

I FOUND THE ANCIENT WAY

By

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CHAPTER ONE

IMAGES

THE FIRST THING that began to make me doubt that the Catholic religion was true Christianity, and consequently that I was serving GOD according to His will, was the worship of images.

I had read many times the commandments of the Law given by GOD on Sinai, and I had never noticed the important fact that the catechisms have left out the second commandment:

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God" (Exodus 20:4, 5).

But in studying the Bible I noticed that there is no commandment more fully explained than this one, and that idolatry is not simply a fault of the people of Israel but of all humanity, not of one age but of all time.

I tried to appease my conscience by thinking that the divine commandment referred to pagan idols. But when I read the Bible more carefully I found out that idolatry is not only the worship of images of false gods, but also of the image of the true GOD, presuming such a thing to exist.

I was especially impressed by this passage from Deuteronomy 4:15, 16:

"For ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female."

GOD knew man's tendency to idolatry, and it seems most logical that He should have appeared in some visible form so as to channel that tendency into worship of Himself.

But since He does not want people to make images even of the true GOD, He speaks from the midst of the fire.

Almost immediately I noticed that when the Catholic Church took away the second commandment it had to divide the tenth into two, so that the number of ten would not be reduced:

"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbors" (Exodus 20:17).

In spite of the fact that woman is man's most prized possession, the Lord does not put her first, perhaps because, knowing ahead of time the falsification that the Catholic Church would commit, this would be the more obvious if they had to take her out of the middle of the commandment in order to make the ninth: **"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbors wife."**

Faced with this difficulty of reconciling the sacred text with the actual teaching of the Catholic Church. I noticed that Nacar and Colunga put in their Spanish translation of the Scriptures an explanatory note that says:

"Nor should this decalog be considered the same as the Christian decalog."

This explanatory note shocked me even more when I remembered the words of JESUS:

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matthew 5:17-18).

"How can these gentlemen argue," I said to myself, "that there is another decalog in which not only a jot or a tittle is missing, but a whole commandment? Why do Nacar and Colunga not explain in their note when GOD delivered the decalog that they call Christian?"

Since I am now converted to Evangelical Christianity, I can say, "We worship GOD in spirit and in truth because we follow the only decalog that man received from GOD, so that by following it we may not offend Him, since from it comes our knowledge of sin."

They say that they do not worship images, but only venerate them.

But the Holy Scripture classifies bowing or kneeling as an act of worship, as one can see in Acts 10:25, 26 and Revelation 22:9. Nevertheless, in the Catholic Church we see men and women bowing down before images.

This can't be blamed on the ignorance of the people, for the church itself says in its liturgy for Holy Friday,

Ecce lignum Crucis, in quo salus mundi pependi. Venite, adoremus
"Behold the wood of the cross, on which hung the salvation of the world,
Come let us adore it."

Crucifix in hand, the priest repeats this expression three times; then laying the crucifix on a cushion or cloth before the altar, he goes to the side of the epistle, takes off his shoes, and walks to the end of the church. As he nears the cross, he bows down three times, kissing the cross the last time. Afterward, while the people are imitating the priest, he and the two ministers who help him say certain prayers, one of which begins with this expression,

Crucem toom adoramus Domine
"Lord, we worship Thy cross."

Even though this idolatry could never be excused - since GOD prohibits worshipping or bowing before an image - if these were true pictures of CHRIST himself it would have some explanation. But who served as a model for the painter or sculptor?

CHRIST or His mother? No, often it is a debauched man or a woman of loose life, and a few days later we see a worshiper rapturously beholding that beautiful face of the cage of an ungodly man or of a prostitute and bowing down before it.

We have an example in the famous image of CHRIST that is given the name "The Cub of Seville,"

We know that the word "*cub*" means a young animal, and this was the surname or nickname of a gypsy who served as a model for the artist who sculptured the famous image. The image not only inherited the physical likeness of the gypsy, but also his nickname. Any person today can see, if he passes by the chapel that shelters this sculpture, a large number of worshipers kneeling before the image of a gypsy.

Can there be any worse perversion?

When I read in Isaiah (42:8), "**I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images,**" I noticed how GOD tells us through these inspired words that when we give honor to images, we steal it from Him.

Also, using Habakkuk as His instrument, He ridicules idolaters saying:

"Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it" (Habakkuk 2:19).

I also noticed that it is not only in the Old Testament, given to the Jews, that the worship of images is condemned, but also that the New Testament, which is the Magna Carta of the Christian faith, repudiates this way of trying to worship GOD.

I read that Paul said in his discourse on Mars Hill, "**Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device**" (Acts 17:29).

He could have said, "Take away the images of the false gods and set up the one of the true GOD," but instead he says that the Godhead cannot be likened to works of art and of human thoughts.

I asked myself, "What are those altar pieces, before which we bow down and on which they represent GOD the Father as an old man with a long white beard, but works of art and man's device? Who ever saw GOD?"

And like an arrow there sprang from my subconscious mind the text of Romans 1:23, "**They changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of corruptible man.**"

I thought I was acquainted with the Church Fathers, for I had made a listing for myself of quotations from them that I employed in the study circles of Catholic Action. But I had only paid attention to those paragraphs that agree doctrinally with the present teaching of the Catholic Church. I had not been able to read the voluminous works of the Fathers in their entirety.

But while I was reading works of religious controversy, I noticed that this precept from the Ten Commandments was strictly kept in the first centuries of Christianity with the same zeal with which it is kept in Bible-believing churches today.

Accordingly we hear Clement of Alexandria say, "For, in sooth, the image is only dead matter shaped by the craftsman's hand. But we [Christians] have no sensible image of sensible matter, but an image that is perceived by the mind alone - GOD, who alone is truly GOD" - (*Exhortation to the Heathen*).

Augustine says: "Thus to fall most completely into error was the due desert of men who sought for CHRIST and His apostles not in the holy writings, but on painted walls" (*Harmony of the Gospels*, Book 1, Chap. 10).

From this paragraph we can conclude that an element of idolatry was already beginning to spread through the Church of CHRIST, since there were those who looked for CHRIST and His Apostles painted on walls. And we see with what tact Augustine warns against the danger when he tells them that they are not conforming to the Scriptures.

Cyprian is even more eloquent in few words:

"Why do you bow your body captive before foolish images and creations of earth? GOD made you upright . . . your countenance is raised upwards to heaven and to GOD. Look thither, lift your eyes thitherward, seek GOD in the highest." (*To Demetrianus*, Sec. 16).

Athanasius declares that calling on idols is a sin, and what is wrong to begin with can never be right later on. (*Against the Heathen*).

But perhaps what surprised me most was a letter of Epiphanius that Jerome transcribes:

"I came to a villa called Anablatha, and, as I was passing, saw a lamp burning there. Asking what place it was, and learning it to be a church, I went in to pray, and found there a curtain hanging on the doors of the said church, dyed and embroidered. It bore an image either of CHRIST or of one of the saints; I do not rightly remember whose the image was. Seeing this, and being loath that an image of a man should be hung up in CHRIST's church contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures, I tore it asunder and advised the custodians of the place to use it as a winding sheet for some poor person" (*Epiphanius to John*).

This testimony has a double value: that of Jerome, who quotes it, and that of Epiphanius.

And notice the expression, "*Seeing this . . . contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures.*"

It is almost certain that those early Christians were also somewhat iconoclastic, just as people say about us today because we refuse to do anything in disregard of the Scriptures.

Then I understood that there had always been true Christians resolved to avoid everything that is condemned in the Word of GOD and that thousands gave their lives to defend Christian worship against the sin of idolatry that was being introduced.

But CHRIST had ceased to be the Head of a part of His early Church, the Roman emperor and kings of the earth occupying His place and being those who did and undid.

So in the year 726 the Isaurian Emperor (Leo) ordered the images removed, and in the year 754 Constantine Capronius convened the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople, which decreed:

"Only Satan could have introduced image worship and anyone who practices it should be punished."

But in the year 787 in the East the Empress Irene, whose devoutness didn't keep her from tearing out the eyes of her son Constantine, convened the second Council of Nicaea, which decreed the worship of images, while in the West Charlemagne rejected the . . . decree of Irene and of the second Council of Nicaea and wrote a book against image idolatry called Libri Carolini.

The Council of Frankfort in the year 794 condemned image worship, and in the year 825 the one in Paris ratified this condemnation. But this struggle between the Word of GOD and the power of darkness ended with the triumph of the latter on February 12, 842, the Devil using as his instrument another woman, the Empress Theodora.

What a terrible surprise it was for me - and what a spiritual comfort - to see that the Spirit of GOD fought against idolatry during the centuries from the third to the ninth, in which period thousands of faithful Christians lost their lives on account of their protests in the bosom of a church that was surrendering little by little to worldly influences. And this was only one step in its progressive departure from the teachings of CHRIST.

How sad it is to see that in the course of history this departure becomes more and more obvious!

"Who can tell," I said to myself fearfully, and repeat today with sorrow, thinking of so many of my Catholic relatives, companions and friends, "whether the Lord has not already said concerning the Roman Church that sentence that He addressed to His ancient rebellious people: '**Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone**' [Hosea 4:17]; or the one He pronounced against the people before the flood: '**My Spirit shall not always strive with man**' [Genesis 6:3]."

~ end of chapter 1 ~

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