

OBJECTIONS TO CATHOLIC IDOLATRY CONSIDERED

Catholics are definitely idolaters. Statues for veneration are too essential for us to believe that they are merely reminders of saints and of Jesus. And why are Bible texts not venerated from which we can learn better? A statue of Jesus does not tell us as much as a plaque with good quotes from him. And there is the worship of the wafer as God. Catholics say that we have got them all wrong for images were venerated in the Old Testament.

THE FAITH OF OUR FATHERS, James Cardinal Gibbons, Forty Ninth Edition, John Murphy and Co Publishers, Baltimore, London, New York, 1897 (TAN Books keep this book in print) says something interesting. It says that Catholics are not idolaters because Catholics believe that there is no virtue or divinity in the images they venerate but that the images only picture the saints and Christ (page 235). They have the nerve to boast about that and then turn around and worship the communion wafer which they do believe there is virtue and divinity in. Moreover, they believe that because Jesus is everywhere and so is Mary they are indeed inside their images and pictures.

God told Moses to have statues of angels put on top of the Ark of the Covenant. Catholics say, "The ark was a symbol of God's presence and the people prayed towards it and honoured it. In principle, God sees nothing wrong with the Catholic practice of honouring images. Even if there had been no statues on it their venerating the box would prove image-veneration to be lawful". But the ark was not seen by the people and may have been covered up when it was taken out of the Tabernacle. Catholics answer, " But they knew it was there with its angels on it and venerated it. They saw it in their minds and venerated this picture. It said that the people prayed in the direction of the ark." The ark was regarded like a throne of God. It was not the ark but who used it as a throne that was the focus of the devotion. The ark was not a representation of God but a throne. God was believed to be invisibly present between the angels in a special way. It was the presence that was worshipped not the ark. The ark far from detracting from the idea an invisible imageless God in fact supported it. The focus was the invisible God and his invisibility was stressed by it.

To honour something that God is enthroned upon is not to say that images should be honoured as temples of God for God is enthroned everywhere and not just on the ark. The ark seems to be a reminder to the people that God though everywhere was enthroned among them. Wrong. It was the invisibility above it that was the reminder.

Suppose the ark really was a reminder of God in the Catholic sense that a statue would be, the ark business would be an exception to the law against images and would imply that it is not right to hold that God has made something his throne or tabernacle unless he has said so. The ark might have been an authorised idol for God explicitly commanded Moses to have it made. If it was then by what authority do Catholics worship statues of Mary and St Teresa and venerate the Turin Shroud? There is no explicit divine command to venerate these things. There is no explicit divine command to even make them never mind venerate them.

The notion that God forbids images as idolatrous and then allows exceptions makes God contradict himself. If idolatry is wrong it is always wrong. If you assume God is consistent, then you must assume that the ark was not honoured or an authorised idol but the presence above it was the focus which is by no means the same as adoring an idol thinking God is inside it for with the ark you had to forget about the ark and think of who was upon it. God appeared on a throne in the Bible. The ark was another of his thrones.

The Jews not being allowed to touch the ark would imply that they were not pure enough to go near God. It was God not the ark they respected.

The fact that images of angels were made despite God's rigid ban on anything that could attract the people to idolatry shows that angels were not objects of worship. God was confident that though Israel liked the notion of honouring other gods it did not like the thought of venerating angels. There was no chance of it turning angels into Gods.

God refused to take the form of anything the people could make an idol of when he appeared to them on Mount Sinai. He did not even take the form of an angel which indicates that angel worship is forbidden. The veneration of angels, and therefore saints, as in the Catholic Church is condemned. Just as God said it as serious sin to adore gods who were not gods so the Church of Rome has saints that are not saints. It has relics which are not true relics. Pius VII confirmed that the relics of St Francis were real though they were duds (page 369, Handbook to the Controversy with Rome, Vol 2)

The bit in the Bible where those who looked at a bronze serpent were cured does not establish the veneration of images as lawful for the snake was no more venerated than a sunset one looks at to lift one's mind.

Solomon put images of angels in his temple but that is not to say that they were venerated. God did not say he approved of what Solomon did. He sometimes didn't bother correcting him and does he bother correcting any of us?

Catholics argue that when God became Jesus he made image worship right. Then God let people worship him in and before his body. But bowing before an image is not bowing before God but what represents him while Jesus was God according to Catholic dogma. The situations are different. Jesus had to have a physical form. Perhaps Jesus gave all who saw him the grace to focus on God and not God as represented in the body of Jesus. There is no evidence that Jesus claimed to be God so he cannot be used as an excuse for idolatry. When God would not appear in any form that could be made into an image though the form would be God he would not appear in the person of Jesus. If the New Testament says Jesus was God and agrees with the Old Testament then it follows that Jesus was symbolically God for he was so like him and was the one we have to get to know to see what God is like.

If Jesus was able to change the Jewish law he had to be explicit that he was doing so. Laws have to be changed by the book. He never said he allowed image worship.

The Catholic Church is a pagan religion. It worships false Gods for the Bible says that worshipping or venerating even images of the true God is to adore other Gods. God speaks of himself as being jealous and that he will punish idolatry with the most severe sentences possible. Catholicism then is a dangerous religion. There is no Bible authority at all for Catholic image veneration. The arguments here were all given to the Church leadership when it was declared by the iconoclasts in the first millennium that image worship was idolatry but because the people mostly wanted their idols and saints the Church ignored the arguments and put popularity first. Nobody argued, incidentally in those days, that since the papacy approved of images that it must be right which is interesting. It shows that the papacy today as the head of the Church and the supreme earthly teacher of the Church was a subsequent invention of the Church.

The Catholic Church has many allegedly miraculous images and has the Turin Shroud. Apparitions of Mary for example encourage images and want basilicas set up around images of the apparition. According to scripture these things are the work of the Devil.

The Church fails miserably in showing that statue or image veneration is permitted by God.

When Critics Ask, Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, Victor Books, Illinois ,1992 demonstrates how Catholic use of images in worship is against the Bible.

The book lays out a table - see page 84 and I have used the table in making the following list and have made clarifications.

FORBIDDEN Images as objects of worship are forbidden

PERMITTED Images that are not objects of worship

FORBIDDEN Images appointed and set up by man, eg images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and statues of Mary

PERMITTED Images directly and explicitly commanded by God. Roman Catholicism has accounts of apparitions of Jesus and Mary that commanded the use of images. This is the same thing as men not God authorising the images because the Church holds that revelation ceased two thousands years ago. The apparitions only look back to that revelation and can't add to it. They are only reminders and that is why you are allowed to disbelieve all apparitions if you so choose. So the apparitions don't have any authority of their own.

FORBIDDEN Images for religious purposes for flowers to be put before them, for them to be carried in procession, for them to be bowed before. If you really honour say a saint, you will not be bowing before the image but trying to stir up a likeness to the saint in your heart. For example, instead of looking at a statue of St Zita the saint of housekeepers, try and be a Zita and honour her like that.

PERMITTED Images for the purpose of education including religious education

FORBIDDEN To represent what God is like, nothing can adequately capture God. God must be seen inside yourself and you must sense his goodness working in you rather than looking at and bowing before a representation of him. Seeing God's love and goodness working in you is the only way you should be interested in seeing God and picturing God. Even that can lead to idolatry for God is so much bigger than our ideas of goodness. But in that sense it is a necessary evil. Using images then would be an unnecessary evil - an act of disobedience to God and an act of idolatry.

PERMITTED To express the truth, no image of God was ever permitted or used with God's permission in the Bible

FORBIDDEN Used without restrictions or qualifications - eg despite the universal tendency for us to prefer to invent our own gods and have idols the Church provides holy statues for simple people and superstitious people without restriction or caution. These people will easily treat the image as if it were divine or a god or a saint. You can be an idolater without even realising it.

PERMITTED Severe restrictions in the use of images to avoid the risk of idolatry -eg how the cherubim on the ark of the covenant were rarely seen. The ark was kept out of view. The cherubim on the ark were never prayed to for the people prayed to God not angels or saints. They did not represent beings to be prayed to.

We conclude that the use of images in worship is a sin according to the Bible. The Bible wants you to look for prompts from God in your heart that invite you to and incline you to do good instead of honouring images and carrying them in procession.

