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The Commandments. II.

Images and Pictures of God.

Dent. 4: 9-26.

Exodus. 32: 1-14

Acts. 7: 37-50.

Exodus XX: 4. 5. 6.

Sinai's summit is still full in view, and from that canopy of cloud peals 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 Romish 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 omit-
ted, as though it were but an expansion of the first.

But a careful examination shews 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 wor-
ship. The first forbids Polytheism, and enjoins mon-
otheism: the second opposes material represen-
tations, images & pictures of Jehovah, as media of
worship, and indirectly enjoins a spiritual wor-
ship. 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 shadows, the people demanded of Aaron to make them a visible God. And so we see them, breaking off 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 setup calves of Gold in Dan & Bethel, he proclaimed them as representatives of Jehovah, or forms under which to worship Him. Ahab 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 explicitness of the command allows no mistake as to meaning. (Quote.) No 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 presence 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 semibarbarism 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 Thufana 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 purged 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 helps in our approach to Him. And because the Romish 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 jewelled 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 pure religion has declined and a spiritual worship been corrupted. Occasionally, amid all these degeneracies, 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 worldli-

ness formalism and materialism, superstition
profanation and mockery. The church which
has most conspicuously broken this second com-
mandment 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, crucifixes and images, teaching human ab-
solutism, selling indulgences, encouraging right-
eousness 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 coursers, he lifts the vast scales wherein mountains are weighed, he guides the stars in their courses. The winds are his chariots and clouds the dust of his feet. His dwelling, immensity; his existence, eternity; his pavilion the canopy of heaven, curtained with the blue firmament &

lit 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 art's most splendid creations!

There is a meaning in the fact that all thro'
the ages the church has debated but never deci-
ded, whether even the incarnate God were fair or
uneomely to behold. 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 rudely cut; 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 pretensions, 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 aomination. To say 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

fatally faulty: or perhaps the special & 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 & pencil
by hammer & chisel, to attempt to put Omnipres-
ence, omniscience, omnipotence on canvas - or
eternity & infinity in marble - to express un-
speakable greatness by giant stature, unspeak-
able power by muscle & sinew - undecaying
& unending life by wrinkles & baldness, white
hair and patriarchal beard is as weak as it is
wicked. When we ^{see} the thousands of cherubs, poised
in air or perched on window seats or pillowed on
cloud - and the countless angels, with bodies
of men or of women, and wings of birds, "as plenty
as pigeons, it all seems puerile 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 ig-
norant & superstitious masses, they expend
their worship upon the picture or statue. I
have myself seen men women & children bow-
ing in profoundest adoration, kneeling and
even prostrate upon marble or mosaic pave-
ments 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 copper casting, representing St Peter or Our Saviour. If that is worshipping God through a medium - what is idolatry! When we see the universal violation of this command by the Romish church 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 strictures as to the bad taste and ill
success of representations of God the Father we
cannot except even the master-pieces of Mich
ael angelo. In the Center of the ceiling of the Sis-
tine chapel, we see God the Father brooding over
the waters, ^{dividing light from darkness.} 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 shews 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 & beard - his body sinewy as a giant or Hercules, surrounded and supported by angels, his right hand stretched out & just touching the finger of Adams 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 picture is the most beautiful woman ever produced by art. (m. ang. 1: 332. 336.) is it not all 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 com-
prehensive 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
can neither be expressed in words nor in forms.
And again: though at first God might be worship-
ped thro' the image, he would at last be forgot-
ten 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 so led astray into image worship and so into idolatry, what would have been the case had He been silent. If Greek Roman & Ritualistic churches, in face of the divine injunction and the remonstrance of Protestant Christendom, corrupt the worship of God with idolatrous homage to pictures & statues, and crucifixes, prayers to the Virgin & 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 ado-

ration 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 genuflection bowing low before each picture and image, pros.

trating himself before the high altar - offering
vain repetitions, Ave maria's, pater noster, as the
heathen do! Call this reverence for sacred things,
religious meditation, pious devotion - call
these helps to worship, aids to faith, but prac-
tically this is image worship - idolatry. That in
God's sight the use of such images even in wor-
shipping him is idolatrous we learn from
Stephen's address to his stoners: referring to
the calf at Sinai which they set up as a sym-
bol 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 & 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 ^{sentiment} poetic feeling
for pious emotion. But all artistic effects whe-
ther 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 & 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 be-
tween 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 wor-
ship Him who is a spirit in spirit and in
truth.

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