

Iconoclastic Controversy

Brendon Biggs

2022

The word “icon” comes from the Greek word *eikon*, meaning “image.” It is defined as “a religious painting or picture which is understood to act as a window through which the worshipper may catch a closer glimpse of the divine that would otherwise be possible.”¹ The term “iconoclastic” is from the Greek “breaking of the images” and was an early controversy in the Church. Iconoclasts “accused those who used icons as idolatry, and claimed the making and worship of images was forbidden in the Bible.”² Does the use of icons in the Church equate to a violation of the second commandment? Are there uses that do not violate the second commandment and can be of benefit? In this paper I will look at the biblical passages surrounding icons, the evolution of the use of icons in the church, and the historical debates surrounding them and determine if there are appropriate uses of images.

BIBLICAL PASSAGES

In Exodus 20:5 God said “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them nor serve them.” The Hebrew word for worship, *shachah*, is “to bow down, to worship.” In the Septuagint it was προσκυνήσεις (Proskynoseis – to prostrate oneself in homage, do reverence to, adore, worship). Michael Heiser writes “what ancient idol worshippers believed was that the objects they made were inhabited by their gods.”³ God created humans in His image (Gen. 1:26). We are “created in the image God, to be His imagers. It is what we are by definition.

¹ Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*, 2nd ed. (Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 243.

² Ibid.

³ Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm, : Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press, 2015), 35-36.

The image is not an ability, but a status. We are God's representative on earth. To be human is to image God."⁴ Dr. Carmen Imes notes "Humans are not *like* God's image, they *are* his image."⁵

Moses was just in Egypt where the Egyptians were worshipping a variety of created gods. The plagues were an attack on these false gods and Yahweh was showing them He was the one true God. God, through Moses, also writes the opening chapters in Genesis where God is stating that the heavens and earth, and all that is in them, are created things and our worship is to the uncreated-creator of the things. The heavenly bodies and created things are not to have names and be worshipped, but rather they have functions to serve man for the purposes God has created them for. It is in this same light that Yahweh is commanding the Israelites to not make idols and worship of created things.

In Isaiah 44:9-20, Isaiah is mocking the makers of idols and the silliness of creating and bowing (v15-Shechah/προσκυνούσιν/does obeisance) before them and bows/bends/falls down (Sagad/κάμπτει) to them.

THEOLOGY CONSIDERATIONS

In 1563, the Protestant catechism of faith outlined the main features of the Reformed faith. The "catechism develops the idea that images of God are neither necessary nor helpful for Christian believers."⁶ The Heidelberg catechism lists a number of questions. In question 96-98 it states:

⁴ Ibid., 44-45.

⁵ Carmen Joy Imes, *Bearing Gods Name: Why Sinai Still Matters* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press), 2019.

⁶ Alister McGrath, Editor, *The Christian Theology Reader 5th Ed.* (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 26.

96 Q. What is God's will for us in the second commandment? A. That we in no way make any image of God nor worship him in any other way than has been commanded in God's Word. (Duet.4:15-19; Isa. 40:18-25; Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:22-23 2 Lev. 10:1-7; 1 Sam. 15:22-23; John 4:23-24

97 Q. May we then not make any image at all? A. God cannot and may not be visibly portrayed in any way. Although creatures may be portrayed, yet God forbids making or having such images if one's intention is to worship them or to serve God through them (Ex. 34:13-14, 17; 2 Kings 18:4-5)

98 Q. But may not images be permitted in churches in place of books for the unlearned? A. No, we should not try to be wiser than God. God wants the Christian community instructed by the living preaching of his Word— not by idols that cannot even talk (Rom. 10:14-15, 17; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:19 2 Jer. 10:8; Hab. 2:18-20).⁷

McGrath notes that “the text shows the traditional Reformed emphasis, which gives priority to word over image.”⁸ He also points out that, while eastern Orthodox use of icons and Roman Catholic use of devotional images were the targets of the criticism, Lutheran's “saw no difficulty in continuing to use such devotional aids.”⁹ Jacques Ellul was a French Protestant theologian and sociologist interacted with a leading Orthodox theologian, Paul Evdokimov (1901-70). Evdokimov said that icons are windows into the divine and not things that are divine in themselves.¹⁰ Arguments for allowing icons often use the illustration of Christ having a divine nature (invisible) and the visible added human nature. The icons are seen in this light and “implies a theology of the concrete presence of the spiritual realm, and of divine light, which

⁷ *The Heidelberg Catechism*: <https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/HeidelbergCatechism.pdf>.

⁸ McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader*, 26.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 205.

symbolically re-transcribed and which the image of glory itself.”¹¹ John of Damascus uses this line of argumentation linking Christ’s incarnation with that of the veneration of images. By using the incarnation, the blood on the cross, ink on the pages of the Bible, altars and other material things, he finds no issues with making crosses, patens, and chalices and other material things and says “either dispense with the honor and veneration that these things deserve, or accept the tradition of the church and the veneration of images.”¹² This theology also “tries to place humanity permanently on Tabor, the mount of Transfiguration.”¹³ Counter Biblical arguments point to Jesus as the only “image (*eikon*) of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Col. 1:15). The author of Hebrews says Jesus is “the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature.” (Heb. 1:3). John says the Father has never been seen (Jn. 1:18, 6:46) and that only the Son has seen the Father and has made Him known. When we see Jesus, we see the Father (Jn. 14:9). Making an idol of God the Father or the Holy Spirit is pointless because no one could know what the Father or Spirit looks like. It would be made in the image of the person’s mind. God is also spirit (Jn. 4:24). Jesus was seen but His looks were not recorded so any image would not be accurate. One would be gazing on a figure that came from the artist’s mind. To kneel or bow down and direct spiritual direction toward this image seems to be exactly what the Scripture says not to do.

John of Damascus said he did not worship matter, but rather the Creator of the matter. He

¹¹ Ibid., 204.

¹² Ibid., 243.

¹³ Ibid., 204.

admits the image is not God, but since Jesus came as matter, Damascus then concludes it is ok to make images made from matter for devotional aids. It seems there is one aspect where you can include images as illustrations in a book for educating and learning, but the issue is whether we should venerate and direct spiritual to them. Damascus “held that the 2nd Commandment forbids making of Pagan icons, images of false gods, not icons of Christ who is the Truth...furthermore they did not regard icons as ‘graven images’; icons were not statues ‘in the round’, but paintings or mosaics ‘in the flat.’”¹⁴ The pagans made idols for their false gods, however, even though the intent of Christians to make the icon/idol of the true God, the result is, kneeling, bowing, bending in front of them is still a “likeness of what is in heaven above...” (Ex. 20:4). There is only one true heaven so the likeness applies to any false god or the true God. Nick Needham writes that in Orthodox churches, “the icons often have olive-oil lamps burning beneath them. The idea behind the icons is that the worship of the congregation on earth is a joining and sharing in the glorified Church in heaven; the icons are a window into that heavenly worship, revealing the presence of the saints and angels. It is in company with them, and with the help of their prayers, that believers on earth approach and worship the Trinity.”¹⁵ Needham continues describing the inside of the church where an “icon-screen” separates the communion table with the rest of the church.

¹⁴ Nick Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power, Vol 2: The Middle Ages* (London, England: Grace Publications, 2016, 106.

¹⁵ Ibid., 98.

The icon-screen is adorned by some icons after the 9th century and has 3 doors signifying the Trinity. Icon of Mary and Jesus are on two of the doors. Incense is spread on the icons which is offered to God for His presence. The basic patterns of worship are the same that was practiced in the Byzantine Empire a thousand years ago.¹⁶

Roman Catholics use Latin terms of *dulia* for veneration and *latria* as worship to God alone. John Calvin wrote *Institutes* during the midst of the controversy in the 1500's and in Book1, Chapter 12 part 2 states "The distinction of what is called *dulia* and *latria* was invented for the very purpose of permitting divine honors to be paid to angels and dead men with apparent impunity."¹⁷ Catholics give Mary *hyperdulia* which is one step below *lateria*. Calvin goes on to say that "For '*latreia*' in Greek has the same meaning as worship in Latin; whereas '*douleia*' properly means service, though the words are sometimes used in Scripture indiscriminately."¹⁸ Dr. James White notes that "in the Latin Vulgate, both *duleuo* (to serve) and *latreuo* (to worship) are rendered by the same term, *servio*. No matter how the defender of Rome tries, no basis can possibly be found in Scripture for the distinction of *laria* and *dulia*."¹⁹

Theologian's Elliot Miller and Kenneth R. Samples also evaluates *laria*, *dulia* and *hyperdulia* as it applies to veneration of Mary by Roman Catholics. Miller and Samples writes "while in theory these categories are intended to prevent idolatrous worship of created beings, in

¹⁶ Ibid., 99-100.

¹⁷ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Translated by Thomas Norton (Las Vegas, NV: Pantianos Classics, 2021), 49.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ James White, *The Roman Catholic Controversy*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1996), 211.

practice they have little effect on the religious feelings of the masses. How could feelings be subject to such subtle rational distinctions?”²⁰ They continue to note that the “fact is Mary is, and for centuries has been, worshipped by millions all over the world, especially in Latin countries, and the church has done little to discourage it.”²¹ Even the bishop of Cuernavaca, Mexico agreed: “Devotion to Mary and the saints, especially in our [Latin American] countries, at times obscures devotion to Christ.”²² This is a Pandora’s box and a slippery slope and “once devotion to anyone but God is sanctioned by the hierarchy, there is no way the hierarchy can later constrain it within certain limits. All *sin* operates according to the same ‘give-it-an-inch-and-it-takes-a-mile’ dynamic-and *idolatry* is sin-and *religious devotion* to anyone but God is idolatry. This is the verdict from Scripture...we must conclude then that biblically all prayer, glory, and devotion belong to God and to his Son, Jesus Christ.”²³

In Exodus 20 God says not to “worship or serve.” James McCarthy also notes that God did not use the term “above” Him. He uses “before” Him (Ex. 20:3). This “literally, ‘before my face.’” In the context of bowing before a king was allowed in a non-religious context but in a religious context, Scripture forbids it. Examples of this is when Cornelius bowed before Peter (Acts 10:25-26) and when John bowed before the angel (Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9) and they were told to get up and worship God alone. White continues that “a man or woman bows down before a

²⁰ Elliot Miller and Kenneth R. Samples, *The Cult of the Virgin: Catholic Mariology and the Apparitions of Mary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books House, 1992), 70.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid., 70-71.

statue of Mary or Peter or John or the Angel Michael, and says a prayer or lights a candle, that person...is engaging in veneration within an inarguably religious context. That person, therefore, is doing exactly what Exodus 20:5 forbids.”²⁴

The first iconoclasts were accused of being *docetic*. (i.e., Denied Jesus full humanity). In many religions condemned in the Bible, “the idol was a visible representation of an invisible religious reality.”²⁵ Needham uses the illustration of “the distinction between the love a man might have for his wife, and the secondary affection he might feel for a picture of his wife.”²⁶ Iconoclasts argued that the picture is only the human nature and not the divine nature so it depicts only half of Christ.²⁷ The theological debate continued when they looked at the early church. Scripture does not provide anyone venerating icons and “up until the 4th century, the fathers of the Church did not set forth any theology of Christian icon, and sometimes condemned pictures of Christ; the positive veneration of icons they regarded as Pagan.”²⁸

HISTORICAL

The Gospel Coalition, a network of broadly Reformed evangelical churches, contends that icon veneration was not practiced in the early church and rather, “the archeological evidence gives us some examples of Christian imagery but not necessarily in places of worship and... there

²⁴ James White, *The Roman Catholic Controversy*, 211.

²⁵ McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader*, 205.

²⁶ *2000 Years of Christ's Power*, Vol 2, 107.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 108.

is no evidence that it ever went beyond decorations. The actual writings of the early church leaders are consistently opposed to the dangers of iconography”²⁹ Polycarp:

. . . we collected Polycarp’s bones, being more precious than the most exquisite jewels and more purified than gold, we interred them in a fitting place. There the Lord will permit us, as far as possible, to assemble in rapturous joy and celebrate his martyrdom – his birthday – both in order to commemorate the heroes that have gone before, and to train the heroes yet to come . . .³⁰

Augustine of Hippo (354-430), the early church father who is revered by Catholics and Protestants, complains that ‘certain monks plied a vile and sordid traffic, by carrying the relics of martyrs about from place to place’. He even doubts the authenticity of their claims ‘if, indeed, they are relics of martyrs at all’.”³¹

Then in the medieval age relics were at the heart of the worship and devotion of many religious people. Relics were not only venerated – they were traded, collected, lost, stolen, duplicated, and distributed throughout Europe.

As early Christians were martyred for their faith, the bones of these martyred saints were collected and preserved as symbols of the perseverance. St. Nicolas was one of those saints. In

²⁹ John B. Carpenter, *Answering Eastern Orthodox Apologists regarding Icon, Volume 43-Issue 3*, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/answering-eastern-orthodox-apologists-regarding-icons/> (accessed November 5, 2022).

³⁰ Dan Grave., ed. *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*. Translated by J.B. Lightfoot. Abridged and modernized by Stephen Tomkins. <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/polycarp/> (accessed November 5, 2022).

³¹ Gearoid S. Marley, *The Veneration of Relics*. Banner of truth, 2015. <https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2015/the-veneration-of-relics/> (accessed November 5, 2022).

1087, the Muslim Seljuk Turks invaded Asia Minor (Modern Turkey) and desecrated the graves of Saints and they would give the bones to dogs as Mohammed instructed (Vol 2, Book 23 Funerals, Hadith No. 414, Hadith Book 4, No. 2115).³² Historian William J. Federer writes “Just as the bones of St. Mark were smuggled out of Muslim controlled Egypt in 828 A.D., so a plan emerged to smuggle the remains of St. Nicolas to Italy in 1087 A.D.”³³ The bones ended up at Bari where a basilica was constructed and consecrated in 1197. May 9th is the day “celebrated in the Russian Orthodox Church as the feast of the ‘translation of the Relics of Saint Nicholas from Myra to Bari.’ The tomb...became a famous location of pilgrimages...His feast day, December 6th...was celebrated with the custom of ‘secret gift-giving’ and many other imaginative traditions.”³⁴

As the Muslims were conquering the area, both the west and east sections of the church were weakened. Earle E. Cairns writes “The Eastern churches were able to do little more than hold back the Muslim hordes from sweeping past Constantinople...The Eastern churches also had to deal with the problem of whether images as well as pictures could be used in the church. The issue, known as the iconoclastic controversy, came partly about because the Muslims were accusing the Christians of being idolaters, as they had pictures and images in the church.”³⁵

³² “Book 23: Funerals (Al-Janaa’iz) - Hadith 414 (Volume 2) - Sahih Al-Bukhari - Collection of Actions, *Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad* (صلى الله عليه وسلم) - Kutub as-Sittah.” <http://gowister.com/sahihbukhari-2-414.html> (accessed November 5, 2022).

³³ William J. Federer, *There Really is a Santa Claus: The History of Saint Nicholas and Christmas Holiday Traditions* (St. Louis, Missouri: Amerisearch, 2002.), 73.

³⁴ Ibid., 75

³⁵ Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), 170-171.

The “first iconoclastic controversy took place at some point around the year 730 when Emperor Leo III ordered the removal of an image of Christ that was prominently positioned over the ceremonial entrance to the Great Palace of Constantinople. Leo did not consult with church leaders in removing the image, and probably didn’t have their support in doing so. One possible motivation for this change was the growing influence of Islam in the region. Given Islam’s hostility towards any images of the divine, Leo concluded that it might be politic to remove any possible cause to offense to his Islamic neighbors, and hence reduce the likelihood of political tensions and possibly invasions.”³⁶

Leo “believed he had a personal mission from God to cleanse the Empire from the sin of image-worship, which would otherwise bring down wrath on Byzantium.”³⁷ Leo’s soldiers pulled down a large golden icon and caused a riot which Leo then had killed. Historically, in Italy numerous communities denied their allegiance to Byzantium. Venice grew out of this and played a role in the fall of Byzantium.³⁸ The Pope’s supported iconodules (icon-venerators) partly because they did not like how the iconoclast emperors were subjecting the Church to the State which was not the spiritual authority. Monasteries were victims of the controversy and many monks had to flee with icons hidden in their robes. Leo’s son, Constantine V (741-75) evicted thousands of monks and converted monasteries into army barracks. Iconodules like Stephen of Saint Auxentius were martyred. Constantine’s V son, Leo IV married Empress Irene

³⁶ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian History: An Introduction* (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 81.

³⁷ Needham, *2000 Years of Christ’s Power*, Vol 2. 102.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

who loved icons and the controversy died down.³⁹ Cairns adds “Charlemagne made a statement opposing worship of images about the time Irene became empress of the Eastern empire. He even offered to marry Irene in order to reunite the areas of the old Roman Empire under one crown with the capital in the West.”⁴⁰ Irene refused the offer. After Leo IV death, Irene ruled the empire and called the “Second Council of Nicaea in 787 which permitted veneration rather than worship of images. John Damascus also supported the veneration of icons as a means of worship.”⁴¹ It was Damascus who wrote the theological ideas for the East in his book *Foundation of Wisdom*. At the Second Council of Nicaea in 787, “it was permissible to paint portraits of Christ because although he was God, he was also a man and was visible to his contemporaries. It was hoped this would end the iconoclastic controversy, which it did temporarily, although iconoclasm was revived in 811 and was finally not finally defeated until 843.”⁴²

The iconoclastic controversy was partly a clash between church and state. Emperors liked images of themselves. Needham writes that the Orthodox church opposes statues but affirms drawings, mosaics, wood, or stone carvings of low relief. By the 8th century “people would bow down in their presence, burn lamps and candles in front of them, kiss them, and pray before

³⁹ Ibid., 103.

⁴⁰ Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries*, 183.

⁴¹ Ibid., 183.

⁴² Gerald Bray, *The Church: A Theological and Historical Account* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2016), 255.

them...physical acts intended to express one's heart's love and honor towards Christ."⁴³

Charlemagne's response is found in his Caroline Books and the balance he was looking for was to "reject the practice of bowing or kneeling before the icons, kissing them, and burning candles or incense in front of them. They also rejected the stories of miracles worked by icons, as human imaginations, or demonic deceptions. On the other hand, they accepted that religious honor should be paid to the sign of the cross and to relics of the saints."⁴⁴ The Council in Frankfurt approved this view in 794 but the West opposed icon-veneration until the 10th century where it adopted the Eastern position. Needham states that this controversy tore the East apart for 120 years.

Gerald Bray continues that the "defenders of orthodoxy insisted that to abolish pictures of Christ would be to deny the incarnation. Rome sympathized with the 'orthodox' on this, but of course it could only do so because the emperor's effective power no longer stretched that far west."⁴⁵ The architecture of the churches produced Gothic cathedrals of the West. Emperor Justinian I (r. 527-65) erected Church of the Holy Wisdom in Constantinople. The interior was decorated with magnificent mosaics and frescoes depicting the life of heaven, with Christ seated in glory (in the dome) and the saints gathered around him. This trend was registered by the iconoclasts of the eighth century, who wanted to keep (or return to) the more austere church decoration of an earlier time, but they failed and the use of visual imagery was enshrined in

⁴³ Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume 2*, 101-102.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴⁵ Bray, *The Church*, 105.

public worship to a degree that was never true in the West.”⁴⁶ Bray notes that Orthodox churches to this day have an overwhelming presence of icons and even though Catholics do not object to them. The Protestants do not have them and it is more than a “matter of style and tradition, since iconography plays a role in Eastern theology and worship that is unknown in the West.”⁴⁷

REFORMATION

Luther felt citizens in Wittenberg had become “disastrously obsessed with mere outward matters, including icons, and had allowed their hearts to drift away from the all-important spiritual truth of the Gospel.”⁴⁸ With Luther’s focus on Christ alone for salvation, the Virgin Mary, and the saints soon ceased to have a place in worship as objects of religious invocation, or of veneration through images.”⁴⁹ Leo Jud (1482-1542) had a sermon in Zurich that came out against veneration of icons in 1523 which provoked a violent outbreak of image smashing.⁵⁰ Zwingli argued in front of the Zurich city council in October 1523 that physical veneration of icons was contrary to Scripture and led to idolatry. Eight months later the council decreed to remove them from churches.⁵¹ Evangelical bishop John Hilsey of Rochester (1535-38) exposed icon frauds such as the Blood of Hailes and the Rood of Boxely. One of England’s greatest 16th

⁴⁶ Ibid., 136.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 136.

⁴⁸ Nick Needham, *2000 Years of Christ’s Power, Volume 3: Renaissance and Reformation* (London, England: Grace Publications, 2016), 130.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 120.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 154.

⁵¹ Ibid., 256.

century preach, Hugh Latimer, encouraged the destruction of images and relics.⁵² By April 1525, in Zurich churches, removal of all “pictures statues, crucifixes, candles, altars, and relics, and abolition of the organ, the choir, priestly robes, religious processions, and monasteries.”⁵³ Under Carlstadt, Zwilling, and the Zwickau prophets, violence in Wittenburg ensued with mobs “smashing altars, shrines, and images-chiefly statues and stained glass windows depicting Christ and the saints, which often adorned the tombs of the upper classes.”⁵⁴

Edward VI implemented reformed perspective to the Church in the mid-1500’s and there was a “massive wave of government-sponsored iconoclasm, with images of the saints being removed from churches or destroyed, and the church walls being whitewashed to cover over pictures.”⁵⁵ Radicals in Scotland formed “the Lords of the Congregation of Jesus Christ” and there were outbreaks of iconoclasm, each more devastating than its predecessor.⁵⁶ Orthodoxy was found to be neither Roman Catholic nor Protestant. Lutherans found some things in common (e.g., rejection of the papacy) but some things were in common with Rome (e.g., icons and relics). In Russia, they felt they were the “Third Rome.” Nilus of Sora (1433-1508) became a monk and championed a school called “non-Possessors” which were free of materialistic burdens and entanglement with politics and did not like monastic ownership of land. His opponent was Joseph of Volokolamsk (1439-1515) who felt to build Christs kingdom on earth they needed

⁵² Ibid., 386.

⁵³ Ibid., 151.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 129-130.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 390-391.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 410.

money. His school of thought was labeled the “Possessor.” Nilus’s conviction was that “even the beauty of an icon or of church music could become an idol.”⁵⁷ The Non-Possessor movement was crushed and the Possessors, under Macarius of Luzbetski, were reformed. The new icon controversy involved a new style of painting that was “less concerned with depicting a saint, more with telling a story, creating an illustrated allegory (e.g., of a Biblical text).”⁵⁸ Some were disturbed by this and one protestor, Ivan Viskovaty was condemned for heresy and Macarius ensured victory for the new iconography in Russian art.

In Eastern Orthodoxy, one of their greatest patriarchs of Constantinople was Cyril Lucaris. He saw Protestantism as a “powerful ally against Counter-Reformation Catholicism and also a practical model for reforming and renewing church life that could be ‘baptized’ into an Orthodox context.”⁵⁹ Cyril affirmed lawfulness of icon but did admit to Protestant friends that their veneration was open to grave abuse and that some Orthodox never got beyond superstitious veneration of icons. He never actually condemned icons but did condemn the worship of them.⁶⁰

CONCLUSION-APPROPRIATE USE OF ICONS

Jordan Cooper, pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Watseka, Illinois, writes about why Lutherans might use the crucifix and icons to enhance their spiritual life:

⁵⁷ Ibid., 538.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 541.

⁵⁹ Nick Needham, *2000 Years of Christ’s Power, volume 4, The Age of Religious Conflict* (London England: Grace Publications, 2016), 586.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 587.

We use them as tools to instruct and remind us of our faith. The crucifix is a constant reminder of the gospel. It is often placed in the sanctuary to remind both the pastor and the congregation that Christ, and his cross are the center of the church's worship life. We use images of saints to remind us of the great faith of those who have come before us, and remind us of the unity of the church in heaven and on earth.⁶¹

The use of images to depict events in the Bible for instructional purposes is a valid use.

When the laity was made up of illiterate members, images depicting the major narrative was a helpful tool. The symbol of a cross reminds us of the suffering Christ went through and worn on jewelry or on clothing can identify a person as a Christ follower. The magnificent architecture of the Sistine Chapel and other church architectural features are amazing to gaze upon and appreciate. But appreciation of the craftsmanship and beauty of the painting is not directly prayer to the object. The architecture and painting/image are not personified. It is when a person directs prayer toward the image and bows down or kneels in front of the image where icons become problematic. James G. McCarthy reminds us that "in the Ten Commandments the Lord does not forbid His people from having other gods *above* Him but *before* Him (Ex. 20:5) ...He demands undivided loyalty and devotion."⁶² Having statues around the house of Biblical figures, past saints and angelic beings can easily stretch the appropriateness of images. At that point the images are not serving an educational purpose nor serve an architectural feature but rather are in

⁶¹ Elise Mae Cannon, *Spiritual Synchronicity: Icon veneration in Evangelical and Orthodox religious Practices in the 21st Century*, Religions: Basel Vol 12, ISS 7, (2021), <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2554723964/AE23E75C044F44CCPQ/1?accountid=143627> (accessed November 5, 2022).

⁶² James G. McCarthy, *The Gospel According to Rome: Comparing Catholic Tradition and the Word of God* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 222.

violation of second commandment. They are personified as if they are what the person is directing their prayer to. They become good luck charms or things to add protection from bad spirits. There is no protection in these things Isaiah called “all futile,” “of no benefit,” and the creators and those that acquire them are “put to shame” (Isaiah 44:9-20). McCarthy adds “Roman Catholic devotion to Mary first crosses the line into idolatry, when misguided Catholics kneel before a statue of Mary, kiss her feet, and offer her heartfelt praise and petition, they give to a creature the devotion which belongs to God alone...God will have no other gods *before* Him, regardless of how inferior.”⁶³ Erasmus in 1515 was pondering that the human soul should place its faith in Christ alone. His revelation included the thought that Christ alone can provide every blessing and “if this is true, why then should we seek help from any created being.”⁶⁴ Luther’s focus on the Gospel is helpful in determining when images can be used. When the Wittenberg citizens became obsessed with outward matters such as images, he said that “had allowed their hearts to drift away from the all-important spiritual truth of the gospel.”⁶⁵ Needham notes the slippery slope of the way Christians went from asking the saints to pray *for* them (invoking the saints) to praying *to* the saints which was little different than that of the Pagans.⁶⁶ Gregory the Great’s church did not have a doctrine of icon-veneration, which arose

⁶³ Ibid., 223.

⁶⁴ Needham, *2000 Years of Christ’s Power, Volume 3.*, 146.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 130.

⁶⁶ Nick Needham, *2000 Years of Christ’s Power, Vol 1: The Age of the Early Church Fathers* (London, England: Grace Publications, 2016), 200.

after the 6th century,⁶⁷ and gave instructions that “these people should not use them for adoration...to adore a depiction is one thing; to learn lessons through the story depicted is another. Writing sets out one truth to the literate, while a picture sets out to those who cannot read but can see.”⁶⁸ Gregory the Great references Luke 4:8, “You shall adore the Lord your God and serve Him Only” and said “If you want icons in the church for instructions, as the ancient custom allows, then you can make them and have them.”⁶⁹ This is a good summary to make the dividing line between useful instruction and adoration which can serve as a good model for the present age.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 342.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 353.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 353-354.

Bibliography

- Al-Janaa'iz - Book 23: Funerals (Hadith 414 (Volume 2) - Sahih Al-Bukhari - *Collection of Actions, Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad* (صلى الله عليه وسلم) - Kutub as-Sittah." <http://gowister.com/sahihbukhari-2-414.html> (Accessed November 5, 2022).
- Bray, Gerald. *The Church: A Theological and Historical Account*. Grand Rapids, Mi: Baker Academic, 2016.
- Cairns, Earle E. *Christianity Through the Centuries, A History of the Christian Church*. 3rd Ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996.
- Calvin, John . *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Thomas Norton. Las Vegas, NV: Pantianos Classics, 2021.
- Cannon, Elise Mae. *Spiritual Synchronicity: Icon veneration in Evangelical and Orthodox Religious Practices in the 21st Century*. Religions: Basel Vol 12, ISS 7, (2021).
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2554723964/AE23E75C044F44CCPQ/1?accountid=143627> (accessed November 5, 2022).
- Carpenter, John B. *Answering Eastern Orthodox Apologists regarding Icon*, Volume 43-Issue 3.
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/answering-eastern-orthodox-apologists-regarding-icons/> (accessed November 5, 2022).
- Federer, William J. *There Really is a Santa Claus: The History of Saint Nicholas and Christmas Holiday Traditions*. St. Louis, Missouri: Amerisearch, 2002.
- Grave, Dan., ed. *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*. Translated by J.B. Lightfoot. Abridged and modernized by Stephen Tomkins.
<https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/polycarp/> (accessed November 5, 2022).
- The Heidelberg Catechism*: <https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/HeidelbergCatechism.pdf>
- Heiser, Michael. *The Unseen Realm,: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*. Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press, 2015.
- Imes, Carmen Joy. *Bearing Gods Name: Why Sinai Still Matters*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2019.
- Marley, Gearoid S. *The Veneration of Relics*. Banner of Truth, 2015.
<https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2015/the-veneration-of-relics/> (accessed November 5, 2022).

- McCarthy, James G. *The Gospel According to Rome: Comparing Catholic Tradition and the Word of God*. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1995.
- McGrath, Alister E. *Christian History: An Introduction*. Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.
- . *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*. 2nd ed. Malden, Massachusetts, Wiley-Blackwell, 2017.
- Miller, Elliot and Kenneth R. Samples, *The Cult of the Virgin: Catholic Mariology and the Apparitions of Mary*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books House, 1992.
- Needham, Nick. *2000 Years of Christ's Power, Vol 1: The Age of the Early Church Fathers*. London, England: Grace Publications, 2016.
- . *2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume 2: The Middle Ages*. London, England: Grace Publications, 2016.
- . *2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume 3: Renaissance and Reformation*. London, England: Grace Publications, 2016.
- . *2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume 4: The Age of Religious Conflict*. London, England: Grace Publications, 2016.
- White, James. *The Roman Catholic Controversy*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1996.