

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

In the Light of Scripture

by

F. C. H. Dreyer and E. Weller

Copyright © 1960

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

IMAGES

A PROMINENT FEATURE of Roman Catholicism is the worship of the images found in every church. There are images of our Lord, of the Virgin Mary, of the apostles, and very many saints, all set up as objects of adoration, with the usual adjuncts of worship placed conveniently nearby.

We search in vain for any precedent for this, either in the pages of the New Testament or in Christian writings of the early centuries. There are evidences of a fairly early use of Christian symbols in the catacombs— a lion or lamb to represent the Lord, a dove for the Holy Spirit, a boat for the church, an anchor for hope, a palm leaf for victory, and so on.

These were also used on seal rings and as decorations in the houses of Christians, in place of the idolatrous symbols of heathen days.

Toward the end of the third century, pictures came into vogue as ornamentation for the walls of Christian places of worship, and in the fifth century they appear to have been used as a means of instruction for the ignorant in place of the literature which they could not read for themselves. From this, with the decline of spiritual life characteristic of the time, it was an easy step to venerating and worshiping them as being intrinsically holy.

This practice was legalized by the Council of Nicea, 787, which anathematized those who opposed. Nevertheless, the movement was resisted in many places for many years, until in 1562 the Council of Trent issued a further decree permitting the placing of images in churches, and allowing their veneration, not as objects of worship in themselves, but as a way of worshiping those whom they represented, the worship of the object being transferred to the person.

Rome justifies image worship by saying that the prohibition in Exodus 20 applies only to images of heathen deities. To bolster up this idea she combines the first and second commandments of the Decalogue, making them one or else omitting the second commandment, and splits the tenth commandment into two, to make the requisite number. But no juggling with words can alter the force of God's commandments.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me (Exodus 20:4, 5).

These commandments contain two prohibitions which are unqualified and cover every form of false worship, irrespective of the material of which the image was made, or whether it was supposed to be a representation of the Lord—as was probably the case both with the golden calf Aaron made in the wilderness, and those set up by Jeroboam for the northern kingdom of Israel at a later date. That the Decalogue prohibits not only the worship of images, but anything which usurps the place of God, is made clear in Colossians 3:5: “**Covetousness, which is idolatry.**”

Here is the commentary of Moses on these commandments:

Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire; Lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, The likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air, The likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth: And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven (Deuteronomy 4:15-19).

Here it is clear that God forbids worship of likenesses of Himself under any form whatsoever, and the prohibition does not apply only to heathen deities. In her image worship, Rome is acting in plain disobedience to God's express command. There is no need to ask whether worship so offered can find acceptance.

For the worship of the cross and crucifix, Rome appeals to John 19:37: “**They shall look on him whom they pierced.**”

A recent commentary says: This verse foretells the use of the crucifix to move men to repent of their sins and love the wounds of the Lord. Some of the wicked men who looked at Jesus on the cross were smitten with grief and repented, as have many more of later generations. But Christ died on the cross, not to move men to pity Him. As He went to Calvary bearing the heavy cross upon His body already torn and bleeding from the cruel scourging,

There followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck (Luke 23:27-29).

The coming destruction of Jerusalem was going to plunge them into a welter of agony that would be greater even than the physical sufferings of the cross. Our Lord's death had a far deeper purpose than to move men to pity Him. It was the price of our redemption, and the only way God's mercy could reach us. In the garden He prayed, “**If it be possible, let this cup pass from me!**” But it was not possible: by it alone could our salvation be procured, and after His resurrection we find Jesus saying to His disciples:

Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24: 26, 27).

In the upper room, He showed them His hands and His feet, and to Thomas He said:

Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing (John 20:27).

He did this, however, not to move the disciples to pity, but for the purpose of certain identification, that they might be sure that was He Himself, and not a disembodied spirit.

The accounts of our Lord's crucifixion are given in all the Gospels with the greatest reserve about the physical sufferings He must have endured. About the only words that refer to that suffering were, "**I thirst.**" In their preaching of the Gospel, the apostles hardly made a reference to our Lord's physical sufferings to move men's emotions. The salvation that His death brought was their theme, and the strong emphasis was always upon His glorious resurrection as the seal of it.

Representations of Christ's death on the cross first appeared in the fifth century, to set forth pictorially what was recorded in the Gospels, but there was no attempt at studied realism. That tendency did not appear until the eleventh century, and was not developed until the seventeenth, when a Spanish artist, casting away conventional restraints, portrayed the death agonies of the Lord and set the pattern for the centuries that followed, whether the representations were in painting or in sculpture.

These attempted realistic representations of Christ's agony on the cross are characteristic of Roman Catholicism, which makes its strongest appeal to the emotions. The crucifixes and calvaries found in such abundance in many Roman Catholic lands all tend to obscure the fact that our Lord's sufferings and atoning death are finished and over, that He rose from the dead and today is seated at the Father's right hand. They tend to overshadow the fact that our risen victorious Lord, ever living to make intercession for us, is pleading His precious blood once shed on the cross on our behalf.

The Roman Catholic Church has done with the cross what the Israelites of Hezekiah's day did with the brazen serpent which Moses had made in the wilderness. The children of Israel had a true relic, seven hundred years old, commemorative of the great grace of healing which their forefathers had received by its means. But now it had become a snare to them and the thing which had been a foreshadowing of Christ's sufferings on the cross had been perverted into an idol. Hezekiah dealt with this sin ruthlessly. In spite of its antiquity, its historical associations, and its spiritual significance, he broke the brazen serpent to pieces, calling it Nehushtan, a thing of brass (II Kings 18:3, 4; see also John 3:14, 15).

When our Lord returns to this earth, as He will in power and great glory, He will utterly abolish, not only the idols of the heathen, but also the images, the idols in the churches, wherever they are found.

And the idols he shall utterly abolish. And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; To go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of? (Isaiah 2:18-22).

~ end of chapter 27 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
