

## WHAT IS IDOLATRY AND WHY IT IS UNAVOIDABLE IN RELIGION?

### WHAT IS IDOLATRY?

What is idolatry? Idolatry is simply the worship of what is not divine as divine. It is treating something as God when it is not. Anything can be an idol – a statue or even a mental picture.

Idolatry is the worship of what is not God as sacred. It's a violation of the right God has to be worshipped. The Bible God condemns it severely.

Idolatry is popularly assumed to refer to people thinking images see and hear and help them and deserve to be worshipped as gods.

No idolater worships a statue just because it is a statue.

1 The idolater may hold that the entity he or she worships is present in the image. So the image is not worshipped but the being residing in it.

2 Sometimes its thought that the entity or even magical power that needs to be prayed to before the power can work has become the image.

3 The third possible view is that a deity is simply represented by the image and that there is no god or saint inside the image so that the reverence and respect paid to the image is really meant for the divine person depicted.

You can see that 1 and 3 are in every practical sense identical. In both cases the image is a representation of the god. It is just that 1 has the god inside it and the other hasn't.

What about 2 where the deity puts magical power in the image that you can draw on by honouring the image or the idea that the deity is turned into the image just like bread is turned into Jesus in the Catholic faith. Even in those it is not the image that is worshipped but the god. The image is worshipped because it is the God which differs in no practical sense from the idea that the god is inside the image. What if the image is not the god? Then the mistake is not in worshipping a statue but in where the god is. You can honour the king even if you mistakenly think he is in the palace or mistakenly think that the figure you bow before in the fog is him.

It follows then that if idolatry is wrong then all three of these approaches is idolatry and wrong. They stand and fall together. In all three, the image represents the God. That is the main thing. The image wouldn't be used for the god to dwell in if it didn't represent her or him. Also, where the god is is not as important as treating the image as the representation of the god for he can get the worship offered before it whether he is in it or not.

Catholics practice idolatry according to the third approach and also the second for they regard communion as the body of God

### IDOLATRY UNAVOIDABLE?

Many people get a nice glow inside them when they pray and think of God. They pray without realising that they are praying to this feeling.

The best theologians say that God is being itself and you cannot talk about what God is only about what he is not. They say that the thought of a God who is in time and like us is idolatry.

If you adore your perception of God, you are not adoring God. Even if your perception is right that is not the point. You are still intending to honour what you think God is not what he is. It would take a miracle for a person to really honour and worship God.

Our hearts deceive us very well. We could think we are adoring him when we are actually adoring a mental and emotional image of him.

When people who pray to God find idolatry so hard to avoid, it must be nearly impossible to honour a saint and pray to a saint without being an idolater. The veneration of saints then must be rejected outright as blasphemous and heretical and corrupting. It is a turning away from the true good which is God.

Imagine then how bad it is that Catholics worship the Eucharist as Jesus Christ! They pretend that a wafer in which no physical change has taken place is still physically changed into the real body and blood of Jesus! That is worse than anything the pagans ever did!

To honour alleged God-men like Jesus, statues of saints and relics is idolatry. God is goodness. So if you sense his goodness and worship what you sense that is true worship. Images and relics and the Jesus God of the Catholics are not directly focused on goodness. A man who sits with his wife by the fire and ignores her to focus on her photo is not really honouring her at all. A man who instead of seeing the goodness that is God inside his heart and chooses to focus on some sense object such as Jesus or a communion wafer or a holy statue is rejecting God for sense stimulation. He is not honouring God but only making it look like as if he does. He is not really even honouring true goodness.

Christians objected strenuously when the Catholic Church had people touching images of saints and God and carrying them in procession and kissing them and crowning them. They said this was idolatry and condemned by God in the Bible as false worship. The Catholics responded that those activities were not wrong in themselves and that God was only objecting to honouring images of fictitious gods implying he had no problem with images of him. This answer in effect implies that you may treat an image as if it were God himself and this is fine. But its still degrading idolatry. It implies that worshipping images of God is okay but worshipping images of Zeus is not. It ignores the point that the image is really a substitute for God. An image of God would be more dangerous than an image of a fake god. Why? Because the fake god is a bad counterfeit of God while the other is a better one. The Church says that Satan does far better not to tell lies to mislead believers but to distort and pollute much of the truth they have and he will use even the truth for his own ends. The deceived end up blinded to the reality. If he told them loads of lies instead they would see through them.

The Bible teaches that only fools deny that there is a God and Romans 1 says all on earth have an impression that there is God. So the idolater worships idols before he would have it be thought that he has no God. That is his way of dealing with his attraction towards God. He worships God in his idols. But that doesn't mean that God approves of idolatry. On the contrary he reveals that it is the greatest and most dangerous sin possible. The sin may largely consist of a man needing God and refusing to go to him but choosing to quiet the need with a fake god.

The Church says that there are traces of sin in all that we do. We might do a really good and praiseworthy thing but there will be traces of sin in it. It's not perfectly holy or good. It says we have a bias towards serving ourselves and being independent of God. Clearly then we must have a predisposition to idolatry. You would need to be a perfect saint - impossible for even the saints didn't claim to be perfect - in order to honour a statue without being idolatrous. It is more natural to be idolatrous in your venerating the saints than it is statues. It gets worse and worse. The Catholic who venerates an image is one thing but if the image is of a saint the idolatry is multiplied!

