The Commandments. II.

Images and Pictures of God.

After these things, Moses went up into the mount of the Lord, as the Lord commanded him; and there he dwelt forty days and forty nights. The Lord said to Moses, "You shall see the Lord, and you shall live." And Moses built an ark of shittim wood, and covered it with gold. He took two tablets of stone, and wrote on them the commandments and the testimonies of the Lord, as he had commanded him. And the Lord said to Moses, "When you return to Egypt, you will see that all those who rebelled against my word shall die." And Moses wrote them on the tablets, and gave them to the people.

And the people of Israel said to Moses, "We shall do all that the Lord has said, and we will do it quickly." And Moses returned to the mount of the Lord, and declared to the people all the commandments, and the testimonies. And the people said to Moses, "All that the Lord has said we will do." And Moses went down from the mount, and gave the people the tablets, and the people saw the tablets and were afraid, and said, "The Lord is too holy for us, we shall not come near him, for fear that we shall die." And Moses said to the people, "The Lord will not be angry with you for ever, but if you sin against the Lord, you shall perish." And the people said to Moses, "We will do all that the Lord has said, and we will do it quickly." And Moses returned to the mount of the Lord, and there he dwelt forty days and forty nights.
Dent. 4:9-26.
Exodus. 32:1-14
Exodus XX: 4, 5, 6.

Sinai's Summit is still full in view, and from that canopy of cloud Heals forth again the voice of God, announcing the second command of the Decalogue. Observe that though a Voice was heard, they saw no Shape nor manner of similitude.

Afterwards, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and seventy elders of Israel went up into the mount; and there saw the God of Israel, under his feet, as it were a paved work of sapphire stone and as it were the body of heaven in its clearness. Sapphire being blue, it was like a transparent tessellated pavement of the color and clearness of the sky. Paul says: no man hath seen or can see...
God and this may have been only a vision of that mysterious Shekinah which was to Israel the nearest approach to a visible divine presence. It may have been a formless, disembodied glory, beneath which shone a transparent azure pavement. And even this view was permitted to but a few and for a particular reason. God, in allowing the people to behold no similitude, was impressing the idea of His spirituality.

The second commandment is no mere repetition of the first. The Roman Church, following St. Augustine, combines these two into one, making necessary a division of the tenth in order to make good the number. And, in some of their devotional
books the second commandment is wholly omitted as though it were but an expansion of the first. But a careful examination shows us that the two are not identical. The first refers to the one and only object of our adoration: Jehovah. The second negatively defines the mode of his worship. The first forbids Polytheism, and enjoins monotheism: the second opposes material representations, images, pictures of Jehovah as media of worship, and indirectly enjoins a spiritual worship. God must not be presented under any form or figure, since none can embody or express Him. The command is attended by the sanction of a penalty which merits particular attention.
The thing forbidden is the making of images of God, carved or cast, sculptured or painted. Some have argued that all statues or pictures representing anything, violate the precept. But this is the grossest literalism. Moses was bidden to sculpture cherubim for the Ark of the Covenant, the brazen serpent, the twelve brazen oxen beneath the Laver. Images are forbidden only as representations of an invisible God.

Human nature drifts toward idolatry. Even those who abhor pagan idols and false gods often ask for some visible, tangible representation of Jehovah. Moses, with sagacious insight, recognized this craving and hence especially warned
the people not to indulge it. Yet so strong is this natural tendency, that, even while Moses communed with God upon the mount—on that very plain over which the voice of God had thundered out this command—within the circle of Sinai's awful shadow, the people demanded of Aaron to make them a visible God. And so we see them, breaking of their golden earrings, and Aaron, yielding to their importunity, casts a molten calf and fashions it with a graving tool: and then there this Egyptian idol is set up and worshipped. It would seem that they only meant it as a representation of Jehovah, for the consecration day was proclaimed as a feast unto the Lord. And in the midst of their
idolatrous carnival, while surrounding it with sacrifices, they said "These be thy Gods," etc.

So likewise, when Jeroboam set up calves of gold in Dan and Bethel, he proclaimed them as representatives of Jehovah, or forms under which to worship Him. This broke the first commandment in worshipping the Phoenician deities like his iniquitous wife Jezebel; but Jeroboam broke the second, in presuming to represent the true God to the senses.

We have referred to the yearning for an incarnated deity. Man finds it hard to think of God as an abstract spirit. Partly in condescension to this our weakness, God took the form of man.
But He forbade man to give him a form: and the ex-

felicity of the command allows no mistake as to meaning. (Quote) So people, however high their
culture, have ever worshipped God in a manner
wholly spiritual, except as taught by Him.
The Germania of Tacitus, in his masterly style,
tells us that the ancient Germans, conscious of
the infinite greatness of the celestial beings, did
not imagine they could comprehend them within
temple walls, or represent them by any style of
human countenance; and that in consequence
they consecrated forests and groves, and with
the name of deity entitled that mysterious fires-
ence which they perceived only by the eye of faith.
We read this grand paragraph and say to ourselves, here is at least one people that rose above this weakness of human nature, and amid the shadows of semi-barbarism conceived of God as a pure spirit.

But Gibbon (1:269-270. note) says: when we recollect that the Germans were unskilled in architecture and totally unacquainted with the art of sculpture, we shall readily assign the true reason of a scruple which arose not so much from a superiority of reason, as from a want of ingenuity. The ancient Germans had shapeless idols and when they began to build more settled habitations they raised also temples such as that of the
Goddess Delphana who presided over Divination.

It appears then that even these applauded German tribes were not an exception to the universal violation of the Second Commandment.

Human nature is by no means free of this propensity, even since the incarnation of God, in Christ. He has clothed himself in a human form and we may so think of him and yet we are continually yearning for material help in our approach to him. And because the Roman church caters to this appetite, it has marvellous influence especially with the masses. Both the Greek and Latin churches cultivate this propensity by crosses and crucifixes, robes and relics, images...
pictures, altars and rites, representations of God, of Christ, of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Virgin, Saints and martyrs. And what is the apology for all this high ritualism, this religious paraphernalia? It is this: we worship the one God, but all these are aids to devotion, helping the senses and thus bringing God near to the soul.

If however you desire to prove that God, not without reason, gave the prohibition, go and ask History. We find that, among the Jews, the use of any outward images of Deity always proved a snare. Even Gideon's enjewelled Ephod, formed out of the rich spoils of Midian, and nothing more than a symbol of worship became in time an idol.
The constant departures of the Hebrews from a spiritual worship made it needful for God to scourge their disobedience by long and repeated Captivity. If we turn to the church of the New Testament, we find that, in the dark ages of ecclesiastical history, liturgies, images, and all the attendants of ceremonialism and ritualism came into use, and so far as they have prevailed, true religion has declined and a spiritual worship been corrupted. Occasionally, amid all these degradations, we find spiritual worshippers, but the rarity of such exceptions only makes more conspicuous the fact that all outward representations of God somehow go hand in hand with worldly...
ness formalism and materialism, superstition, propagation and mockery. The church which has most conspicuously broken this second commandment has been mother to most monstrous heresies and practices, so that most Christians see in her the Apocalyptic beast or Babylon. She has gone down the centuries with priestly robes, crucifies and images, teaching human ab-solution, selling indulgences, encouraging righteousness of works, affirming probation after death elevating the Virgin to adoration and making Heaven a court of deified saints.
The very attempts of the Sacred Writers to express God shew the impossibility of properly representing Him under any outward form. He is, in the magnificent imagery of inspiration, pictured forth as seated upon a throne in Heaven, while His feet rest upon earth as a footstool. In the hollow of His palm He holds the seas, He gathers the winds with His fist, as though they were the reins of His courser; He lifts the vast scales wherein mountains are weighed; He guides the stars in their courses. The winds are His chariot and clouds the dust of His feet. His dwelling, immensity; his existence, eternity; his pavilion the canopy of heaven, curtained with the blue firmament. 
let by star lamps. Thunder, his voice, lightning
his flashing glance. What wonder man is bidden
to have no other God, to attempt to make no im-
age of him under any likeness of whatsoever is
in heaven, earth or sea, by nature's most glori-
ous works or arts most splendid creations.

There is a meaning in the fact that all thro' 
the ages the church has debated but never de-
ded, whether even the incarnate God were fair or
unevenly to be hold. In one century, it is asser-
ted that in every physical grace he was the alto-
gether lovely. Another century - and it is main-
tained that he was homely, dark like an arab-
without form or comeliness or beauty to be desired.
The conflict of views arose from opposite opinions as to scripture language. But what means it that no descriptions, recollections or traditions of Christ's personal appearance, have determined these controversies? God had a purpose in allowing the physical features of the Saviour's person to be veiled in obscurity. It was to prevent image worship—the corruption of purely spiritual conceptions, the substitution of the eye of flesh for the eye of faith. Material representations would favor material conceptions. And so while we have authentic portraits, images & busts of great men who lived even prior to Christ's advent, we have not even an approximate likeness of Jesus.
The earliest sculpture representing Him, in the Catacombs of Rome is roughly rudelycut, dates 150 years after his birth, and was doubtless the work of one who had never seen him or any likeness of him: and it is so uncouth that it reminds one of faces on Egyptian obelisks or the ruined façades of Yucatan, which might with almost equal propriety and fidelity represent man beast or devil! And no other likeness of Christ whatever has any claim to be considered as even remotely furnishing a clue to the mystery of his physical appearance: they are all, however, pretenious, the invention of man. God has left us no apology even for the carnal worship of Christ.
The traveler in Rome is especially struck with the frequency with which he meets religious paintings and sculptures which profane sacred things by the attempt to represent to the senses a purely spiritual existence. A refined sensibility is shocked by discovering that these pictures of an old man half-bald, and perhaps with a long flowing white beard, poised in mid-air or without any visible support, represents Almighty God, the Father. It is bad enough to see human art attempting to represent the Son of God, and in every case falling infinitely short of our conceptions of what He must have been, who was God manifest in the flesh.
But to assume that the highest human genius or skill is adequate to put Deity upon canvas or into marble, to represent the infinite disembodied spirit by the form, feature, hues and tints of human flesh strikes us as as simple an abomination. Today no more the effect is to belittle our conceptions of Deity. To suppose that God can be so represented is to degrade our thoughts of Him. Instead of aiding faith and devotion it becomes a hindrance. Every picture or statue of Christ grievously disappoints us. If one feature seems to be expressive and characteristic, another appears equally weak and unfaithful; however, grant the general conception the details are
fatal fault: or perhaps the special and minute particulars, as separately examined, satisfy us far better than the work as a whole. The artist attempts to express gentleness and portrays effeminacy, tries to represent refinement and gets sentimentalism, essays to delineate firmness and strength and gives the impression of obstinacy or even stubbornness. We have yet to see the first representation of our Saviour that does the Christian conception of Him the least justice: they are all weak, unsatisfying and sometimes revolting. But it is not unnatural since Christ was a man that man should by his art attempt to express and embody him to sense.
But to represent God, not as incarnate in Jesus but as the Spiritual Creator, with paint and pencil by hammer and chisel, to attempt to put omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence on canvas or eternity and infinity in marble, to express unspeakable greatness by giant stature, unspeakable power by muscle and sinew, undecaying2

repelling life by wrinkles and baldness, white hair and patriarchal beard is as weak as it is wicked. When we the thousands of cherubs, poised

in air or perched on window seats or perched on cloud— and the countless angels, with bodies of men or of women, and wings of birds, as plenty as pigeons, it all seems fierce and silly; but
these pictures of the Invisible & Infinite Creator impress us as simply abominable & blasphemous. It is well of their advocates to affirm that they are simply helps to the worship of the true God; but the really educated & intelligent, even among Romanists turn from them; and as for the ignorant & superstitious masses, they expend their worship upon the picture or statue. I have myself seen men, women & children bowing in profoundest adoration, kneeling and even prostrate upon marble or mosaic pavements for hours, crossing themselves, clasping hands, mumbling prayers before some tawdry daub of the Virgin, or the Father, or embracing...
And kissing the feet of some marble statue or cope
her casting, representing St. Peter or Our Sordo.
If that is worshipping God through a medium—
what is idolatry? When we see the universal
violation of this command by the Romish ch-
ch in these sensible representations of God, we can
readily see why it is convenient for the Papal
church to merge the second commandment into
the first and make it refer to the use of idols as
false deities, and in their devotional books to
omit it altogether. These devotional books stand
in the stead of the Bible to the Common people
by many of them are actually mistaken for the
Bible: this omission is therefore a politic measure.
From these structures as to the bad taste and ill-
success of representations of God the Father we
cannot except even the masterpieces of Mich-
ael Angelo. In the center of the ceiling of the sis-
tine chapel, we see God the Father brooding over
the waters, and again creating great lights. In
each the same form appears in the second pic-
ture. He is caught by a storm and borne through
infinite space - his long, white beard waving,
his arms outstretched; a third picture repres-
ents God hovering over the waters while Creation
is in progress. Here his appearance is fiercer: and
then a fourth picture shows him bestowing
life upon the first man. Adam lies full-formed
as in a dream, God is softly descending in a violet-gray garment or mantle transparent as if woven of clouds; the head covered with thick white hair and beard - his body sinewy as a giant or Hercules, surrounded and supported by angels, his right hand stretched out and just touching the finger of Adam's left hand as if to transmit an electric spark. Then another picture is the Creation of Eve, in which God the Father stands at the feet of the sleeping Adam, his long grayish violet mantle falling in great folds at his feet. Now suppose we admit that grandeur is expressed in all these paintings that as a portrait of a human body, even Phidias
never equalled it; that Eve's figure is the most beautiful woman ever produced by art. (M. Ang-
1:332-336.) is it not a profane assumption of a power in art to represent an infinite God.

Is it not a violation of the explicit terms of this Commandment: Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image—cast or carved—
or any similitude of anything in heaven earth
sea. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them—
the oriental forms of worship requiring the
bending of the body from waist upward, or
prostration on the ground—nor serve them. It
would seem that we are forbidden either to
construct or countenance or do them homage.
to offer them sacrifice, incense, oblation or libation, making vows, building altars or consecrating to them shrines. For so unmistakable and comprehensible a command, we may find reason in human nature. However innocent at the outset such images might be, the worshipper, in the end would come to associate them with God so as to dwarf his conception of One whose glory cannot be expressed in words nor in forms.

And again: though at first God might be worshiped thru the image, He would at last be forgotten in the image. The result would be the worship of the image itself. Human history vindicates the divine insight & foresight prompting the
command. If, notwithstanding the command, God's chosen people were led astray into image worship and into idolatry, what would have been the case had He been silent. If Greek Roman and ritualistic churches, in face of the divine injunction and the remonstrance of Protestant Christendom, corrupt the worship of God with idolatrous homage to pictures and statues, and crucifixes, prayers to the Virgin and Saints, and the worship of the Host—what excesses might not have been possible had no divine bridle checked our tendency to formalism. We should all have merged worship into the consecration of shrines and the blessing of bells, the ador
raction of relics and the idolatry of images, the vanities of ritualism and the canonizing of saints. Spirituality would have departed from the vitals of the church and prayerless prayers and soulless forms alone would remain. Indeed we have sometimes feared that this curse has indeed come upon the Romish and ritualistic churches. We stand at the door of one of these Cathedrals - we see the panels of the wall filled with paintings of God the Father, Christ, the Virgin and Saints. We see the superstitious worshipper, dipping his finger in the holy water, moving along the aisles with many a prayer and genuflexion bowing low before each picture and image.
trating himself before the high altar—offering ram repetitious, are man's prayer rosters, as the heathen do! Call this reverence for sacred things, religious meditation, fervent devotion—call these helps to worship, aids to faith, but practically this is image worship—idolatry. That in God's sight the use of such images even in worshiping him is idolatous we learn from Stephen's address to his stones: referring to the calf at Sinai which they set up as a symbol of Jehovah, he says, they offered sacrifice unto the idol.
The churches of our own and other similar denominations are thought to be separated from all fellowship with ritualistic image worship by the simplicity of our forms, or the comparative absence of forms. We deny the necessity of uniformity while we assert the necessity of unity in worship. And without conscious bigotry or sectarianism, I confess to a peculiar love for my own denomination because so far removed from idolatry. But we must not forget that we are by no means exempt from danger; art and music endanger the simplicity of Protestant worship. Religion is not hostile to art, but art must not crowd out religion. One of the
risks incurred in connection with a gorgeous ritual, imposing ceremonial and pompous pageantry is that of mistaking poetic feeling for serious emotion. But all artistic effects whether in architecture, decoration, symbolism or music involve the same risk. If you find you are more devout in a massive temple, amid lofty pillars and beneath sublime arches where soft shadows fall from stained windows and soft strains breathe from organ and choir, before rich carvings and richer colorings, if you find that you feel more worshipful, amid such surroundings than in a humbler house of God, where the fragrant incense of praise and of
Prayer floats up from no silver censer. Stop and think: you are laying undue stress upon that which is outward and material, and are in spirit breaking this command. God is the great iconoclast. He would break every image, that by faith alone we may worship Him and commune with Him. The two Commands are one in forbidding us to put anything between us and God, by addition, substitution, or representation. And though negative in form, they imply a positive precept: Thou shalt worship and serve Jehovah alone, and worship Him who is a spirit in spirit and in truth.