



GOD, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; 3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Hebrews 1:1-3)

A perennial question arises from time to time concerning images and their proper use by the people of God. Most often, the source of the question arises from modern theologians trying to re-think the understanding of the Holy Scriptures and the Reformers themselves. To those who have driven an anchor of faith into the Holy Ground of Scripture, the issue is mute; but to those who are constantly trying to dig up the bones of settled doctrine, Paul makes the allusion: *Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.* (2 Tim 3:7)

I believe it is perfectly natural for such questions to arise in the heart of a new convert to Christ who must be fed on the milk of the Gospel; but for those who have long been scholars of the Word and who should be seeking the meatier portions, this question should have been settled long ago.

Perhaps the question arises from a misreading of the Second Commandment of the Ten given at Sinai: *4 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: 5 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.* (Ex 20:4-5) If we understood this Commandment out of context of all remaining Scripture, we could conceivably believe that we could neither paint, carve, or even imagine in our minds the shape and form of some image on earth or in heaven. Would this make sense when our Lord used so many physical and material examples of images on earth to reflect those in Heaven? By these I mean each article of furniture in the Wilderness Tabernacle (and later in the Temple) of things familiar and physical to represent the Presence of Christ - the Candles, the Shewbread, the Altar of Incense, and the Mercy Seat. Even the Brazen Altar at the entrance of the Tabernacle symbolized the greater sacrifice which must be made for all to enter, and that sacrifice was made at Calvary. And what of the word-pictures God uses to represent His elect? *16 Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and*

the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. 17 And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. (Mal 3:16-17)

The New Testament, too, uses the same resort to images and word-pictures to reveal spiritual truths that we are incapable of perceiving without the aid of such images. Does anyone reading this devotion truly believe that God is referring to an actual mortal lamb when He refers to His only Begotten Son as the Lamb of God? His people are even referred to as vessels of the palace: *“But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonor. - (2 Tim 2:20)* The immediate response to this verse is to imagine such a great house with those various vessels of wood, clay, silver and gold; and then to wonder of which nature we are. These are just as certainly pictures of things on earth as if drawn with the painter’s brush.

Remember the great Red Dragon of Revelations 12? Did you suppose that was truly a large reptile, or did you read the rest of the chapter to learn that this Red Dragon represented Satan? Most of the Parables of Jesus relied upon the mundane objects of daily life to represent higher truths of spiritual things. So, an image that reminds us of great truths are not forbidden by the Second Commandment. Well, then what does the Second Commandment counsel against? The entire commandment is composed of three verses only. Here is what the old, reliable Jamieson-Faussett-Brown defines the meaning: *“Thou shalt not make... any graven image... thou shalt not bow down thyself to them - that is, ‘make in order to bow.’* Under the auspices of Moses himself, figures of cherubim, brazen serpents, oxen, and many other things in the earth beneath, were made and never condemned. The mere making was no sin - it was the making with the intent to give idolatrous worship” - Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary

We do not err as does Rome in bowing down and praying to man-made images in the Reformation Church of England. The Oxford Boys who desired to undo the Reformation and return to Rome may be represented in those Anglo-Roman churches of our day, but certainly not in those churches who take the Reformers seriously and who adhere strictly to the Thirty Nine Articles of Religion of the English Reformation.

If images were no allowed, we would be forced to remove the crosses from every church. That cross is a reminder of who we are and the great sacrifice of our Lord that set us free. In fact, if we did not see mental images of things in our minds, we would not be able to even THINK.

We, ourselves, are made in the likeness and image of God: *26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. 28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Gen 1:26-28)* There are strong images in this text. First that man is created in the image of God - that is a tripartite image: body, soul, and spirit. It hails back to the principles underlying the Trinit - too deep for this devotion. But it also again postulates God original condition for His first Institution of Holy Matrimony as being between one man and one woman. “Male and Female” describes in a mystical way the image of God. It cannot be corrupted by man. If both natures are in the Triune God, why should we expect less in the Institution of Marriage. Marriage is also a fore-picture of the Church – God’s second Institution.

We could scarcely know God if we had no defining image to reveal Him to us. His Son was revealed in a physical body so that we could better know God. It is difficult to imagine the appearance of a Spirit, but a physical image resolves the matter – “*Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.*”

It is good that we attribute physical properties to heavenly things so that we can associate meaning and remembrance of them. MY wife was fully converted in an Armenian Orthodox Church of all places. It was not by any doctrine being preached for the church was not in session. We had visited the building in Esfahan, Iran, in order to satisfy our curiosity since we had lived nearby the church for a few years. The building was enormous, but adobe seemed to be the major construction of the building. It had little to recommend it from its outside appearance (just like the goat-hair covering of the Tabernacle); but inside was a different matter. The walls were covered in paintings of the life of our Lord, his birth ministry and crucifixion. My wife was enthralled to see a graphic illustration of what Christ suffered for us. The life of the Apostles was also depicted, and the manner of their deaths. It was a spiritually powerful expression of faith. My wife, from that day forth, became a fervent Christian. She did not look upon the images as being Holy in themselves, but as representing Holy truths that were clearly outlined in Scripture.

It would be condescending of the English to portray Christ in some form foreign to English understand - and perhaps politically correct. We see Christ as we see ourselves, only with the perfection and holiness of which we are devoid. The Englishman sees Christ as an Englishman. The Chinese see Christ with Chinese features. So does the African, the Middle Easterner, the Indian, the Pacific Islander see Christ in their own image and likeness. To the Chinaman, Christ appears clothed in the alphabet of China for He is the WORD in every language. To the Korean, Japanese, Kenyan, Philippine, German, French, and English - Jesus appears in the alphabet and vocabulary of their own native language for He truly is Christ, the Son of God, to all peoples.

True art does not corrupt the natural images of God's Creation as does Picasso and others. True Art emulates the beauty of God's Creation though imperfectly; yet it represents the best efforts of man to reflect of the beauty of God in all things created. The beauty of true art opens our minds eye more fully to the beauty of God just as the Last Supper of Da Vinci reveals, for the first time in graphic art, a moment in time when Christ said, *One of you shall betray me!* That painting also employs, for the first time in art, the principle of 'point perspective.' This technique draws, in a marvelous way, the focus of the observer immediately to the Person of the Central Figure – Jesus Christ. Is true art Godly? Sure it is, because it opens our memory to things divine and heavenly!