

# **A Lost God in a Lost World**

From deception to deliverance;  
a plea for authentic Christianity

Melvin Tinker



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Melvin Tinker's analysis is characteristically clear, punchy, perceptive, and penetrating. *A Lost God in a Lost World* is another magnificent example of wide-ranging and carefully applied biblical exposition from one of England's leading pastor-theologians.

**Benjamin Dean, Dean of Postgraduate Studies, Lecturer in Systematic Theology, George Whitefield College, Cape Town, South Africa**

*A Lost God in a Lost World* is an invitation to turn from gods of our own imagination to look at the real God. It's an invitation to a bigger view of the human problem and a bigger view of God. It's a transforming vision. In a restless, rootless world, here is a firm foundation. For a church drifting to the margins of the culture, here is a way forward—not through a new technique or methodology, but through a renewed understanding of the triune God. *A Lost God in a Lost World* delivers cultural reflection and biblical insight in a highly accessible manner.

**Tim Chester, pastor of Grace Church, Boroughbridge, and tutor with the Acts 29 Oak Hill Academy**

Addressing the confusion of modern life, Melvin Tinker offers a sure guide to both the crisis of our time and the way to confront and overcome it. His approach is direct, to the point and compelling in the force of its logic. This is a book for both individual and group study and will challenge its readers with both the tragedy of human life and the solution provided by God in Jesus Christ.

**Gerald Bray, Research Professor of Divinity, Beeson Divinity School, Samford University**

That the church in the West is at crisis-point few would deny. The question is: what can be done? Some suggest better management and structuring; others advocate more shift with the culture. Melvin Tinker plumbs deeper, arguing for a Christian integrity based on glorious but all-too-neglected core truths. With winning clarity, this book expounds those humanising truths which can reform and refresh the church. Bracing and fortifying, this is a tonic for today.

**Dr Michael Reeves, Director of Union and Senior Lecturer, Wales Evangelical School of Theology, Bridgend**

Melvin Tinker's book powerfully addresses the heart of an issue that lies behind many of the ills of Christian life in this age: reducing God to the measure of our own minds, and trying to bend his will to meet our own desires. With each chapter focusing on a different passage of Scripture and highlighting a different aspect of God's glorious character and work, he refreshes us by showing our great need for God in his greatness and glory.

**Dr Tim Ward, Associate Director of the Proclamation Trust's Cornhill Training Course**

For Mark and Becky Lanier  
The Hull Mission Team  
And all the members of the  
Lanier Biblical Literacy Class, Houston, Texas.



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# 1

## When God is Weightless

### The Problem of Idolatry, Isaiah 44:9–23

One of the greatest hindrances to the flourishing of the Christian faith in the West is not unbelief but belief. It is not that Britain, for example, is full of unbelievers, those who are ardent atheists. The likes of Professor Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and Stephen Fry are, in fact, few and far between. Rather the West is made up of many *believers*. How can this be so? To answer that question we need to ask a prior question: what are the marks of *any* believer?

There are three things: first, a believer *worships*. This is not just a matter of adoration and praise, but whatever a person gives themselves over to as the centre of their world, in short, what they live for. Secondly, the believer *serves* so that what is seen as the ultimate goal in life is what we give ourselves over to working for. Thirdly, a believer *proclaims* or to use a

more contemporary term—*advertises*. Here there is the inner compulsion to tell other people about what drives and directs us in our day-to-day living. With the rise of social media the power to do this is unprecedented in the history of the human race.

When we take those three features of a ‘believer’—someone who worships, serves and proclaims—it becomes pretty obvious that the West is made up of believers alright, but not Christian believers. It is composed of what the Bible calls idolaters, people who believe in things, maybe even in ‘god’, but usually one of their own making, other than the one true God of the Bible.<sup>1</sup> What is more, as we shall see, idolaters are to be found as much *within* the church as outside it.<sup>2</sup>

The pull towards idolatry has always been a constant problem for God’s people. It is clearly there in Isaiah’s day amongst Jews who with their mouths would recite daily their ‘creed’, the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4–5, ‘Hear, O Israel:

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1. A notable example of an advocate of DIY religion is the singer Annie Lennox. On the CD sleeve of her collection of traditional Christmas carols, *A Christmas Cornucopia* she writes, ‘While I don’t personally subscribe to any specific religion, I do believe that the heart of all religious faith has to be rooted in love and compassion, otherwise it serves no purpose. For me the word ‘Christ’ represents the sacred and mysterious divinity in life ... which could just as easily be ‘Buddha’ or ‘Allah’.

2. Carl Trueman suggests that in considering modern day idolatries, the Marxist concept of the *fetish* is a useful concept readily at hand, ‘A fetish is something to which human beings ascribe a power it does not possess in and of itself.’ ‘The Banality of Evil’, in *Minority Report—Unpopular thoughts on everything from ancient Christianity to Zen-Calvinism* (Mentor, Christian Focus, 2008) p. 83.

The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength', but who by their lives demonstrated that they worshipped anything *but* the Lord their God alone.<sup>3</sup> Neither is it insignificant that the apostle John writing to Christians in his own day ends his first letter with the terse command 'Dear children, keep yourselves free from idols' (1 John 5:21). From the beginning of the Bible to its end, idolatry is seen as the besetting sin of the human race. Indeed it defines sin because sin is an attempt to dethrone God by putting ourselves or something else in his place. It is the 'original sin'. Idolatry lies at the heart of human rebellion. As one writer has recently put it, 'In the Bible there is no more serious charge than that of idolatry'.<sup>4</sup>

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3. Daniel Block has extensively argued that the main purpose of the Shema is to reinforce Israel's covenant allegiance to Yahweh alone and so can be rendered accordingly as 'Our God is Yahweh, Yahweh alone'; 'The Shema should not be taken out of context and interpreted as a great monotheistic confession. Moses had made that point in 4:35, 39: "For Yahweh (alone) is God; there is none beside(s) him." Nor is the issue in the broader context the nature of God in general or his integrity in particular—though the nature and integrity of his people is a very important concern. This is a cry of allegiance, an affirmation of covenant commitment in response to the question, "Who is the God of Israel?" The language of the Shema is "sloganesque" rather than prosaic: "Yahweh our God! Yahweh alone!" or "Our God is Yahweh, Yahweh alone!" This was to be the distinguishing mark of the Israelite people; they are those (and only those) who claim Yahweh alone as their God.' Daniel I Block, 'How Many is God? An investigation into the meaning of Deuteronomy 6:4-5' *JETS* 47/2 (June 2004) pp.193-212.

4. Brian S Rosner, 'The Concept of Idolatry', *Themelios* (Vol. 24, No 3, 1999) p. 21.