A TREATISE

ON

THE WORSHIP OF IMAGES.

WRITTEN BY

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A TREATISE

OF

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IN THE NAME, AS IT SEEMETH, OF THE WHOLE CLERGY,

ADRESSED TO KING EDWARD VI, CONCERNING IMAGES, THAT THEY ARE NOT TO BE SET UP NOR WORSHIPPED IN CHURCHES.

FIRST PART.

Certain reasons which move us that we cannot with safe consciences give our assents that the Images of Christ, &c., should be placed and erected in Churches.

First, the words of the commandment, “Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image,” &c. And the same is repeated more plainly, “Cursed is the man which maketh a graven or molten image, &c., and setteth it in a secret place, and all the people shall say, Amen.”

In the first place, these words are to be noted: “Thou shalt not make to thyself;” that is, to any use of religion.

In the latter place, these words: “And setteth it in a secret place;” for no man then durst commit idolatry openly. So that, comparing the places, it evidently appears that images, both for use of religion and in place of peril for idolatry, are forbidden.

God, knowing the inclination of man to idolatry, shewed the reason why he made this general prohibition: “Lest ye err, peradventure thou, being deceived, shouldest bow down to them and worship them.”

This general law is generally by all to be observed, notwithstanding that peradventure a great number cannot be hurt by them, which may appear by the example following.

[1 Placed where there is danger of their being worshipped. Ep.]
God forbade the people to join their children in marriage with strangers, adding the reason: “For they will seduce thy son, that he shall not follow me.”

Moses was not deceived or seduced by Jethro’s daughter, nor Boaz by Ruth, being a woman of Moab. And yet for all that, the general law was to be observed, “Thou shalt join no marriage with them.” And so likewise, “Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image.” &c.

In Deuteronomy God gives a special charge to avoid images: “Beware that thou forget not the covenant of the Lord thy God which he made with thee, and so make to thyself any graven image of anything which the Lord hath forbidden thee; for the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, and a jealous God. If thou have children and nephews, and do dwell in the land, and, being deceived, make to yourselves any graven image, doing evil before the Lord your God, and provoke him to anger, I do this day call heaven and earth to witness that you shall quickly perish out of the land which you shall possess; you shall not dwell in it any longer, but the Lord will destroy you and scatter you amongst all nations.”

Note what a solemn obtestation God useth, and what grievous punishments he threateneth to the breakers of the second commandment.

In the tabernacle and temple of God no image was by God appointed to be set openly, nor by practice afterwards used or permitted, so long as religion was purely observed; so that the use and execution of the law is a good interpreter of the true meaning of the same.

If, by virtue of the second commandment, images were not lawful in the temple of the Jews, then by the same commandment they are not lawful in the churches of the Christians. For being a moral commandment, and not ceremonial (for, by consent of writers, only a part of the precept of observing the Sabbath is ceremonial), it is a perpetual commandment, and bindeth us as well as the Jews.

The Jews by no means would consent to Herod, Pilate,
or Petronius, that images should be placed in the temple of Jerusalem; but rather offered themselves to death than assent unto it: who, besides that they are commended by Josephus for observing the meaning of the law, would not have endangered themselves so far, if they had thought images had been indifferent in the temple of God. For as St Paul saith, “What hath the temple of God to do with idols?”

God’s Scripture in no place commends the use of images, but in a great number of places doth disallow and condemn them.

They are called, in the book of Wisdom, the trap and snare of the feet of the ignorant.

It is said, the invention of them was the beginning of spiritual intoxication; and that they were not from the beginning, neither shall they continue to the end.

In the fifteenth chapter of the same book it is said, “Their pictures are a worthless labour.” And again, “They Umbrat trees, and worthy of death that put their trust in them, that make them, that love them, and that worship them.”

The Psalms and prophets are full of like sentences; and how can we then praise that which God’s Spirit doth always disapprove?

Furthermore, an image made by a father, as appears in the same book, for the memorial of his son departed, was the first invention of images, and occasion of idolatry.

How much more, then, shall an image made in the memory of Christ, and set up in the place of religion, occasion the same offence? Images have their beginning from the heathen; and upon no good ground, therefore, can they be profitable to Christians. Whereunto Athanasius agrees, when writing of images against the Gentiles: “The invention of images


[3 “Thus some parent mourning bitterly for a son who hath been taken from him, makes an image of his child; and him who before had been to his family as a dead man they now begin to worship as a god; rites and sacrifices being instituted to be observed by his dependents.”

Book of Wisdom, xiv.


came of no good, but of evil; and whatsoever hath an evil beginning can never in anything be judged good, seeing it is wholly naught.”

St. John says, “My little children, beware of images;” but to set them in the churches, which are places dedicated to the service and invocation of God, and that over the Lord’s table, being the highest and most honourable place, where most danger of abuse both is and ever hath been, is not to beware of them nor to flee from them, but rather to embrace and receive them. Tertullian, expounding the same words, writeth thus: “Little children, keep yourselves from the shape itself, or form of them.”

Images in the Church either serve to edify or to destroy. If they edify, then is there a kind of edification which the Scriptures neither teach nor command, but always disallow: if they destroy, they are not to be used; for in the Church of God all things ought to be done to edify.

The commandment of God is, “Thou shalt not lay a stumbling-block or a stone before the blind;” and, “Cursed is he that maketh the blind to wander in his way.”

The simple and unlearned people who have been so long under blind guides, are blind in matters of religion, and inclined to error and idolatry. Therefore, to set images before them to stumble at (for they are snares and traps for the feet of the ignorant), or to lead them out of the true way, is not only against the commandment of God, but desperveth also the malediction and curse of God.

The use of images is, to the learned and confirmed in knowledge, neither necessary nor profitable. To the superstitionists, it is a confirmation in error. To the simple and weak, an occasion to fall, and very offensive and wounding to their consciences; and therefore very dangerous. For St. Paul saith, “Offending the brethren and wounding their weak consciences, they sin against Christ.” And Matthew xviii: “Woe be to him by whom offence or occasion of falling cometh; it would better that a millstone were tied about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than to offend one of the little ones that believe in Christ.” And where an objection may be made that such offence may be taken away by sincere doctrine and preaching, it is to be answered, that is not sufficient; as hereafter more at large shall appear.

And though it should be admitted as true, yet it should follow that sincere doctrine and preaching should always, and in all places, continue as well as images: and so that wheresoever an image were erected to offend, there should also, of reason, a godly and sincere preacher be continually maintained; for it is reason that the remedy be as large as the offence, the medicine as general as the poison; but that is not possible in the realm of England, if images should be generally allowed, as reason and experience may teach.

As good magistrates, who intend to banish all whoredom, do drive away all naughty persons, especially out of such places as be suspected; even so images, being “Mere trices,” id est, “Whores”—for that the worshipping of them is called in the prophets fornication and adultery—ought to be banished, and especially out of churches, which is the most suspected place, and where the spiritual fornication hath been most committed.

It is not expedient to allow and admit that which is hurtful to the greatest number; but in all churches and commonwealths the ignorant and weak are the greatest number, to whom images are hurtful, and not profitable.

And whereas it is commonly alleged that images in churches stir up the mind to devotion, it may be answered that, contrariwise, they rather distract the mind from prayer, hearing of God’s word, and other godly meditations; as we read that in the council chamber of the Lacedemonians no picture or image was suffered, lest, in consultation of weighty matters of the common weal, their minds, by the sight of the outward image, might be occasioned to withdraw or to wander from the matter.

The experience of this present time declareth, that those parts of the realm which think, and are persuaded, that God is not offended by doing outward reverence to an image, most desire the restitution of images, and have been most diligent to set them up again: restitution, therefore, of them by com-

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1 Filioli custodite vos ab idolis, non jam ab idololatria quasi ab officio, sed ab idolis, i.e. ab ipso effigie eorum.

mon authority shall confirm them more in their error, to the danger of their souls, than ever they were before. For, as one man writeth, "Nothing is more certain or sure than that which of doubtful is made certain."

The profit of images is uncertain; the peril, by experience of all ages and states of the Church, as afore, is most certain. The benefit to be obtained by them, if there be any, is very small; the danger in seeing of them, which is the danger of idolatry, is the greatest of all other. Now, to allow a most certain peril for an uncertain profit, and the greatest danger for the smallest benefit, in matters of faith and religion, is a tempting of God and a grievous offence.

SECOND PART.

Probations out of the Fathers, Councils, and Histories.

First, it is manifest, that in the primitive Church images were not commonly used in churches, oratories, and places of assembly for religion; but they were generally detested and abhorred, insomuch that the want of imagery was objected to the Christians by the heathen, as a crime.

Origen relates that Celsus objected the lack of images.

Arnobius saith also, that the Euchists accused the Christians, that they had neither altars nor images.

Zephyrinus in his "Commentary upon the Apology of Tertullian," gathers thus of Tertullian's words: "That place of persuasion were very cold, and to no purpose at all, except we hold this always, that Christians in those days did hate, most of all, images, with their trim dressing and ornamentation."

Irenæus reproveth the heretics called Gnostics, because that they carried about the image of Christ, made in Pilate's time, after his own proportion (which were much more to be esteemed than any that can be made now); using also, for declaration of their affection towards it, to set garlands upon the head of it.

Lactantius affirmin plainly, "It is not to be doubted, that there is no religion where there is any image." If Christians then had used images, he would not have made his proposition so large.

St Augustine commends Varro the Roman in these words: De Civitate Dei, lib. iv. cap. 16.

"Since Varro thought religion might be kept more purely without images, who does not see how near he came to the truth?" So that not only by Varro's judgment, but also by St Augustine's approbation, the most pure and chaste observance of religion, and the nearest the truth, is to be without images.

The same St Augustine, in Ps. cxiii., hath these words: "Images have more force to bow down and crook the silly soul, than to teach it."

And upon the same Psalm he moves this question: "Every child, yea, every beast knoweth that it is not God which they see; why, then, doth the Holy Ghost so oft give warning to beware of that which all do know?" St Augustine answers: "When they are set in churches, and begin

Made like to the actual bodily form and proportion in which Christ appeared upon earth.


Non est dubium, quin religio nulla sit ubique unumcum simulacrum est.


Plus valent simulacra ad curvandum infelice animam quam ad corrigendum.—[Ed. Par. Ben. 1681, tom. iv. col. 1202. Ed.]

Quis quaeris, immo quaevis bestia scit, non esse Deum quod vident: cur ergo Spiritus Sanctus totes monet avtendum quod omnes sciant? [Ed. 1684, p. 203. Ed.]

[Quemam cum ponuntur in templis, et semel incipient adorari à multitudine, statim nascessur sordidissimus affectus erroris.]

The genuine words of Augustine are:

"Quis quaeritis non hoc certum esse respondet, quod simulacra gentium os habent et non loquuntur, oculos habent et non vide-
once to be worshipped of the multitude or common people, straightway springs up a most filthy affection of error."

This place of St Augustine well opens how weak a reason it is to say, images are a thing indifferent in chambers and in churches; for the alteration of the place, manner, and other circumstances, oftentimes alters the nature of the thing. It is lawful to buy and sell in the market, but not so in churches. It is lawful to eat and drink, but not so in churches. And therefore saith St Paul: "Have you not houses to eat and drink in? Do you contemn the Church of God?"

Many other actions there be, which are lawful and honest in private places, which are neither comely nor honest, not only in churches, but also in other assemblies of honest people.

Tertullian saith he used sometimes to burn frankincense in his chamber, which was then used by idolators, and is so still in the Romish churches; but he joineth withal: "But not after such a rite or ceremony, nor after such a fashion, nor with such preparation or sumptuousness, as is done before the idols."

So that images placed in churches, and set in an honourable place of estimation, as St Augustine saith, and especially over the Lord's table, which is done (using the words of Tertullian) after the same manner and fashion which the Papists used, especially after so long continuance of abuse of images, and so many being blinded with superstitious opinion towards them—cannot be counted a thing indifferent, but a most certain ruin of many souls.

[1] Sed non eodem ritu, nec eodem habitu, nec eodem apparatu, quod agitur apud idola.

[2] Quum venissem ad villam quae dicitur Anabatha, vidisseque ibi preteriens lucernam ardentem, et interrogasset quis locus esset, didisseque esse Ecclesiam, et intrassem ut orarem, inveni ibi velum pendens in foribus ejusdem ecclesie, tintum atque depictum, et habens imaginem quasi Christi vel sancti cujusdam, non enim aetatis memoriae cujus fuit. Cum ergo hoc vidisse in Ecclesiâ Christi contra auctoritatem scripturarum hominis pendere imaginem, acil ilud * * * et precopi in Ecclesiâ Christi istiusmodi vela, quae contra religionem nostram veniant, non appendi.

Fourthly, that he did not only remove it, but with a vehemency of zeal cut it in pieces; following the example of the good King Hezekiah, who brake the brazen serpent and burnt it to ashes.

Last of all, that Epiphanius thinketh it the duty of vigilant bishops to be careful that no such kind of painted images are permitted in the Church.

Serenus, bishop of Massilia, broke down images, and destroyed them, when he saw them begin to be worshipped.1

Experience of the times since has declared whether of the two sentences were better. For since Gregory's time the images standing in the Western Churches have been overflowed with idolatry, notwithstanding his or other men's doctrine; whereas, if Serenus's judgment had universally taken place, no such thing had happened: for if no images had been suffered, none could have been worshipped; and consequently no idolatry committed by them.

THIRD PART.

To recite the proceedings in Histories and Councils about the matter of Images, would require a long discourse, but it shall be sufficient here briefly to touch a few.

It is manifest to them that read histories, that not only emperors, but also divers and sundry councils in the Eastern Church, have condemned and abolished images, both by decrees and examples.

Petrus Crinitus, in his book of "Honest Discipline," wrote out of the emperors' books these words: 2 "Valens


[2] Valens et Theodosius imperatores praefecto praetorio ad hunc modum scripscrunt. Qum sit nobis cura diligens in rebus omnibus

and Theodosius, the emperors, wrote to the pretorian prefect in this sort: 'Whereas we are very careful that the religion of Almighty God should be kept in all things; we permit no man to cast, grave, or paint the image of our Saviour Christ, either in colours, stone, or other matter: but wherever it be found, we command it to be taken away, punishing them most grievously that shall attempt anything contrary to our decrees and empire.'"

Leo III., a man commended in histories for his excellent virtues and godliness, (who as is judged of some men was the author of the book de re militari, that is of the feats of war, being translated out of Greek by Sir John Cheke, and dedicated to king Henry the Eighth your highness' father,) by public authority commanded abolishing of images, and in Constantinople caused all the images to be gathered together on a heap, and burned them to ashes.

Constantine, his son, assembled a council of the bishops of the Eastern Church, in which council it was decreed as follows: "It is not lawful for them that believe in God through Jesus Christ, to have any images, either of the Creator or of any creatures, set up in the temples to be worshipped; but rather that all images, by the law of God, and for the avoiding of offence, ought to be taken out of churches." Which decree was executed in all places where any images were, either in Greece or in Asia. But in all these times the bishops of Rome, rather maintaining the authority of Gregory, than, like Christian bishops, weighing the peril of the Church, always in the assemblies allowed images.

Not long after the bishop of Rome, practising with Tharasius, patriarch of Constantinople, obtained of Irene, the empress, her son Constantine being then young, that a


[3] The work "de apparatus bellico, or Tactica," of which the treatise de re militari is the first chapter, was not the work of Leo III., otherwise called Iconoclastes, but of Leo VI. who was surnamed Pacificus, Philosophus, and Sapiens. Cave, Hist. Literaria. Ed.}
council should be called at Nice, in which the Pope's legates were presidents, which appeared well by their fruits; for in that council it was decreed, that images should not only be permitted in churches, but also worshipped; which council was confuted by a book written by Charlemagne, the emperor, calling it a foolish and arrogant council.  

Soon after this council arose a sharp contention between Irene, the empress, and her son, Constantine VI., the emperor, who destroyed images. And in the end, as she had before wickedly burned the bones of her father-in-law, Constantine V., so afterwards unnaturally she put out the eyes of her son, Constantine VI.  

To be short, there never was anything that made more division, or brought more mischief into the Church, than the controversy of images; by reason whereof, not only the Eastern Church was divided from the Western, and never since perfectly reconciled, but also the empire was cut asunder and divided, and the gate opened to the Saracens and Turks to enter and overcome a great part of Christendom. The fault whereof most justly is to be ascribed to the patrons of images, who could not be contented with the example of the primitive Church, being most simple and sincere, and most agreeable to the Scripture—(for as Tertullian saith 4, “What is the first, that is true, and that which is later is counterfeit”—but with all extremity they maintained the use of images in churches, whereof no profit nor advantage ever grew to the Church of God. For it is evident that infinite millions of souls have been cast into eternal damnation by the occasion of images used in place of religion; and no history can record that ever any one soul was won unto Christ by having of images. But lest it might appear that the Western Church had always generally retained and commended images, it is to be noted that in a council held in Spain, called the Eliberian Council 5, the use of images in churches was clearly prohibited in this form of words: “We decree that pictures ought not to be in churches, lest that be painted upon the walls which is worshipped or adored.”  

But, notwithstanding this, experience hath declared, that neither assembling in councils, neither writings, preaching, decrees, making of laws, prescribing of punishments, hath holpen against images, to which idolatry has been committed, nor against idolatry whilst images stood. For these blind books and dumb schoolmasters (which they call layman’s books) have more prevailed by their carved and painted preaching of idolatry, than all other written books and preachings in teaching the truth, and the horror of that vice.  

Having thus declared unto your Highness a few causes out of many which move our consciences in this matter, we beseech your Highness most humbly not to strain us any further, but consider that God’s word threateneth a terrible judgment unto us, if we, being pastors and ministers in his Church, should assent unto the thing which in our learning and conscience we are persuaded tendeth to the confirmation of error, superstition, and idolatry, and finally, to the ruin of the souls committed to our charge, for which we must give an account to the Prince of pastors at the last day. We pray your Majesty also not to be offended with this our plainness and liberty, which all good and Christian princes have ever taken in good part at the hands of godly bishops.  

St Ambrose, writing to Theodosius the emperor, useth these words 6, that is to say: “Neither is it the part of an emperor to deny free liberty of speaking, nor yet the duty of a priest not to speak what he thinks.” And again: “In  


God's cause whom wilt thou hear, if thou wilt not hear the priest, to whose great peril the fault should be committed? Who dare say the truth unto thee if the priest dare not?" These and such like speeches of St Ambrose Theodosius and Valentinianus, the emperors, always took in good part; and we doubt not but your Grace will do the like, not only of whose clemency, but also beneficence, we have largely tasted.

We beseech your Majesty also, in these and such like controversies of religion, to refer the discussion and deciding of them to a synod of your bishops and other godly learned men, according to the example of Constantinus Maximus, and other Christian emperors, that the reasons of both parties being examined by them, the judgment may be given uprightly in all doubtful matters.

And to return to this present matter, we most humbly beseech your Majesty to consider, that besides weighty causes in policy which we leave to the wisdom of your honourable counsellors, the establishment of images by your authority shall not only utterly discredit our ministers as builders up of the things which we have destroyed, but also blemish the fame of your most godly father, and also of such notable fathers as have given their life for the testimony of God's truth, who by public law removed all images.

The almighty and everlasting God plentifully endue your Majesty with his Spirit and heavenly wisdom, and long preserve your most gracious reign and prosperous government over us, to the advancement of His glory, to the overthrow of superstition, and to the benefit and comfort of all your Highness's loving subjects.