

## **ARE YOU PERHAPS AN IDOLATOR? – by Rev. Professor-Emeritus Francis Nigel Lee**

The First Commandment (in Exodus 20:1-3) states: "**God Triune** ('*Eloohiym*) spoke..., saying: '**I am** the Lord **your Triune God** (*J'hoovaah 'Eloohychaa*).'" He must be worshipped in terms of the Second Commandment, stating: "You shall **not make** for yourself **any** engraved **image** or **any likeness** of anything that is **in heaven** above or in the **earth** beneath."

The Second Commandment (in Exodus 20:4f) requires that even the one true Triune God alone is to be worshipped **only** in a **Spirit**-ual way. *Viz.*, He is to be worshipped **only** in **Spirit**, and not even reverently to be represented through **images** made purportedly even of any of the three Persons of the Triune God. For "God is Spirit, and they that worship Him, **must** worship Him in **Spirit** and in truth" alone! John 4:24.

This means no Romish statues, **imag**-ing the so-called 'Holy Family!' No 'Masses' *etc!* No Eastern-'Orthodox' icons! No stained-glass church windows, or kids' picture-books with a long-haired hippie **imag**-inarily (mis)representing the God-man Jesus!

Calvin says in his *Institutes* (Prefatory Address 4 and I:11:1-13 & II:8:17 & IV:9:9): "It was a Father (**Epiphanius**) who said, '**It is a horrid abomination to see in Christian temples a painted image...of Christ!**' ... **An Ecclesiastical Council** [the 305 A.D. *Seventh Council of Elvira*] also decreed, '**Let nought that is worshipped, be depicted!**'

"Brutish stupidity has overspread the globe, men longing after **visible** forms of God -- and so forming deities of wood and stone.... As often as any form is assigned to God, His glory is corrupted by an impious lie.

"'You shall not **make** unto yourself any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above!' .... Exodus 20:4. By these words, He curbs **any** licentious attempt we might make to **represent** Him by a **visible** shape.... **He rejects** without exception **all** shapes and **pictures** and other symbols by which the superstitious imagine they can bring Him near to them....

"It is said in the books of Moses (Deuteronomy 4:15)...'You did not see any kind of similitude in the day the Lord spoke to you on Horeb out of the midst of the fire! Do not corrupt yourselves and make yourselves a graven image...of any figure!' ....

"It will be sufficient to mention Isaiah [40:18 & 41:7-29 & 45:9 & 46:5]...on this subject.... The majesty of God is defiled by an absurd and indecorous fiction when He Who is incorporeal, is assimilated to corporeal matter; He Who is invisible, to a visible image; He Who is Spirit, to an inanimate object; and He Who fills all space, to a bit of paltry wood or stone or gold.... Whatever statues are set up, or **pictures painted to represent God -- are utterly displeasing to Him** as...**insults to His Majesty**....

"The thing forbidden is **likeness**, whether sculptured or otherwise. This disposes of the frivolous precaution taken by the Greek [Eastern-'Orthodox'] Church. They think they do admirably, because they have no (**three-dimensional**) **sculptured** shape of Deity -- while none go greater lengths in **the licentious use of (two-dimensional) pictures!** The Lord, however, not

only forbids any image of Himself to be erected by a **statue**, but to be formed by **any artists whatever**. Because every such image is sinful and insulting to His Majesty....

"Augustine (*City of God* IV:9) distinctly declares it is unlawful not only to worship images, but to dedicate them.... Let Papists, then, if they have any sense of shame, henceforth desist!... It is well-known what kind of monsters they obtrude upon us as 'divine'....

"Paul declares that by the true **preaching** of the Gospel, Christ is portrayed and in a manner crucified before our eyes. Galatians 3:1. Of what use, then, were the erection in churches of so many **crosses** of wood and stone, silver and gold, if this doctrine were faithfully and honestly preached -- viz. Christ died that He might bear our curse upon the tree.... From this one doctrine, the people would learn more than from a thousand **crosses** of wood and stone!

"Let us here consider whether it is expedient that churches should contain representations of **any**...human forms.... Let us remember that for [some] five hundred years during which religion was in a more prosperous condition and a purer doctrine flourished -- [the edifices of] Christian churches were completely free from visible representations.... It appears to me more unbecoming...to admit **any other** images than those living symbols which the Lord has consecrated by His Own Word. I mean **baptism** and the **Lord's Supper**....

"[The] Second Commandment...consists of two parts [viz. both the **making** and the **use** of images in worship]. The former curbs the licentious daring which would subject the incomprehensible God to our senses or represent Him under any **visible** shape. The latter forbids the worship of images on any religious ground.... **Every visible shape of Deity which man devises, is diametrically opposed to the divine nature**....

"It is now [viz. in A.D. 1536] about nine hundred years since the Council of Constantinople...determined that the images set up in temples were to be thrown down and broken to pieces.... Epiphanius in his *Epistle to John of Jerusalem Against Heresies* says it is **an unspeakable abomination** to see images in a Christian temple." Indeed, **God raised up Islam -- to punish idolatry in the Church prior to (and after) the Protestant Reformation!** See Revelation 9:20 & 10:8 & 14:6-9.

For as Calvin states in his *Harmony of the Pentateuch*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1948<sup>fed.</sup>, II:108<sup>f</sup> & 113 & 120-26 & 388: "A true image of God is not to be found.... His glory is defiled and His truth corrupted by the lie, whenever He is set before our eyes in a **visible** form....

"There are two parts in the [Second] Commandment -- the **first** forbids the **erection** of a graven image.... The **second** prohibits the transferring of the **worship** which God claims for Himself alone, to any of these phantoms.... Therefore, to **devise** any image of God, is in itself **impious**.... It is...gross indecency to make God like a stick or a stone.... As soon as anyone has permitted himself to devise an image of God, he **immediately** falls into false-worship....

"Idolaters in vain endeavour to elude this...by their foolish cavils.... Amongst the Papists, that trifling distinction is commonly advanced that only *latreia* [or **worship**] and **not douleia** [or **service** of the statue or picture concerned] is prohibited.... They make a childish endeavour at evasion, when they pay only the honour of **service** to pictures and statues.... For [even Hindus

and other] unbelievers have never been carried away to such an extent of folly, as to adore mere statues or pictures! They have always alleged the same pretext which nowadays is rife in the mouths of the Papists -- viz. that not the image itself was actually worshipped, but that which it represented....

"We must also observe that the transgressors of the Law, are called the enemies and haters of God.... It is sinful to represent God in a visible image.... All those who seek for God in a visible figure, not only decline but actually revolt from the true study of piety....

"The stupid ignorance of the Papists is confuted, who confine this prohibition to the Ancient People [of the Hebrews] -- as if it were now permitted to paint or to sculpture images of God!... **The Spirit declares no less plainly now that we must keep ourselves from idols (First John 5:21)**, than He of old forbade their being made....

"But those who have been taught by God's Law not only that He alone is to be worshipped but that He may not be represented by any visible effigy, are justly accounted covenant-breakers if they do not confine themselves within these bounds.... **They are commanded to worship God spiritually [cf. John 4:24] -- and consequently are forbidden to make to themselves likenesses or images** whereby they would deface and pollute His glory....

"The Papists dispute...that images are not to be removed, because they are useful for the people's instruction. But let this be our wisdom, to acquiesce in what **God** has chosen to decree in this matter!... God declares that all are apostates who do not confine themselves to the simplicity of the Law.... Man is the image of God.... But to represent God by any figure..., is nothing less than to corrupt His glory and so to metamorphose Him.... He admits neither sculptures nor pictures!"

In his *Sermons on Deuteronomy* (27:15 & 29:26) Calvin remarks: "'Cursed be he who makes any idol or any carved image! All this is abomination unto God!'... You know how and after what manner, God will be worshipped by us. Whosoever invents any manner of idolatry, whosoever devises any manner of superstition -- he is making idols. And that is not to serve the living God, but rather to follow their own fancies and imaginations....

"They are all accursed.... For when **God is so misshapen in any painting or in any puppet** or in any other piece of wood or stone, that men will there represent His image and say 'That is a resemblance of Him!' -- it is too gross and outrageous....

"But they which have any taste of what **God** is, and have heard any syllable of His Word where it is said (John 4:24) God is an immortal and infinite Spirit, the Fountain of life -- do know that He has too great injury done unto Him to be represented by a dead thing and by a corruptible creature and to have His Name given unto a **puppet!**... They therefore which have but a small taste of this doctrine, do abhor the setting up of an idol....

"We must lift up our minds...and know that we may not stick fast here below -- not make any idol or puppet unto Him. For He cannot abide it!... God will not be served nor worshipped after our own manner, but He will have us to walk according to His Word without adding anything thereunto.... God says, 'Cursed is he who forges idols!'...

"There is no certainty in them that follow not the Law.... None but the children of God can talk of it from knowledge, according as...John says...(First John 5:20).... God should have so great authority over us...that when He says the word -- we should wholly stick to it....

"Contrariwise, all they that serve God after their own devotion -- do but imagine and serve gods whom they know not. The Papists say that **the Virgin Mary** is their advocate.... When we served '**The Queen of Heaven**' (they say in Jeremiah 44:18), we had our fill of meat and drink -- there was plenty of all manner of good things!

"Nevertheless, that which is spoken by the Prophet Isaiah (44:9)...shall always be true -- namely that idols have no power to do either good or evil. For they be nothing. Therefore, let us learn first of all to stick unto the Word whereby God teaches us!"

"'We ought not to think...the Godhead is like gold or silver or stone engraved by art and man's device!' (Acts 17:29)." Here Calvin comments: "God cannot be represented by a picture or sculpture.... It is...absurd to wish to paint God.... How much harm is done to God, by all those who make up a physical shape for God!... God is worshipped wrongly and irreverently, and His truth is turned into a lie as often as His majesty is represented by some visible form.... Romans 1:25.... It is sinful to devise anything concerning Him by our own understanding."

Here too, we must again urge with the Apostle (in First John 5:21): "Guard yourselves from **idols!**" Whether crooners and 'musicians' aspiring to become an "Australian Idol," or whether American Pentecostalist television 'evangelists' with their 'holy handkerchiefs' idolized by their many gullible admirers -- "guard yourselves from **idols!**" First John 5:21 *cf.* Colossians 3:5. Calvin comments here: "The Apostle not only condemns idolatry -- but commands us to beware of all images.... By this, he signifies that the worship of God cannot be kept sound and pure when men begin to desire images.... The Apostle is speaking not only of statues but also of altars -- and comprehends all the instruments of superstitions!"

States the Calvinistic *Westminster Confession of Faith* (21:1): "The acceptable way of worshipping the True God, is...so limited by His Own revealed will that He may **not** be worshipped according to the **imaginations** and devices of men...under **any visible representation**.... Deuteronomy 12:32; Matthew 15:9; Acts 17:25; Matthew 4:9-10; Deuteronomy 15:1-20; Exodus 20:4-6; Colossians 2:23."

Also the *Westminster Larger Catechism* (110) adds: "The duties required in the Second Commandment are...the disapproving, detesting and opposing all false-worship and, according to each one's place and calling, removing...all monuments of idolatry. Acts 17:16-17; Deuteronomy 7:5; Isaiah 30:22.... The sins forbidden in the Second Commandment are all devising..., using, and any wise approving any religious worship not instituted by God Himself; tolerating...the making [of] any representation of God...or of any of the Three Persons... inwardly in our mind or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness (Deuteronomy 4:15-16 and Acts 17:29 and Romans 1:21-25)."

Dear reader -- are **you** perhaps an idolator? If so, repent immediately -- and, instead, serve God Triune!

