognize the absence d'esprit. By the use of parody one can be direct yet subtle at the same time.

Fires burn in each settlement across the land. The sound of tom-toms can be heard in the background. It is the time for the perennial carving of totem-poles. Congregating in our tee-pees, each group heatedly considers the essentials of their belief-system. After due consultation of these spirit-matters, consensus is achieved within each tribe as to how they will stack their totem-pole.

The meticulous carving begins. Every detail is important, because each cut has implied meaning. Distinction must be achieved, even in the intensity of the painted colors. Extreme effort is made to make it appear life-like. Duly carved and erected for all to see, the winged appendages give it the form of a cross. The totem-pole becomes our rallying-point—a point of social and religious identification. If you are willing to stack *your* totem-pole like we stack *our* totem-pole, then you can be a part of our tribe.

But if you insist on any other conformity to your spiritual belief-system, then we are obliged to separate from you and make war with you. It is a matter of honor for us to make every effort to cut down or otherwise topple your totem-pole. Any divergence, regarded as unorthodoxy, is to be condemned. Diversity cannot be condoned in such important religious matters. It is a warring matter!

Oh, we are not really a violent people. We make every attempt to isolate ourselves in our separated enclaves of piety. But, at the same time, there is a sense of achievement and victory in attacking another's totem pole, for we thereby identify the superiority of our own. In our contemporary sophisti-

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cation, though, we have, for the most part, modified our battles to the hurling of verbal barbs and vituperative condemnation. Our war-dances are more vociferous than our warring is ferocious.

Long live our totem-pole! It is the symbol of our belief and commitment. It is worth fighting for. We consider its integrity to be a life-and-death matter, necessitated to preserve our distinctive heritage, present identity and our hopes for the future.

Yes, we require due reverence to our totemic icon. We require precise initiatory rites, engage in periodic oaths of allegiance, and regularly involve ourselves in identification pow-wows surrounding our totem-pole.

You ask if we worship our totem-pole? Is it a deity-figure? How dare you infer that it is an idol, or that we engage in idolatry!

Do we not see an abundance of ideological idols in fundamentalist circles today? They are not carved of wood, but they are constructed of even harder material—molded in the concrete of inflexible minds.

Nevertheless, they are lifeless icons. The fundamentals have been carefully analyzed, systematized, theologized and fossilized in credal statements of faith. Allegiance to this ideological construct is regarded as more important than a vital fellowship with Christ or other Christians. This is nothing less than idolatry—worshipping (attributing *worship* to) an ideological idol. A.W. Tozer once defined idolatry as “the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him.”

Oh, that we might recognize our spiritual unity in Christ Jesus and return to a common worship of God in Christ. □

—Jim Fowler



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