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INDIFFERENT IMAGINATIONS?

THE CASE AGAINST IMAGES AT MEETINGS OF N. TEXAS PRESBYTERY

by Christopher Coldwell

FROM THE EDITOR

This paper deals with the presence of representations of Christ at meetings of church courts in a denomination where the unlawfulness of such images is a doctrine presently left open to exception. The Westminster Standards condemn such representations as unlawful, yet in the PCA ministers are ordained who take exception to that teaching. Yet, those who think such images are unlawful and offensive to God, are not without scriptural recourse even when the majority believe such representations are lawful in their nature. The North Texas Presbytery of the PCA was petitioned last April by David Seekamp, ruling elder at FPCR, to cover any images that would be present at meetings of presbytery. This article was written to support that petition. While that was the particular occasion of this paper, the arguments herein are scriptural principles which can be applied to many other situations, within the limitations set forth. The session of FPCR felt this article would be useful and interesting to the readership of *The Blue Banner*, and it is reproduced with slight changes in this edition, at their urging. Other materials relating to the unlawfulness of such representations follow this piece.

It is certainly a shame to say the least that a little bit of colored glass or paint should be deemed more worthy of respect than even the least of one of the Lord's redeemed. However, for some people this is the case. On July 23rd, North Texas Presbytery essentially refused Elder Seekamp's petition by sending it back to die in committee.

BACKGROUND¹

Many in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) see nothing wrong with 'representations' of our Lord Jesus, and believe that it is a matter of indifference whether one has them or not. David Seekamp (RE, First Presbyterian Rowlett) holds to the position of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, which has not been deleted or modified in the PCA's standards. They teach that purported images of Christ or any of the persons of the Trinity are unlawful, and that the making of them is not an indifferent matter. However, given the current state of this question in the PCA, he is not seeking for a determination that they are unlawful in their nature, but he is seeking for a restriction of their use. Elder Seekamp is simply entreating that his conscience be respected, and that a church hosting presbytery meetings cover or take down any images present for the duration of the presbytery meeting, and where that is impractical, that the meeting be held elsewhere.

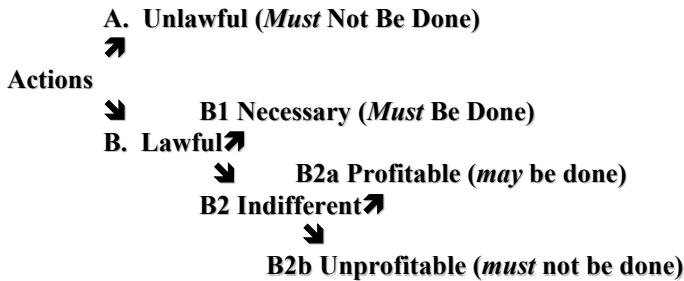
THE NATURE OF THE CASE

Theologians divide actions into categories.² Actions are *lawful* when they *may be done*. Some lawful actions are *necessary* in that they *may not be left undone*. Actions which may be either left *undone*, or *done*, are called *indifferent*. Some indifferent actions are *expedient* in that they *may be done profitably* – others which due to circumstances are unprofitable

¹The author provided this article to Elder Seekamp in support of his petition to N. Texas Presbytery. The text of this petition follows this paper.

²George Gillespie, *English Popish Ceremonies (EPC)*, (Dallas: Naphtali Press, 1993), p. ii.

have become *inexpedient* and are *not to be done*. These might be diagrammed as follows:



As Protestants it is hoped that no one in the PCA would contend that ‘representations’ of the Godhead are necessary. The disagreement in the church is presumably between those who with the standards contend that they are unlawful at all times, and those who contend that some ‘representations’ are a matter of indifference. However, just because something is indifferent and may be done, does not mean it is expedient and may be done profitably. If one side says something is indifferent, and the other that it is unlawful, then the conscience of the latter should be respected. The following is an attempt to show that those who believe images are in their nature indifferent must respect the consciences of those who believe them to be unlawful.

AN INDIFFERENT MATTER

Something may be indifferent in its nature (or we might say ‘in theory’), but not in its use.³ The use of things indifferent is subject to the circumstances surrounding it: Who, What, Where, By what aid, Why, How, and When. These circumstances can change the situation surrounding an action which might be indifferent otherwise, so that it is no longer. If a practice is truly indifferent (which for the sake of argument we are allowing in this case), then we must follow what the Scriptures say about indifferent things.

SCRIPTURE RULES FOR THINGS INDIFFERENT

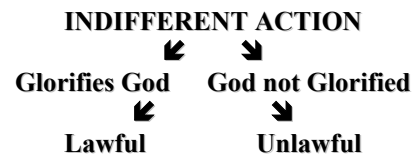
One of our Scottish Presbyterian fathers has said, “Every thing which is indifferent in the nature of it, is not by and by indifferent in the use of it. But the use of a thing indifferent ought evermore to be either chosen or refused, followed or forsaken, according to

³That which is lawful in the nature of it is never lawful in the use of it, except only when it is expedient for edification, as teaches the Apostle (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23).” *EPC*, p. 68.

these three rules delivered to us in God's word: 1. The rule of piety; 2. The rule of charity; 3. The rule of purity.”⁴

THE RULE OF PIETY

All things are to be done to the glory of God. 1 Cor. 10:31. “Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” Rom. 14:7-8. “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord.” Col. 3:17. “And whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” As Gillespie says: “Our whole life, and by consequence, all the particular actions of it, ought to be referred to God's glory, and ordered according to his will.” Westminster Shorter Catechism #1 says, “Man's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy him forever.” Dr. Davenant says, “Even those actions which are indifferent by their own nature, ought nevertheless to be done by Christians in the name of Christ, that is, according to the will of Christ, and to Christ's glory.”⁵



What this means is that just because some thing or some action is indifferent in its nature, we cannot use that thing or perform that action any way we please. It is governed by the will of God, and with an eye to his glory. A general precept of Christ is that we are to “Love our neighbor as ourself.” Things indifferent are forborne out of love toward our neighbor, even more out of love for brothers in the Lord. It does not glorify Christ to choose the use of an indifferent thing over the well-being of any of his people.

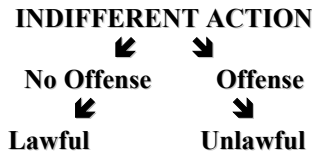
THE RULE OF CHARITY

This rule teaches us that we should not use anything indifferent when offense will occur when we do. Rom. 14:21. “It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.” Rom. 14:19. “Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and the things wherewith one may edify another.” Rom. 15:2. “Let every one of us

⁴*EPC*, pp. 413-415.

⁵*EPC*, *Ibid*.

please his neighbor for his good to edification.” 1 Cor. 10:23. “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.” As one commentator says, “In meat, drink, and the whole kind of things indifferent, it is not enough to look whether they be lawful, but that, further, we are to look whether (to do or omit) the same be expedient, and may edify.”⁶

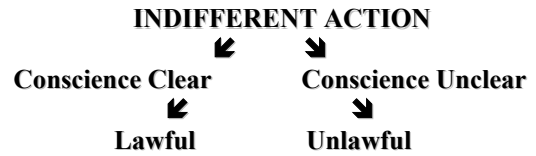


The Rule of Charity in essence is the avoiding of offending our Christian brethren. James Durham defines offense (the old word was scandal) this way: “For if charity and love are the end of the law, and men ought not only to seek their own things, but the things one of another, and love their neighbor as themselves, then ought they to seek their neighbor's edification as their own, and to eschew the prejudging [*prejudicing*] of them. Hence, scandal is opposite that charity and love, and also to that respect which we ought to carry to our brother (Rom. 14:10, 15). Yea, it is a scandal and offense as it is opposite to, and inconsistent with, love to his spiritual well-being. And so in a word, that which may impede and hinder his spiritual growth and advancement therein, is an offense and scandal (Rom. 14:21).” It “hurts his spiritual condition, either by wronging his liveliness, or activity, or comfort, etc.”⁷ 1 John 3:18. “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.”

THE RULE OF PURITY

This rule “respects our peace and certainty of conscience, without which anything is unclean to us, though it is clean and lawful in its own nature.” Rom. 14:14. “To him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.” “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.” Rom 14:23. “He that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” Calvin says, “It is utterly wrong to come near in any respect to what you think displeases the Lord, yes indeed,

even to what you are not convinced is pleasing to him.”⁸



The Rule of Purity involves the doctrine of Liberty of Conscience. “God alone is lord of the conscience and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men.” WCF 20:II. True liberty of conscience is certainly not the liberty to break God's law in neglecting duty or in committing sin. But it is also not the liberty to do anything-else we please. As rule one teaches us, we are to do everything to the glory of God, and if there is no peace of conscience in a matter, then we are to avoid it. Liberty of conscience is violated when by authority or example we lead someone to violate his conscience in a matter he is in doubt about, or thinks unlawful. There is no true church authority that can violate this conscience by imposing doctrines of men, and we should avoid all bad example which would have an ill bearing on a brother's case of conscience.⁹

THE RULES APPLIED

Gillespie concludes discussing these three rules by saying: “Now if a thing indifferent is used according to these three rules, the use of it is not only lawful but expedient also; but if it is not used according to these rules, the use of it is altogether unlawful. And since a thing indifferent in the nature of it can never be lawfully used, except according to these rules, hence it follows, that the use of a thing indifferent is never

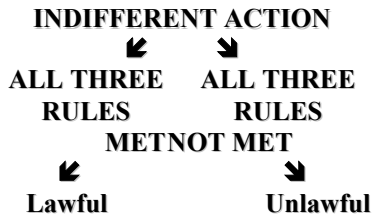
⁶EPC, Ibid.

⁷James Durham, *Concerning Scandal (Scandal)*, (Dallas: Naphtali Press, 1990), p. 12.

⁸EPC, Ibid.

⁹When church powers merely give their will for their reason (that is they answer with naked authority because they cannot or will not articulate any Scriptural reason to go along with their decisions – EPC, p. 22), they have become tyrants over the conscience. The church does not legislate, but adjudicates *from* Scripture. Giving a bare answer, such as ‘What part of *No do you not understand*,’ is an abuse of church power. In fact, such tyranny is one of the lawful reasons given by Thomas M’Crie to separate from the communion of a church. *The Unity of the Church* (Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1989), p. 98. Gillespie says, “Should any synod of any church take more upon them than the synod of the apostles did, who enjoined nothing at their own pleasure but only what they show to be necessary, because of the law of charity (Acts 15:28)?” See EPC, pp. 27-30.

lawful to us when we have no other warrant for using the same beside our own will and pleasure.”¹⁰



Elder Seekamp's certainty that it is unlawful to make ‘representations’ of any person of the Godhead clearly means rule three, the Rule of Purity, cannot be met in this case. Rule two, the Rule of Charity, shows that those who do not agree that they are unlawful, must prefer the offended brother over the thing they believe to be indifferent. Regarding rule one, if Elder Seekamp is correct, then the images can never be used to God's glory, because it is in accordance with his will they not be made. If on the other hand, they are truly indifferent, they cannot glorify God in this case because they offend some brethren who do not see their indifference, and we can only glorify the Lord by obeying his rules regarding the use of indifferent things (rules two and three). So, in following these biblical rules, it is clear in the present case Elder Seekamp's request that such things not be present at presbytery meetings must be granted.

OBJECTIONS

1. Any objection that is offered which prefers having the images present, over the objections of conscience, changes the nature of the debate. At that point, the images have ceased being simply viewed as indifferent, and are now viewed as necessary; so necessary, that they are more important than our brother's liberty of conscience. This necessity cannot be proved from Scripture; but it must be proved to override and instruct consciences.¹¹ So, lest there be confusion here, it should be clear that those who believe something is indifferent cannot argue as though they were the weaker brother, and plead for the *use* of things indifferent. The offense from

¹⁰EPC, p. 415.

¹¹James Durham says, “It is a great mistake in religion, to think that in indifferent circumstantial things, the weak should follow the strong, and upon that ground to undervalue the offending of them. It is quite contrary to Scripture. The strong are to carry to the weak as men do to brittle and weak vessels, using tenderness to them lest they be crushed.” *Scandal*, p. 40.

indifferent things comes in their use, not their non-use. When the use of something is insisted upon, it is no longer indifferent, but it has become necessary, and must have scriptural warrant.

To reiterate again, the position Elder Seekamp holds in conscience (that such images are unlawful) is the historic Reformed view, and the one taken by the Westminster Standards. Since there is divided practice on this issue in the PCA, and a difference of opinion in practice allowed, then the rules of things indifferent should be followed to keep peace in the church. It shows preference and love toward brethren when we show esteem toward their consciences more than things. This also works to build peace in the church.

2. Objections might be given limiting the impact of the Apostle Paul's teachings on the weak and strong in this particular case. How could they be limited?

(1) It might be objected, ‘These teachings of Paul don't apply to this case.’ If these ‘pictures’ are *really* indifferent (there are no other choices if they are not necessary, nor unlawful) then Paul's teachings apply to determine their expediency. Romans 14:15, etc. “Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died ... It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor *anything* whereby thy brother *stumbleth*, or is *offended*, or is made *weak*.” It is clear by ‘anything’ Paul is talking about all things indifferent.

(2) The strong might say, ‘Surely, we are not to put up with this inconvenience forever’ (limiting the duration). Yet Paul's teaching is clear (1 Cor. 8:13), “Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.” As long as the possibility of offense exists, the rule stands: forbear doing whatever it is that might offend.

(3) Someone might object that so and so is a trouble maker, or he is only one person, and of little consequence (limiting to whom the Scriptures apply). Yet again Paul's teaching is clear (1 Cor. 10:32): “Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God.” This encompasses all types of persons; even *everybody* on earth (inside or outside the church).

(4) A limitation of Paul's rule might be imposed because of the perception that the effect on the weak is not serious enough to warrant the bother of accommodating them. 'There is a certain inconvenience in removing these "representations," and the small discomfort it causes others is not a strong enough reason to cause us to undergo them. It's not like these "pictures" are causing you to sin. After all, you're claiming they're unlawful; you certainly aren't going to misuse them. And others may be offended if we remove them.'

(a) Paul says we are to take care lest we *stumble*, *offend* or make *weak*. James Durham correctly understands this verse, as we quoted above, when he says: "And so in a word, that which may impede and hinder his spiritual growth and advancement therein, is an offense and scandal (Rom. 14:21)." It "hurts his spiritual condition, either by wronging his liveliness, or activity, or comfort, etc."¹² Is there really any mere inconvenience which would check us in our care of our brother's spiritual condition?

(b) The bottom line is not whether or not it is actually causing brothers to sin. Paul does not limit it to this, and Durham clearly draws out the implications from Rom. 14:21. As far as whether or not it is a cause of sin, how can any determine what is in another's mind or heart, and so be assured these 'representations' are not a cause of sin? They certainly have that potential; but the danger is even greater for those who think they are lawful. Could some be attaching too much sentiment to them; could they be attaching a superstitious religious significance to them? It is not just those like David Seekamp one needs to be concerned about stumbling, offending, or making weak; but those also who may be overvaluing these 'pictures.'

(c) Why would others be offended by ceding to Elder Seekamp's petition. This petition is only seeking a temporary removal or covering of the images for the time in which presbytery meets, for the sake of the consciences of those who think them unlawful. If any group must be chosen not to offend, then it must be those who believe that these 'representations' are unlawful. Additionally, there is much more potential evil in not removing them (fostering superstition, etc.).¹³

Whether it is the least of our brethren that we may offend, or in the least extent, or in the least thing, the law of the Apostle stands: "For meat destroy not the work of God."

3. It has been suggested that Elder Seekamp remove himself during the worship services at presbytery as a way to alleviate his conscience. However, Mr. Seekamp finds the bare existence of images unlawful. It is not his understanding that images are lawful as long as they are not worshipped. Presently, both positions are held in the PCA. This present petition is not over which position is correct. If images are indifferent in nature, then they cannot be forced on someone's conscience. Besides, the mere suggestion that he absent himself from the worship services shows an inappropriate preference toward these supposed indifferent things, rather than a desire borne of love to bear with a brother in a case of conscience. We should be able to worship together, and desire to do so. It should not be (and cannot be) so important for one to impose an unnecessary practice or belief on everyone that we banish people from the worship of God.

4. There might be an objection over allowing the 'weak brother' to set the agenda for the church, and 'raining on the parade of the strong.' However, first, Elder Seekamp is only taking the position of the 'weaker brother' because he is viewed in that capacity by those who view themselves to be the strong brethren. Point in fact, as has been said before, the confessional position supports Elder Seekamp, while the other view and practice is permitted and tolerated. Be this as it may, that the truly weak brother should not 'set the agenda for the church,' it is important to note that one soul is worth more than any practice or thing which we can live without. The parade the weak may 'rain upon' may not be worth making much of a fuss over. For a while at least (Paul says forever), we can live without the thing that is indifferent. Paul certainly places the burden on 'not doing,' when he says, "I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble" (1 Cor. 8:13). The strong's parade is not worth the stumbling of a brother. Besides, we

¹²*Scandal*, p. 12.

¹³Durham is the authority on understanding offense. His *Concerning Scandal* is a real masterpiece in this area of practical theology. His numerous distinctions are very helpful. In this case (in keeping with the objection),

covering these images merely displeases the one group, while not covering them will actually offend those who believe them unlawful. His rule is that we should always "look [at] what is most expedient as to edification." *Scandal*, pp. 28-31.

shouldn't view the commands of God which say to be careful lest we stumble the weak, as their having a 'trump card' over the church's agenda. Things indifferent are not the church's agenda. The gospel is not indifferent, nor are God's ordinances of government and worship. The weak have no claim to change these, the church's true agenda.

5. An objection might be raised against the whole drift of this argumentation. 'Elder Seekamp, after all, believes these 'pictures' are unlawful. We're claiming they're indifferent. Argue fairly!'

There is nothing unfair in arguing this way. It is precisely biblical and logical. Just because the concession is made that the 'lawfulness' question is impractical to press at the present time, does not mean David Seekamp has abandoned any rights he may lawfully press from Scripture. Since those who disagree with him claim these 'pictures' are indifferent, he asks that he be treated biblically according to that position (which consistency and integrity requires). One cannot both claim something is indifferent, and abandon the protections accorded by Scripture to those who think that thing unlawful.

6. The objection might be raised: 'Indeed, Paul's teachings on things indifferent do apply, for he writes (Rom. 14:1): "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations." This is a doubtful disputation, so it should not be discussed further.'

It is hoped that no one would actually pose this objection, and that all would cringe who hear it, no matter what their position on the subject. Mr. Seekamp's position is not a doubtful disputation. It is *the majority report of the Reformed Faith*. The view has precise and biblical arguments supporting it. The Westminster Standards teach this judgment as doctrine from Scripture, nor does it hold a minor place among the many doctrines taught therein. It is held by the majority of the Reformed theologians before and since the production of these standards.

Besides, what does the Apostle mean here in Romans 14:1? He surely can't mean every time there is a difference of opinion, it is a doubtful disputation, and it should not be discussed. And if it is a doubtful disputation, what is Paul's remedy? This is not an escape clause to end debate and disregard the views of the weak. Debate should end (if it is a doubtful disputation), but the strong are to rest quiet in their

faith, and are not to offend the weak. James Durham's understanding of this passage is helpful (see footnote).¹⁴

ONE LAST OBJECTION — THE RPCES REPORT

7. A final objection might be raised, and indeed it has been by implication, in the RPCES report on the use of 'pictures' of Christ.¹⁵ It is contended that these images are not just indifferent in nature, but they are (1) profitable (expedient) and even (2) necessary to be used. Following the conclusions of the report, one could object to protests against images along these two lines.

(1) The report does not just argue for the lawfulness of 'representations' of Christ, but seriously contends for their use despite potential abuses. The report says, "Recognizing that caution in the making of portraits of Christ is indicated, what are we to say about the use of pictures? While permissible, are pictures of Christ to be encouraged? Yes. For one thing God's Word itself encourages the picturing of events. The description of Christ entering Jerusalem on 'Palm Sunday' is but one of the great events in the life of our Lord on earth which call forth mental pictures. For another thing, pedagogy, particularly with children, calls for depicting of events in the life of our Lord – if art has any place in the life of a Christian, should it not find expression in the sphere of that which is of great importance to the believer – the events of Jesus' life and death and resurrection?"¹⁶

Note that these two reasons, (a) that because the Scriptures can call forth mental images, we should

¹⁴"It is the Apostle's first direction (Romans 14:1), Him that is weak receive, *but not to doubtful disputations*, for such breed strife, and often waken carnalness in the contenders rather than pure zeal. And in this case it is better for some to possess clearness in their own judgment, and to condescend in their practice to others, than by venting their judgment unseasonably, to confound others. That is the meaning of the word (Rom. 14:22), *Hast thou faith?* that is, clearness in such a particular, *have it to thyself*; that is, make your own private use of it without troubling others with the same." *Scandal*, p. 35.

¹⁵*Documents of the Synod: Study Papers and actions of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod – 1965-1982*, pp. 332-350. This report does not use the language of things indifferent, let alone seek to accommodate those who believe images of Christ are unlawful and are offended by them; yet some of its arguments can be clearly understood to be reasoning from their expediency or their necessity.

¹⁶*Ibid*, p. 347.

make actual images, and (b) pedagogy, are merely assertions. They are not proved from Scripture.

(a) Just because Scripture *may* encourage something, does not mean we can ignore its clear teaching on other subjects, namely the laws of the use of things indifferent. However, is it really true that because the Scriptures are vivid, or descriptive, or written in a way that impresses the various truths home, that this is an encouragement in and of itself to draw pictures of those events? Where is the logic here to indicate this conclusion? What about Adam and Eve naked in the garden? The slaughter of the Canaanites? David's adultery with Bathsheba? Onan's sin? Each of these events can impress the imagination with images, but does not the imagining, let alone the actual representing of such events, present occasions to sin, if indeed they are not sin by their very creation? These events are just as much the Word of God as the events of Christ's life. Two of these events cited are not sinful in any way (Adam and Eve were naked in the garden before the Fall; the slaying of the Canaanites was a righteous act commanded by God). The other two events are sinful acts. Yet all the events if dwelt upon in the mind, or drawn, present certain temptations to the senses: The lust of the flesh, and the lust for violence. Even if such events are lawful to depict, are they not still subject to the laws of things indifferent? It is admitted by the report that there is a real temptation to misuse these 'representations' of Christ, so how can they be expedient? Surely this 'encouragement' from Scripture does not exist; clearly there is no argument from expediency for producing images of Christ.

To be encouraged and even called desirable in their use, these images must be profitable and expedient according to the three rules previously laid down. However, due to offense,¹⁷ these 'pictures' cannot be profitable, therefore how can they be encouraged? Again, just because something may be lawful in the nature of it, does not mean it is lawful in its use. Not everyone will be persuaded by the arguments presented in that report for the lawfulness of such images. Those like Elder Seekamp are persuaded that the understanding of Scripture had by the majority of our Presbyterian faith fathers (from Calvin and Knox

¹⁷It is a serious flaw in the RPCES report that they neglect to deal with the offense these images cause those who think they are unlawful. If something is truly indifferent, it is impossible to press for its expedience when it is at the same time a cause of offense.

through Dabney and Thornwell, to Prof. John Murray), is correct and compelling on this issue of the unlawfulness of 'picturing' Christ.

(b) The RPCES paper says pedagogy 'calls for' the use of images. If by 'calls for' they simply mean it is a good idea, then the expediency of the images is still determinable by the laws of indifferent things already discussed, and it does not matter what pedagogy 'calls for.' The report admits that 'representations' of Christ present a danger of idolatry: how can they be desirable or profitable and expedient for instructing adults, let alone our children, with such an inherent danger? If we are to avoid even the appearance of evil, we should avoid anything which has such a propensity not only for apparent evil, but real stumbling and idolatry.

If by 'calls for' they mean images are *necessary*, then, again, it doesn't matter if pedagogy requires it – if Scripture doesn't show a necessity it *cannot* be required. The report never even attempts to show from God's Word how the use of 'pictures' is required in religious instruction, which is absolutely necessary to press their use on the whole church.

Even if these two arguments showed the lawfulness of using 'representations' of Christ, yet they are still inexpedient because of the reasons formerly set down. These arguments cannot justify having these images present at presbytery meetings when they may cause offense. It is certainly hard to see the expediency of the elders of the church having to be instructed by images. And while it may be argued that these are lawful as an expression of art; yet this doesn't remove the objection due to offense. There is no reason for that art to remain anywhere it may cause offense.

(2) An attempt is made in this RPCES report to present 'picturing' Christ as necessary to avoid error. "Moreover, since the Biblical teaching on the incarnation insists upon taking seriously the full humanity of Christ, pictures of the episodes of Christ's life are not only permissible but desirable. To fail to represent Christ while representing the disciples would present only a Docetic view of Christ, a denial of His true humanity. To fail to represent disciples and Christ in pictorial form would tend to convey the notion that the incarnation wasn't important enough to picture, or that non-verbal representation of the gospel and gospel history is not valid. But to take this position would require us to re-examine our use of

such non-verbal symbols as the cross as we make use of them in our sanctuaries and homes.”¹⁸

Here is a strange dilemma. We are cautioned about images of Christ because of the tendency toward idolatry they present,¹⁹ yet we are told we must have ‘pictures’ of Christ to avoid having erroneous doctrinal views!?! No Scripture is cited to show that these implications necessarily flow from not having ‘representations’ of Christ. And we certainly don’t want to be placed in a position of having to reexamine our other notions of symbols by calling them into question! This is sarcastic, but it is strange that the committee was willing to reexamine Larger Catechism #109 and recommend changing it, while it was unwilling to submit this area to examination. Not everyone believes in using crosses in their churches and homes.²⁰ Also, usually it is contended that it is lawful to ‘picture’ Christ’s humanity, yet this committee calls for representing Christ’s incarnation! How did they figure on representing Christ’s deity – with an halo such as depicted in the ‘artwork’ provided with their report?²¹ One would have thought that the two differing sides on this question would have at least agreed that ‘picturing’ Christ’s deity is breaking the second commandment.

Early in this paper it was hoped no one would seriously press for these ‘pictures’ as necessary, yet we find this argument in a paper prepared and received by the highest court of a denomination (now part of the PCA). And if this is necessary nothing is; for they say failing “to represent Christ while representing the disciples would present only a Docetic view of Christ, a denial of His true humanity.” Since it is always necessary to avoid error, it therefore is necessary to have these images of Christ! This means that the medieval church was less likely to be in error on the humanity of Christ, than the Reformed Churches of the Reformation, and that all our Presbyterian Reformers sinned because they condemned images of Christ, which were necessary to prevent falling into error regarding the nature of Christ! One has to wonder what the authors of the

RPCES report were thinking, or if they simply had their end in view and didn’t take too careful of a route getting there.

There are no arguments that would prove that these images *must* remain present at presbytery meetings despite offense. Again, what needs to be proved to disregard the offense, is that they are necessary to be present by Scripture precept. These arguments from art, pedagogy and the incarnation, are speculative at best, and, as far as proving any necessity, not very convincing, if not in fact ludicrous.

CONSIDERATIONS

1. Consider the reasonableness of Elder Seekamp’s petition, and the unreasonableness of refusing it. All he is asking, is that when he comes among his fellow presbyters to carry out the duties Christ has laid upon him as a ruling elder in His church, these things which are offensive to him be removed from sight or covered. When he is not present, those to whom these ‘pictures’ belong may do as they wish. If these images are indifferent to those who believe them to be lawful, they should be no more important than a chalk board or a piece of furniture. How unreasonable it would be not to remove something so unimportant, if it were the cause of an offense!

2. Consider the great and necessary biblical duties commanded us, and the utter insignificance these supposed indifferent ‘pictures’ stand in comparison to these injunctions of Christ. Romans 14:15-15:3. “Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died ... For meat destroy not the work of God. ... It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak. ... Let everyone of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.” 1 Cor. 8:9, 13. “But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak. ... Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.” 1 Cor. 6:7,12. “Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? ... All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient.” 1 Cor. 10:32. “Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God.” 1 John 2:9-10. “He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his

¹⁸Ibid, p. 346.

¹⁹Ibid, p. 345.

²⁰The Reformed understanding of symbols is that we have a very rich heritage in the two sacraments of Christian Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Attempting to expand this list of symbols very much puts one on the road to instituting more sacraments; which is of course the path the Catholics have taken.

²¹Ibid, p. 346-348.

brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.”

3. Consider the danger of neglecting these clear commands and teachings of our Lord Jesus. Matthew 18:6-8. “For whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh! Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee ...”

4. Consider, once again, that Elder Seekamp's position that such images are unlawful, is the position of the Westminster Standards, the statement of faith of Presbyterianism for nearly the last 350 years – standards he has vowed to uphold. The view of subscription the PCA holds or will hold is immaterial to this paper's position. A strict ‘no exceptions’ view is subsumed in any looser view. Surely no one is going to suggest one *must* take exceptions to the standards a church adopts! And the clauses on this question have not been excised out of the PCA's edition of these documents. While past judicial decisions may have been made that make disagreement allowable on this subject, future decisions may come to the opposite conclusion. In the meantime, just because disagreement has been allowed does not mean the Scriptures concerning indifferent things can be disregarded.²²

²²The only decision that comes to mind which might be thought to have a bearing is the *Report of the Special Committee of Synod on Pictures of Christ*, by the RPCES (159th GS Minutes, May 22, 1981, pp. 189-107), previously referenced. The PCA and RPCES joined in 1982, and this document has no judicial standing as to precedent (Preface, *Documents of the Synod: Study Papers and actions of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod – 1965-1982*, edited by Paul R. Gilchrist). It concludes images of Christ are lawful to make, but it is a seriously flawed paper. It not only is flawed, but is wicked in the way it treats those who would disagree with its conclusion. While it shows pastoral concern toward those who might misuse or place an undue importance on these images, it gives no direction on how to be sensitive and show love toward the brethren who believe the ‘pictures’ are unlawful in and of themselves. And to make this disregard and contempt of these brethren's consciences obvious, an actual image is appended as part of the report! It is certainly interesting to say the least that this report makes the very error it

5. Consider Mr. Seekamp's conscience, and not merely one's own clearness of conscience in this matter. It is unwarrantable to cause him to be grieved in the performance of his duty to Christ, while the avoiding thereof is so easy to accommodate. It will be no commendation at the last day that one used these ‘pictures’ in full persuasion of their lawfulness, if at the same time one stumbled the least of one's brethren while using them (Rom. 14:10-13).

SUMMATION

This paper began by dividing actions and things into categories of lawful and unlawful. Those that are lawful are either necessary or indifferent, and those that are indifferent in nature are either profitable or unprofitable (expedient or inexpedient) in their use. Those actions or things that are unprofitable in their use (in accordance with time, place, etc.) are as forbidden as those that are unlawful in their nature.

For the sake of argument, the debate over the nature of ‘representations’ of Christ was waived, although their indifference is not establishable. It was also assumed that no one would be so bold as to argue for their necessity (at least in this situation of meetings of presbytery). Clearly it has been shown, even if these images are indifferent in nature, that their use is inexpedient, because they do not meet the three rules of expedient indifferent things. Therefore, they are as unallowable in the given situation as though they were unlawful in their very nature.

IMPLICATIONS

The implications of not removing these images for the sake of a brother's conscience are grave. God's clear commands not to stumble brethren would be broken. It would be a refusal to remove an offense and does not show love to brethren in the Lord, which again is a violation of God's will. In viewing the images as more important than a brother's conscience, they cease being viewed as simply indifferent (if indeed they are), and have become somehow necessary. Viewing these ‘representations’ as necessary entangles us in superstition and will-worship. In effect and in summary, the refusal to hear and grant this petition would violate solemn oaths to

advises against, in placing too much importance in these ‘representations’ in comparison to their very brethren in the Lord. Regardless of other flaws, the report clearly disregards Scripture's teaching on the use of things indifferent and avoiding offense.

uphold and promote the peace and purity of Christ's church.

CONCLUSION

While Elder Seekamp and those who agree with him, hold that such images are sinful in and of themselves, they recognize that this is not something on which all are in agreement. Granted for the sake of argument, that those are correct who hold that such things are indifferent, the pressing of these 'representations' on the consciences of those who believe them to be unlawful is sinful and should not be done. It is therefore necessary to have them removed at presbytery meetings, for the sake of the consciences of those who find them unlawful, and for the sake of those who think them indifferent, lest by forcing consciences in this matter they sin against their brethren.

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Westminster Confession of Faith, 20:II; 21:I

Westminster Larger Catechism #109.

Westminster Shorter Catechism #51.

FURTHER READING

Peter Barnes, *Seeing Jesus, The Case Against Pictures of Our Lord Jesus Christ* (Banner of Truth, 1990)

James Fisher, *The Westminster Assembly's Shorter Catechism Explained, by way of question and answer* (Many editions), Q. #51

J. Marcellus Kik, "Pictures of Christ" (np)

John K. La Shell, "Imagination and Idol: A Puritan Tension," *Westminster Theological Journal*, Fall 1987. The author does not take a complete unlawful position regarding 'pictures' of Christ, but presents a useful discussion of the topic.

John Murray, "Pictures of Christ," *The Presbyterian Reformed Magazine*, Winter 1993, pp. 186-188. Rpt. from *Reformed Herald*, vol. XVI, no. 9, February 1961.

Petition To N. Texas Presbytery

To: North Texas Presbytery Sessions
and Bills and Overtures Committee

Date: April 11, 1994

Dear Fellow Presbyters:

As you may well know FPCR strictly adheres to the Westminster Standards in the firm belief the positions taken therein are correct and a true understanding of the Scriptures. I realize that in the PCA there are great differences on the nature of confessionalism (system vs. strict), but I am not writing to try and convince anyone about the position to be taken on this. My present concern is a matter of conscience and this is the reason for this letter.

I firmly believe as the Westminster standards teach, that it is a sin to make representations of any person of the Godhead (LC 109). I know in the PCA it is by no means uncommon to have "pictures of Christ" in churches. I know this is the case in North Texas Presbytery. I would gladly defend the position of the standards if asked, yet as I indicated above I'm not trying to change anyone's opinion with this letter. I believe that attending presbytery meetings is a duty to be taken seriously. Yet sometimes in fulfilling this duty, I find myself in churches which have these idols (in my opinion) in plain sight. I wish to and indeed must fulfill my duties as a ruling elder in Christ's church, yet I'm grieved to the heart when I must do so with such images about. My request, indeed my plea, is that when your church is to hold meetings where elders must attend, that such images would be hidden so as not to place an offense before those of us who object to them. In cases where such things are so prominent that they cannot be hidden, another site should be chosen for meeting.

My purpose by this letter is not to irritate or stir up any resentment among brethren who have such things in their church buildings. Rather, please look upon this as an occasion to show love and charity toward an offended brother. As you may recall, at the meeting in Gainesville there were images in stained glass. Due to this, I felt conscience bound to leave the assembly. I have since the meeting in Gainesville talked with Fred Guthrie by phone. He encouraged me to bring this concern before the Presbytery.

My duty to attend presbytery, as it is now, implies a potential requirement to break God's law (as I understand it). Since there is no command to use these, on a ground of their indifference, could they be removed (or draped) for a season (or another place be chosen in which to convene presbytery), so as not to offend? If it would be the mind of presbytery to formulate such a policy, it would [be] a great relief of concern and encouragement to me (and others) in the performance of duties to the presbytery.

Regards,
RE David Seekamp
First Presbyterian Church of Rowlett

IMAGES OF CHRIST

A VIOLATION OF THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

Supporting Documents

J. Marcellus Kik

The following are offered as supportive of our belief that images of Christ are unlawful not only to use, but to even make. This is what the Westminster Standards teach. The position is not frivolously held, nor carelessly defended, and we are persuaded it is what God teaches in his Holy Word.

PICTURES OF CHRIST J. Marcellus Kik

Exodus 20:4-6, "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. 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; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments."

In this second commandment we are forbidden to make 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. We are forbidden to bow down to them or to serve them. Now the question has been asked whether or not this commandment forbids the use of pictures of Christ. Naturally the commandment forbids the bowing down before such pictures and worshipping them. There can be no question of that.

But in many Protestant churches and in many evangelical churches pictures of Christ are used in teaching and in the homes of Christians pictures of Christ are hung up to remind them, I suppose, of Christ. Is that Scriptural? Does it meet with the

approval of God? Is it sinful? Is it another way of breaking the second commandment?

No doubt, if I state that the use of pictures of Christ is unscriptural; that it does not meet with the approval of God; that it is sinful; and that it is a breaking of the second commandment – I will be considered as a fanatic, a reactionary, and perhaps not quite normal. But before you have such unkind thoughts please hear me out. If we are Christians our service and worship will be regulated by the Word of God. The Bible is our infallible guide in faith and worship.

Now here is the surprising thing. Nowhere in the Bible, either in the Old Testament or New Testament, is there a physical description of Christ. Isn't that strange if God wanted to use the picture of Christ in spreading the Gospel or in worship, that we are not told whether Christ was tall or short, fair or dark, light or dark hair, blue eyes or brown eyes.

With all their love for the Lord you would think that Peter or John would have given a description of Him, unless, of course, they were forbidden. They wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Surely it is significant that neither they nor any other of the Scriptures gave a physical description of the Lord. Surely if God desired the use of pictures of Christ to further the cause of Christ He would have had a physical description of His Son in His Word. Why should we consider ourselves wiser than God and provide what He has deliberately left out?

The second amazing fact is that in the first four centuries of the history of the Church no picture of Christ was used. These were the years when the Church made her most astonishing growth. These were the years in which the Christians conquered Pagan Rome. It is so frequently stated that we need pictures of Christ in order to teach people the Gospel. The apostle Peter did not need pictures of Christ to instruct the young or bring the Gospel to adults. The apostle John did not need pictures of Christ to convert pagans and instruct the Church. The apostle Paul did not need pictures of Christ to convert Barbarians and Greeks. The early church did not need pictures of Christ to conquer paganism. They accomplished it by preaching the Word in the power of the Holy Spirit.

When pictures of Christ were first introduced they were opposed. The Church historian Eusebius, who lived in the fourth century, declared himself in the strongest manner against images of Christ in a letter to the Empress Constantia who asked him for

such an image. Amongst other things Eusebius wrote: "Who can therefore counterfeit by dead and insensible colours, by vain shadowing painter's art, the bright and shining glistering of such His glory? whereas His holy Disciples were not able to behold the same in the mountain; who, therefore, falling on their faces, acknowledged they were not able to behold such a sight."

Here Eusebius touches on one of the reasons why it is impossible to have a true picture of Christ. If you want a picture of Christ do you want it as He was upon earth or as He is now in heaven? If you want a picture of Him as He was upon earth you have quite a problem. There was no picture of Him painted. The so-called pictures of Christ which are present today are from the imaginations of the artists. That is why there are so many different pictures. Not one of them is a true picture. So every time you say this or that is a picture of Christ you are uttering a lie. You cannot teach truth by a lie. Christ is the Truth and surely He would not want the use of a false means to point to Him. Christ abhors lies and falsehoods.

How would you like it if someone who never saw you painted a picture and told every one that it was a picture of you? Certainly you would resent it. And certainly Christ must resent all those counterfeit pictures of Him.

But supposing you wanted a picture of Christ as He is now. The Disciples had such a vision of Him on the mount of transfiguration. We read in Matthew 17:2, "And his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." This was the glorified Christ. No artist could give us a picture of Christ which would show the glowing of Christ's face as the sun and his raiment as white as the light. They would only rob Christ of His glory by miserably falling short of a true painting of Christ in His present glory.

But someone will state that at least we can depict the humanity of Christ as He appeared upon earth. But who are we to separate His humanity from His divinity! The apostle John states in his Gospel, chapter 1:14, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." Notice that the apostle states that even while Christ was in the flesh they beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father. In other words, they beheld His divinity as well as His humanity. This one cannot paint. So one must behold His humanity as separate from His divinity. Then one falls into the

ancient error of Nestorius. He stated that Christ consisted of two persons: one human and the other divine. There was, according to Nestorius, a separation between the human and the divine persons.

That was the ground on which the Council called by Constantine V condemned paintings of Christ. You see this question of pictures of Christ was the subject of controversy throughout the eighth century. So Constantine called a council in 753 of three hundred and thirty bishops. Their conclusion was this: "If any person shall divide the human nature, united to the Person of God the Word; and, having it only in the imagination of his mind, shall therefore, attempt to paint the same in an Image; let him be holden as accursed. If any person shall divide Christ, being but one, into two persons; placing on the one side the Son of God, and on the other side the son of Mary; neither doth confess the continual union that is made; and by that reason doth paint in an Image the son of Mary, as subsisting by himself; let him be accursed. If any person shall paint in an Image the human nature, being deified by the uniting thereof to God the Word; separating the same as it were from the Godhead assumed and deified; let him be holden as accursed."

This council points out the difficulty and indeed the impossibility of painting a portrait of Christ. Christ is more than man. He is God-man. It is impossible to depict by a painter's brush the almighty power of Christ; the glorious majesty of Christ; the infinite knowledge of Christ. You cannot localize by a painter's brush the everywhere presence of Christ. One can only succeed in degrading Christ. When one considers the deity of Christ it is no wonder that the apostles did not attempt a physical description of their Lord and Saviour.

There is always, also, the danger of worshipping the picture of Christ and attaching power to it. Even a Protestant publishing firm stated that there is power in a picture of Christ. It stated: "When one plants deeply and firmly in his mind the picture of Christ, it has a strong and powerful influence in his life." Thus instead of attributing this influence to Christ and the Holy Spirit they attribute it to the picture they are trying to sell. That is a breaking of the second commandment.

But can it not help in the saving of souls, it is asked. But how? Looking at a picture of Christ hanging upon the cross tells me nothing. It does not tell me that He hung there for sin. It does not tell me

that He hung there for my sin. It does not tell me that He is the Son of God. Only the Word of God does that. And it is the Word of God that has been given us to tell the story of salvation through the blood of Christ. It is not through the foolishness of pictures that sinners are converted but through the foolishness of preaching.

It is amazing how slowly unscriptural practices enter the Christian Church. We must at all times go back to the Scriptures. The Bible is our infallible guide. And if our practices and doctrines do not conform with the teachings of the Scriptures *then* we must eliminate them. The Bible instructs the Church not to make any likeness of Christ. The present day pictures of Christ are false and no one would make a serious claim that they resemble Christ upon earth. They separate His humanity from His deity. They do not at all give us a glimpse of His present glory. They are not condoned by the inspired apostles.

God has ordained the foolishness of preaching to evangelize the world. He has promised to attend the preaching of the Word with the power of the Holy Spirit. The so-called pictures of Christ are a hindrance and a temptation to idolatry. Let us cleanse the Temple of God from them.

<p style="text-align: center;">Pictures of Christ by Professor John Murray</p>
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NOTE: This article first appeared in the *Reformed Herald*, vol. XVI, no. 9, February 1961.

The question of the propriety of pictorial representations of the Saviour is one that merits examination. It must be granted that the worship of Christ is central in our holy faith, and the thought of the Saviour must in every instance be accompanied with that reverence which belongs to his worship. We cannot think of him without the apprehension of the majesty that is his. If we do not entertain the sense of his majesty, then we are guilty of impiety and we dishonor him.

It will also be granted that the only purpose that could properly be served by a pictorial representation is that it would convey to us some thought or lesson representing him, consonant with truth and promotive of worship. Hence the question is inescapable: is a pictorial representation a legitimate way of conveying truth regarding him and of

contributing to the worship which this truth should evoke?

We are all aware of the influence exerted on the mind and heart by pictures. Pictures are powerful media of communication. How suggestive they are for good or for evil and all the more so when accompanied by the comment of the spoken or written word! It is futile, therefore, to deny the influence exerted upon mind and heart by a picture of Christ. And if such is legitimate, the influence exerted should be one constraining to worship and adoration. To claim any lower aim as that served by a picture of the Saviour would be contradiction of the place which he must occupy in thought, affection, and honour.

The plea for the propriety of pictures of Christ is based on the fact that he was truly man, that he had a human body, that he was visible in his human nature to the physical senses, and that a picture assists us to take in the stupendous reality of his incarnation, in a word, that he was made in the likeness of men and was found in fashion as a man.

Our Lord had a true body. He could have been photographed. A portrait could have been made of him and, if a good portrait, it would have reproduced his likeness.

Without doubt the disciples in the days of his flesh had a vivid mental image of Jesus' appearance and they could not but have retained that recollection to the end of their days. They could never have entertained the thought of him as he had sojourned with them without something of that mental image and they could not have entertained it without adoration and worship. The very features which they remembered would have been part and parcel of their conception of him and reminiscent of what he had been to them in his humiliation and in the glory of his resurrection appearance. Much more might be said regarding the significance for the disciples of Jesus' physical features.

Jesus is also glorified in the body and that body is visible. It will also become visible to us at his glorious appearing – “he will be seen the second time without sin by those who look for him unto salvation” (Hebrews 9:28).

What then are we to say of pictures of Christ? First of all, it must be said that we have no data whatsoever on the basis of which to make a pictorial representation; we have no descriptions of his physical features which would enable even the most accomplished artist to make an approximate portrait.

In view of the profound influence exerted by a picture, especially on the minds of young people, we should perceive the peril involved in a portrayal for which there is no warrant, a portrayal which is the creation of pure imagination. It may help to point up the folly to ask: what would be the reaction of a disciple, who had actually seen the Lord in the days of his flesh, to a portrait which would be the work of imagination on the part of one who had never seen the Saviour? We can readily detect what his recoil would be. No impression we have of Jesus should be created without the proper revelatory data, and every impression, every thought, should evoke worship. Hence, since we possess no revelatory data for a picture or portrait in the proper sense of the term, we are precluded from making one or using any that have been made.

Secondly, pictures of Christ are in principle a violation of the second commandment. A picture of Christ, if it serves any useful purpose, must evoke some thought or feeling respecting him and, in view of what he is, this thought or feeling will be worshipful. We cannot avoid making the picture a medium of worship. But since the materials for this medium of worship are not derived from the only revelation we possess respecting Jesus, namely, Scripture, the worship is constrained by a creation of the human mind that has no revelatory warrant. This is will-worship. For the principle of the second commandment is that we are to worship God only in ways prescribed and authorized by him. It is a grievous sin to have worship constrained by a human figment, and that is what a picture of the Saviour involves.

Thirdly, the second commandment forbids bowing down to an image or likeness of anything in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. A picture of the Saviour purports to be a representation or likeness of him who is now in heaven or, at least, of him when he sojourned upon the earth. It is plainly forbidden, therefore, to bow down in worship before such a representation or likeness. This exposes the iniquity involved in the practice of exhibiting pictorial representations of the Saviour in places of worship. When we worship before a picture of our Lord, whether it be in the form of a mural, or on canvas, or in stained glass, we are doing what the second commandment expressly forbids. This is rendered all the more apparent when we bear in mind that the only reason why a picture of him should be exhibited in a

place is the supposition that it contributes to the worship of him who is our Lord. The practice only demonstrates how insensitive we readily become to the commandments of God and to the inroads of idolatry. May the Churches of Christ be awake to the deceptive expedients by which the archenemy ever seeks to corrupt the worship of the Saviour.

In summary, what is at stake in this question is the unique place which Jesus Christ as the God-man occupies in our faith and worship and the unique place which the Scripture occupies as the only revelation, the only medium of communication, respecting him whom we worship as Lord and Saviour. The incarnate Word and the written Word are correlative. We dare not use other media of impression or of sentiment but those of his institution and prescription. Every thought and impression of him should evoke worship. We worship him with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God. To use a likeness of Christ as an aid to worship is forbidden by the second commandment as much in this case as in that of the Father and Spirit.

<p style="text-align: center;">FISHER'S CATECHISM Selections from Q&A #51</p>

Q. What is forbidden in the second commandment?

A. The second commandment forbiddeth, the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in his word.

Q. 1. What are the *leading sins* forbidden in this commandment?

A. Idolatry and will-worship.

Q. 2. What is the *idolatry* here condemned?

A. [The worshipping of God by images]: Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, etc.

Q. 3. What is an *image*?

A. It is a statue, picture, or likeness of any creature whatsoever.

Q. 4. Is it lawful to have images or pictures of mere creatures?

A. Yes, providing they be only for *ornament*; or the design be merely *historical*, to transmit the memory of persons and their actions to posterity.

Q. 5. Can any *image* or *representation* be made of God?

A. No; it is absolutely *impossible*; he being an infinite, incomprehensible Spirit (Isa. 40:18). "To whom will ye liken God? or, what likeness will ye compare unto him?" If we cannot delineate our own souls, much less the infinite God (Acts 17:29). "We ought not to think that the

Godhead is like unto gold or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.”

Q. 6. What judgment should we form of those who have devised images of God, or of the persons of the adorable Trinity?

A. We should adjudge their practice to be both *unlawful* and *abominable*.

Q. 7. Why *unlawful*?

A. Because directly *contrary* to the *express letter* of the law in *this commandment*, and many other Scriptures; such as, Jer. 10:14-15; Hos. 13:2; and particularly Deut. 4:15-19, 23. “Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves, (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,” etc.

Q. 8. How is it *abominable*?

A. As it is a debasing the Creator of heaven and earth to the rank of his own creatures; and a practical denying of all his infinite perfections (Psa. 50:21).

Q. 9. May we not have a *picture* of Christ, who has a *true body*?

A. By no means; because, though he has a true body and a reasonable soul (John 1:14), yet his human nature subsists in his divine person, which no picture can represent (Psa. 45:2).

Q. 10. Why ought all pictures of Christ to be *abominated* by Christians?

A. Because they are downright *lies*, representing no more than the picture of a mere man: whereas, the *true Christ* is *God-man*; “Immanuel, God with us” (1 Tim. 3:16; Matt. 1:23).

Q. 11. Is it lawful to form any *inward representation* of God, or of Christ, upon our *fancy*, bearing a resemblance to any creature whatsoever?

A. By no means; because this is the very *inlet* unto gross outward idolatry: for, when once the Heathens “became vain in their imaginations, they presently changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into images made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things” (Rom. 1:21-23).

Q. 23. Is it lawful, as some plead, to have images or pictures in churches, though not for worship, yet for instruction, and raising the affections?

A. No; because God has expressly prohibited not only the worshipping, but the making of any image whatsoever on a religious account; and the setting them up in churches, cannot but have a native tendency to beget a sacred veneration for them, and therefore ought to be abstained from, as having, at least, an appearance of evil (1 Thess. 5:22).

Q. 24. May they not be placed in churches for beauty and ornament?

A. No: the proper ornament of churches is the sound preaching of the gospel, and the pure dispensation of the sacraments, and other ordinances of divine institution.

Q. 25. Were not images of the cherubim placed in the tabernacle and temple, by the command of God himself?

A. Yes: but out of all hazard of any abuse, being placed in the holy of holies, where none of the people ever came; they were instituted by God himself, which images are not; and they belonged to the typical and ceremonial worship, which is now quite abolished.

James Durham [& Thomas Vincent] Images of Christ



It is not lawful to have pictures of Jesus Christ, because his divine nature cannot be pictured at all, and because his body, as it is now glorified, cannot be pictured as it is, and because, if it do not stir up devotion, it is in vain; if it do stir up devotion, it is a worshipping by an image or picture, and so a palpable breach of the second commandment. [Thomas Vincent, *Exposition of the Shorter Catechism*.]

And if it be said man's soul cannot be painted, but his body may, and yet that picture representeth a man; I answer, it doth so, because he has but one nature, and what representeth that representeth the person; but it is not so with Christ: his Godhead is not a distinct part of the human nature, as the soul of man is (which is necessarily supposed in every living man), but a distinct nature, only united with the manhood in that one person, Christ, who has no fellow; therefore what representeth him must not represent a man only, but must represent Christ, Immanuel, God-man, otherwise it is not his image. Beside, there is no warrant for representing him in his manhood; nor any colourable possibility of it, but as men fancy; and shall that be called Christ's portraiture? would that be called any other man's portraiture which were drawn at men's pleasure, without regard to the pattern? Again, there is no use of it; for either that image behaved to have but common estimation with other images, and that would wrong Christ, or a peculiar respect and reverence, and so it sinneth against the commandment that forbiddeth all religious reverence to images, but he being God and so the object of worship, we must either divide his natures, or say, that image or picture representeth not Christ. From the *Law Unsealed: or, A Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments*.

Loraine Boettner, Roman Catholicism

Closely akin to the use of images is that of pictures of Christ. And these, we are sorry to say, are often found in Protestant as well as Roman Catholic churches. But nowhere in the Bible, in either the Old or New Testament, is there a description of Christ's physical features. No picture of Him was painted during His earthly ministry. The church had no pictures of Him during the first four

centuries. The so-called pictures of Christ, like those of Mary and the saints, are merely the production of the artist's imagination. . . . No picture can do justice to his personality, for he was not only human, but divine. And no picture can portray his deity. All such pictures are fatally defective. . . . For most people the so-called pictures of Christ are not an aid to worship, but rather a hindrance, and for many they present a temptation to that very idolatry against which the Scriptures warn so clearly. ♦

The Blue Banner

Note: Our issue containing Frank Smith's *Petticoat Presbyterianism* was moved to September/October in order to present the articles herein.

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The First Presbyterian Church of Rowlett, Texas
 Session: Pastor Richard Bacon. Elder David Seekamp
The Blue Banner Editor: Christopher Coldwell
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Tapes, Books, Etc.

Forbidden Images. Two sermons preached by Pastor Bacon on the unlawfulness of making pictures of any persons of the Godhead. 2 tapes.

Scriptural Worship, by Carl Bogue. The first tract in Blue Banner Books' Presbyterian Tract series. . ♦

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