

THE BOOKS OF HOMILIES: Book 2—II. Against peril of Idolatry: Part 2

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[0 : 00] The second part of the homily against peril of idolatry. You have heard, well beloved, in the first part of this homily, the doctrine of the word of God against idols and images, against idolatry and worshipping of images, taken out of the scriptures of the Old Testament and the New, and confirmed by the examples as well of the apostles as of our Saviour Christ himself.

Now although our Saviour Christ taketh not or needeth not any testimony of men, and that which is once confirmed by the certainty of his eternal truth, hath no more need of the confirmation of man's doctrine and writings, than the bright sun at noontide hath need of the light of a little candle to put away darkness and to increase his light.

Yet for your further contentation it shall in the second part be declared, as in the beginning of the first part was promised, that this truth and doctrine concerning the forbidding of images and worshipping of them, taken out of the Holy Scriptures, as well of the Old Testament as the New, was believed and taught of the old Holy Fathers, and most ancient learned doctors, and received in the old primitive church, which was most uncorrupt and pure.

And this declaration shall be made out of the said Holy Doctor's own writings, and out of the ancient histories ecclesiastical to the same belonging. Tertullian, a most ancient writer and doctor of the church, who lived about one hundred and threescore years after the death of our Saviour Christ, both in sundry other places of his works, and specially in his book written against the manner of crowning, and in another little treatise entitled, Of the Soldier's Crown or Garland, doth most sharply and vehemently write and inveigh against images or idols.

And upon St. John's words, the first epistle and fifth chapter saith thus, St. John, saith he, deeply considering the matter, saith, My little children, keep yourselves from images or idols.

[1 : 52] He saith not now, keep yourselves from idolatry, as it were from the service and worshipping of them, but from the images or idols themselves, that is, from the very shape and likeness of them.

For it were an unworthy thing, that the image of the living God should become the image of a dead idol. Do not, thank you, those persons which place images or idols in churches and temples, yea, shrine them even over the Lord's table, even as it were of purpose to the worshipping and honouring of them, take good heed to either St. John's council or Tertullians.

For so to place images and idols, is it to keep themselves from them, or else to receive and embrace them? Clemens, in his book to James, brother of the Lord, saith, What can be so wicked or so unthankful, as to receive a benefit of God, and to give thanks therefore unto stocks and stones?

Wherefore awake ye, and understand your health? For God hath need of no man, nor acquireth anything, nor can be hurt in anything. But we be they which are either halpen or hurt, in that we be thankful to God, or unthankful.

Origenes, in his book against Celsus, saith thus, Christian men and Jews, when they hear these words of the law, Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and shalt not make any image.

[3 : 08] Do not only abhor the temples, altars, and images of the gods, but if need be, will rather die than they should defile themselves with any impiety. And shortly after he saith, In the commonwealth of the Jews, the carver of idols and image-maker was cast far off and forbidden, lest they should have any occasion to make images, which might pluck certain foolish persons from God, and turn the eyes of their souls to the contemplation of earthly things.

And in another place of the same book, It is not only, saith he, a mad and frantic part to worship images, but also once to dissemble or wink at it. And, A man may know God and his only Son, and those which have had such honour given them by God, that they be called gods, but it is not possible that any should, by worshipping of images, get any knowledge of God.

Athanasius, in his book against the Gentiles, hath these words. Let them tell, I pray you, how God may be known by an image. If it be by the matter of the image, then there needeth no shape or form, seeing that God hath appeared in all material creatures, which do testify his glory.

Now if they say he is known by the form or fashion, is he not better to be known by the living things themselves, whose fashions the images express? For of surety the glory of God should be more evidently known, if it were declared by reasonable and living creatures, rather than by dead and unmovable images.

Therefore, when you do carve or paint images, to the end to know God thereby, surely ye do an unworthy and unfit thing. And in another place of the same book he saith, The invention of images came of no good, but of evil, and whatsoever hath an evil beginning can never in anything be judged good, seeing it is altogether naught.

[4 : 53] Thus far Athanasius, a very ancient, holy, and learned bishop and doctor, who judgeth both the first beginning and the end, and altogether of images or idols, to be naught.

Lactantius, likewise, an old and learned writer, in his book of the origin of error, hath these words, God is above man, and is not placed beneath, but is to be sought in the highest region.

Wherefore there is no doubt, but that no religion is in that place wheresoever any image is. For if religion stand in godly things, and there is no godliness but in heavenly things, then be images without religion.

These be Lactantius' words, who was above thirteen hundred years ago, and within three hundred years after our Saviour Christ. Cyrillus, an old and holy doctor, upon the gospel of St. John, hath these words, Many have left the Creator, and have worshipped the creature, neither have they been abashed to say unto a stock, Thou art my Father, and unto a stone, Thou begottest me.

For many, yea, almost all, alas for sorrow, are fallen unto such folly, that they have given the glory of deity, or Godhead, to things without sense or feeling.

[6 : 02] Epiphanius, bishop of Salomene in Cyprus, a very holy and learned man, who lived in Theodosius the Emperor's time, about three hundred and ninety years after our Saviour Christ's ascension, writeth thus to John, Patriarch of Jerusalem.

I entered, saith Epiphanius, into a certain church to pray. I found there a linen cloth hanging in the church door, painted, and having in it the image of Christ, as it were, or of some other saint, for I remember not well whose image it was.

Therefore when I did see the image of a man hanging in the church of Christ, contrary to the authority of the scriptures, I did tear it, and gave counsel to the keepers of that church, that they should wind a poor man that was dead in the said cloth, and so bury him.

And afterwards the same Epiphanius, sending another unpainted cloth, for that painted one which he had torn, to the said patriarch, writeth thus, I pray you, will the elders of that place to receive this cloth, which I have sent by this bearer, and command them, that from henceforth no such painted cloths, contrary to our religion, be hanged in the church of Christ.

For it becometh your goodness, rather to have this care, that you take away such scrupulosity, which is unfitting for the church of Christ, and offensive to the people committed to your charge.

[7 : 18] And this epistle, as worthy to be read of many, did St. Jerome himself translate into the Latin tongue, and that ye may know, that St. Jerome had this holy and learned bishop Epiphanius, in his most high estimation, and therefore did translate this epistle, as a writing of authority, hear what a testimony the said St. Jerome giveth him in another place, in his treaty against the errors of John, bishop of Jerusalem, where he hath these words, Thou hast, saith St. Jerome, Pope Epiphanius, which durst openly in his letters call thee an heretic, surely thou art not to be preferred before him, neither for age, nor learning, nor godliness of life, nor by the testimony of the whole world.

And shortly after, in the same treaty, saith St. Jerome, bishop Epiphanius was ever of so great veneration and estimation, that Valens, the emperor, who was a great persecutor, did not once touch him, for heretics, being princes, thought it their shame, if they should persecute such a notable man.

And in the tripartite ecclesiastical history, the ninth book and 48th chapter, is testified, that Epiphanius, being yet alive, did work miracles, and that after his death, devils being expelled at his grave or tomb did roar.

Thus you see what authority St. Jerome, and that most ancient history, give unto the holy and learned bishop Epiphanius, whose judgment of images in churches and temples, then beginning by stealth to creep in, is worthy to be noted.

First, he judged it contrary to Christian religion and the authority of the scriptures to have any images in Christ's church. Second, he rejected not only carved, graven, and molten images, but also painted images, out of Christ's church.

[9 : 00] Thirdly, that he regarded not whether it were the image of Christ or of any other saint, but being an image would not suffer it in the church. Fourthly, that he did not only remove it out of the church, but with a vehement zeal, tear it asunder, and exhorted that a course should be wrapped and buried in it, judging it meet for nothing but to rot in the earth, following herein the example of the good king Ezekias, who break the brazen serpent to pieces and burned it to ashes, for that idolatry was committed to it.

Last of all, that Epiphanius thinketh it the duty of vigilant bishops to be careful that no images be permitted in the church, for that they be occasion of scruple and offence to the people committed to their charge.

Now, whereas neither St. Jerome, who did translate the said epistle, nor the authors of that most ancient history, ecclesiastical tripartite, who do most highly commend Epiphanius, as is aforesaid, nor no other godly or learned bishop at that time or shortly after, have written anything against Epiphanius' judgment concerning images, it is an evident proof that in those days, which were about 400 years after our Saviour Christ, there were no images publicly used and received in the Church of Christ, which was then much less corrupt and more pure than now it is.

And whereas images began at that time secretly and by stealth to creep out of private men's houses into the churches, and that first in painted cloths and walls, such bishops as were godly and vigilant, when they espied them, removed them away as unlawful and contrary to Christian religion, as did here Epiphanius, to whose judgment you have not only St. Jerome, the translator of his epistle, and the writer of the history tripartite, but also all the learned and godly bishops and clerks, yea, and the whole church of that age, and so upward to our Saviour Christ's time by the space of about 400 years, consenting and agreeing.

This is written the more largely of Epiphanius, for that our image maintainers nowadays, seeing themselves so pressed with this most plain and earnest act of writing of Epiphanius, a bishop and doctor of such antiquity, holiness and authority, labour by all means, but in vain against the truth, either to prove that this epistle was neither of Epiphanius' writing, nor St. Jerome's translation, either if it be, say they, it is of no great force, for this Epiphanius, say they, was a Jew, and being converted to the Christian faith and made a bishop, retained the hatred which Jews have to images, still in his mind, and so did and wrote against them as a Jew, rather than as a Christian.

[11 : 35] O Jewish impudency and malice of such devises, it would be proved, and not said only, that Epiphanius was a Jew. Furthermore, concerning the reason they make, I would admit it gladly, for if Epiphanius' judgment against images is not to be admitted, for that he was of a Jew, an enemy to images, which be God's enemies, converted to Christ's religion, then likewise followeth it, that no sentence in the old doctors and fathers sounding for images ought to be of any authority, for that in the primitive church the most part of learned writers, as Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, Austin, and infinite others, were of Gentiles, which be favourers and worshippers of images, converted to the Christian faith, and so let somewhat slip out of their pens sounding for images, rather as Gentiles than Christians, as Eusebius in his History Ecclesiastical and St. Jerome saith plainly, that images came first from the Gentiles to us Christians, and much more doth it follow, that the opinion of all the rabblement of the popish church, maintaining images, ought to be esteemed of small or no authority, for that it is no marvel that they, which have from their childhood been brought up amongst images and idols, and have drunk in idolatry almost with their mother's milk, hold with images and idols, and speak and write for them.

But indeed it would not be so much marked, whether he were of a Jew or a Gentile converted to Christ's religion that writeth, as how agreeably or contrarily to God's word he doth write, and so to credit or discredit him.

Now what God's words saith of idols and images and the worshipping of them, you heard at large in the first part of this homily. St. Ambrose, in his treaty of the death of Theodosius the Emperor, saith, Helene found the cross and the title on it, she worshipped the king and not the wood surely, for that is an ethnish error and the vanity of the wicked.

But she worshipped him that hanged on the cross and whose name was written in the title, and so forth. See both the godly empress's fact and St. Ambrose's judgment at once. They thought it had been an heathenish error and vanity of the wicked to have worshipped the cross itself, which was imbrued with our Saviour Christ's own precious blood, and we fall down before every cross piece of timber, which is but an image of that cross.

St. Augustine, the best learned of all ancient doctors, in his 44th epistle to Maximus said, Know thou that none of the dead, nor anything that is made of God, is worshipped as God of the Catholic Christians, of whom there is a church also in your town.

[14 : 03] Note that by St. Augustine such as worshipped the dead or creatures be no Catholic Christians. The same St. Augustine teacheth, in the 22nd book of the City of God, the 10th chapter, that neither temples or churches ought to be builded or made for martyrs or saints, but to God alone, and that there ought no priest to be appointed for martyr or saint, but to God only.

The same St. Augustine in his book of the Manners of the Catholic Church hath these words, I know that many be worshippers of tombs and pictures. I know that there be many that banquet most riotously over the graves of the dead, and giving meat to dead carcasses, do bury themselves upon the buried, and attribute their gluttony and drunkenness to religion.

See, he esteemeth worshipping of saints' tombs and pictures as good religion as gluttony and drunkenness, and no better at all. St. Augustine greatly alloweth Marcus Varro, affirming that religion is most pure without images, and saith himself, Images be of more force to crook an and unhappy soul than to teach and instruct it, and saith further, Every child, yea, every beast, knoweth that it is not God that they see.

Wherefore then doth the Holy Ghost so often monish us of that which all men know? Whereunto St. Augustine himself answereth thus, For, saith he, when images are placed in temples, and set in honourable sublimity, and begin once to be worshipped, forthwith breedeth the most vile affection of error.

This is St. Augustine's judgment of images in churches, that by and by they breed error and adultery, it would be too tedious to rehearse all other places which might be brought out of the ancient doctors against images and adultery.

[15 : 41] Wherefore we shall hold ourselves contented with these few at this present. Now as concerning history's ecclesiastical touching this matter, that you may know why and when, and by whom images were first used privately, and afterwards not only received into the Christians' churches and temples, but in conclusion worshipped also, and how the same was gainsaid, resisted, and forbidden, as well by godly bishops and learned doctors, as also by sundry Christian princes, I will briefly collect into a compendious history that which is at large and in sundry places written by diverse ancient writers and historiographers concerning this matter, as the Jews, having most plain and express commandment of God, that they should neither make nor worship any image, as is at large before declared, did notwithstanding by the example of the Gentiles or heathen people that dwelt about them, fall to the making of images and worshipping of them, and so to the committing of the most abominable idolatry, for the which God by his holy prophets doth most sharply reprove and threaten them, and afterward did accomplish his said threatenings by extreme punishing of them, as is also above specified.

Even so, some of the Christians in old time, which were converted from worshipping of idols and false gods unto the true living God and to our Saviour Jesus Christ, did of a certain blind zeal, and as men long accustomed to images, paint or carve images of our Saviour Christ, his mother Mary, and of the apostles, thinking that this was a point of gratitude and kindness towards those by whom they had received the true knowledge of God and the doctrine of the gospel.

But these pictures or images came not yet into churches, nor were not worshipped of a long time after. And lest you should think that I do say this of mine own head only, without authority, I allege for me Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, and the most ancient author of the ecclesiastical history, who lived about the 330th year of our Lord in Constantinus Magnus' days and his son Constantius, Emperor's, in the seventh book of his history ecclesiastical, the fourteenth chapter, and Saint Jerome upon the tenth chapter of the prophet Jeremy, who both expressly say that the error of images, for so Saint Jerome calleth it, hath come in and passed to the Christians from the Gentiles by unheathenish use and custom.

The cause and means Eusebius showeth, saying, It is no marvel if they which being Gentiles before and did believe seemed to offer this as a gift unto our Saviour for the benefits which they had received of him.

Yea, and we do now see that images of Peter and Paul and our Saviour himself be made, and tables to be painted, which me think to have been observed and kept indifferently by unheathenish custom, for the heathen are once so to honour them whom they judged honour worthy, for that some tokens of old men should be kept for the remembrance of posterity is a token of their honour that were before and the love of those that come after.

[18 : 37] Thus far I have rehearsed Eusebius' words, Where note ye that both Saint Jerome and he agree herein that these images came in amongst Christian men by such as were Gentiles and accustomed to idols, and being converted to the faith of Christ, retained yet some remnants of Gentility not thoroughly purged, for Saint Jerome calleth it an error manifestly.

And the like example we see in the Acts of the Apostles of the Jews, who, when they were converted to Christ, would have brought in their circumcision, whereunto they were so long accustomed with them into Christ's religion, with whom the Apostles, namely Saint Paul, had much ado for the staying of that matter.

But of circumcision was less marvel, for that it came first in by God's ordinance and commandment. A man may most justly wonder of images so directly against God's holy word and straight commandment, how they should enter in.

But images were not yet worshipped in Eusebius' time, nor publicly set up in churches and temples, and they who privately had them did err of a certain zeal, and not by malice.

But afterwards they crept out of private houses into churches, and so bred first superstition and last of all idolatry amongst Christians, as hereafter shall appear, in the time of Theodosius and Martian emperors, who reigned about the year of our Lord 460 and 1100 years ago, when the people of the city of Nola once a year did celebrate the birthday of Saint Felix and the temple, and used to banquet there sumptuously.

[20 : 07] Pontius Paulinus, bishop of Nola, caused the walls of the temple to be painted with stories taken out of the Old Testament, that the people beholding and considering those pictures might the better abstain from too much surfeiting and riot.

And about the same time Aurelius Prudentius, a very learned and Christian poet, declareth how he did see painted in a church the history of the Passion of Saint Cassian, a schoolmaster and martyr, whom his own scholars at the commandment of the tyrant tormented with the pricking or stabbing in of their pointals or brazen pens into his body, and so by a thousand wounds and mow as Seth Prudentius most cruelly slew him.

And these were the first paintings and churches that were notable of antiquity, and so by this example came in painting and afterward images of timber and stone and other matter into the churches of Christians.

Now, and ye will consider this beginning, men are not so ready to worship a picture on a wall or in a window as an embossed and gilt image set with pearl and stone, and a process of a story painted with the gestures and actions of many persons, and commonly the sum of the story written withal, hath another use in it than one dumb idol or image standing by itself.

But from learning by painted stories it came by little and little to idolatry, which when godly men, as well emperors and learned bishops as others, perceived, they commanded that such pictures, images or idols should be used no more.

[21 : 33] And I will, for a declaration thereof, begin with the decree of the ancient Christian emperors, Valens and Theodosius II, who reigned about four hundred years after our Saviour Christ's ascension, who forbade that any images should be made or painted privately, for certain it is that there was none in temples publicly in their time.

These emperors did write unto the captain of the army attending on the emperors after this sort, Valens and Theodosius, emperors, unto the captain of the army, whereas we have a diligent care to maintain the religion of God above in all things.

We will grant to no man to set forth, grave, carve or paint the image of our Saviour Christ in colours, stone or any other matter, but in what place soever it shall be found, we command that it be taken away and that all such as shall attempt anything contrary to our decrees or commandment herein shall be most sharply punished.

This decree is written in the books named Libri Augustalis, the imperial books gathered by Tribonianus, Basilides, Theophilus, Dioscorus and Satira, men of great authority and learning at the commandment of the emperor Justinian and is alleged by Petrus Cronitus, a notable learned man in the ninth book and ninth chapter of his work entitled De Honesta Disciplina, that is to say of honest learning.

Here you see what Christian princes of most ancient times decreed against images, which then began to creep in amongst the Christians. For it is certain that by the space of three hundred years and more after the death of our Saviour Christ, and before these godly emperors reign, there were no images publicly in churches or temples.

[23 : 08] How would the idolaters glory if they had so much antiquity and authority for them as is here against them? Now shortly after these days, the Goths, Vandals, Huns and other barbarous and wicked nations burst into Italy and all parts of the west countries of Europe with huge and mighty armies spoiled all places, destroyed cities and burned libraries so that learning and true religion went to rack and decayed incredibly and so the bishops of those latter days being of less learning and in the middle of wars taking less heed also than did the bishops afore by ignorance of God's word and negligence of bishops and specially barbarous princes not rightly instructed in true religion bearing the rule, images came into the church of Christ in the said west parts where these barbarous people ruled, not now in painted cloths only, but embossed in stone, timber, metal, and other like matter and were not only set up but began to be worshipped also and therefore Serenus, bishop of Massil, the head town of Gallia Narbonensis, now called the province, a godly and learned man who was about 600 years after our saviour Christ, seeing the people by occasion of image fall to most abominable idolatry, break to pieces all the images of Christ and saints which were in that city and was therefore complained upon to Gregory, the first of that name bishop of Rome, who was the first learned bishop that did allow the open having of images in churches that can be known by any writing or history of antiquity, and upon this Gregory do all image worshippers at this day ground their defence, but as all things that be amiss have from a tolerable beginning grown worse and worse till they at the last become intolerable, so did this matter of images.

First men used privately stories painted in tables, cloths, and walls, afterwards gross and embossed images privately in their own houses, then afterwards pictures first, and after them embossed images began to creep into churches, learned and godly men ever speaking against them.

Then by use it was openly maintained that they might be in churches, but yet forbidden that they should be worshipped, of which opinion was Gregory, as by the said Gregory's epistle to the forename Serenus, bishop of Massiel, plainly appeareth, which epistle is to be found in the book of the epistles of Gregory, or register, in the tenth part of the fourth epistle, where he hath these words, that thou didst forbid images to be worshipped we praise altogether, but that thou didst break them we blame, for it is one thing to worship the picture, and another thing by the picture of the story to learn what is to be worshipped, for that which scripture is to them that read, the same doth picture perform unto idiots, or the unlearned beholding, and so forth.

And after a few words, therefore it should not have been broken, which was set up, not to be worshipped in churches, but only to instruct the minds of the ignorant. And a little after, thus thou shouldst have said, if you will have images in the church for that instruction wherefore they were made in old time, I do permit that they may be made, and that you may have them, and show them that not the sight of the story which is opened by the picture, but that worshipping which was inconveniently given to the pictures did mislike you.

And if any would make images, not forbid them, but avoid by all means to worship any image. By these sentences taken here and there out of Gregory's epistle to Serenus, for it were too long to rehearse the whole, ye may understand whereunto the matter was now come, six hundred years after Christ, that the having of images or pictures in the churches were then maintained in the west part of the church, for they were not so froward yet in the east church, but the worshipping of them was utterly forbidden, and you may withal note that seeing there is no ground for worshipping of images in Gregory's writing, but a plain condemnation thereof, that such as do worship images do unjustly allege Gregory for them.

[26 : 57] And further, if images in the church do not teach man according to Gregory's mind, but rather blind them, it followeth that images should not be in the church by his sentence, who only would they should be placed there to the end that they might teach the ignorant.

Wherefore, if it be declared that images have been and be worshipped, and also that they teach nothing but errors and lies, which shall by God's grace hereafter be done, I trust that then by Gregory's own determination all images and image worshippers shall be overthrown.

But in the mean season Gregory's authority was so great in all the west church that by his encouragement men set up images in all places, but their judgment was not so good to consider why he would have them set up, but they fell all on heaps to manifest idolatry by worshipping of them, which Bishop Serenus, not without just cause, feared would come to pass.

Now if Serenus his judgment, thinking it meet that images whereunto idolatry was committed should be destroyed, had taken place, idolatry had been overthrown, for to that which is not no man committeth idolatry.

But of Gregory's opinion, thinking that images might be suffered in churches so it were taught that they should not be worshipped, what ruin of religion, what mischief ensued afterward to all Christendom, experience hath to our great hurt and sorrow proved.

[28 : 16] First by the schism rising between the east and the west church about the said images, next by the division of the empire into two parts by the same occasion of images to the great weakening of all Christendom, whereby last of all hath followed the utter overthrow of the Christian religion and noble empire in Greece and all the east parts of the world, and the increase of Muhammad's false religion and the cruel dominion and tyranny of the Saracens and Turks, who do now hang over our necks also that dwell in the west parts of the world, ready at all occasions to overrun us, and all this do we owe unto our idols and images and our idolatry and worshipping of them.

But now give you ear a little to the process of the history, wherein I do much follow the histories of Paulus Diaconus and others joined with Eutropius, an old writer, for though some of the authors were favourers of images, yet do they most plainly and at large prosecute the histories of those times, whom Baptist Platina also in his history of popes, as in the lives of Constantine and Gregory II, bishops of Rome, and other places where he entreateth of this matter, doth chiefly follow.

After Gregory's time, Constantine, bishop of Rome, assembled a council of bishops in the west church and did condemn Philippicus, then emperor, and John, bishop of Constantinople, of the heresy of the Monothelites, not without a cause indeed, but very justly.

When he had so done, by the consent of the learned about him, the said Constantine, bishop of Rome, caused the images of the ancient fathers, which had been at those six councils which were allowed and received of all men, to be painted in the entry of St. Peter's church at Rome.

When the Greeks had knowledge hereof, they began to dispute and reason the matter of images with the Latins, and held this opinion, that images could have no place in Christ's church, and the Latins held the contrary, and took part with the images.

[30 : 07] So the east and west churches, which agreed evil before, upon this contention about images, fell to utter enmity, which was never well reconciled yet. But in the mean season, Philippicus and Arthemius, or Anastasius, emperors, commanded images and pictures to be pulled down and raised out in every place of their dominion.

After them came Theodosius III. He commanded the defaced images to be painted again in their places. But this Theodosius reigned but one year. Leo III of that name succeeded him, who was a Syrian-born, a very wise, godly, merciful, and valiant prince.

This Leo by proclamation commanded that all images set up in churches to be worshipped should be plucked down and defaced, and required specially the bishop of Rome that he should do the same.

And himself, in the mean season, caused all images that were in the imperial city Constantinople to be gathered on a heap into the middle of the city, and there publicly burned them to ashes, and whited over and raised out all pictures painted upon the walls of the temples, and punished sharply diverse maintainers of images.

And when some did herefore report him to be a tyrant, he answered, that such of all other were most justly punished, which neither worshipped God aright, nor regarded the imperial majesty and authority, but maliciously rebelled against wholesome and profitable laws.

[31 : 26] When Gregorius, the third of that name bishop of Rome, heard of the emperor's doings in Greece concerning images, he assembled a council of Italian bishops against him, and there made decrees for images, and that more reverence and honour should yet be given to them than was before, and stirred up the Italians against the emperor, first at Ravenna, and moved them to rebellion.

And as Ospergensis and Antonius, bishop of Florence, testify in their chronicles, he caused Rome and all Italy at the last to refuse their obedience and the payment of any more tribute to the emperor, and so by treason and rebellion maintained their idolatry.

Which example other bishops of Rome have continually followed and gone through withal most stoutly. After this, Leo, which reigned 34 years, succeeded his son Constantine V, who after his father's example kept images out of the temples, and being moved with the council which Gregory had assembled in Italy for images against his father, he also assembled a council of all the learned men and bishops of Asia and Greece, although some writers placed this council in Leo Isoracus, his father's latter days.

In this great assemble, they sat in council from the 4th of the Ides of February to the 6th of the Ides of August, and made concerning the use of images this decree. It is not lawful for them that believe in God through Jesus Christ to have any images, neither of the creator nor of any creatures, set up in 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, and this decree was executed in all places where any images were found in Asia or Greece.

And the emperor sent the determination of this council holden at Constantinople to Paul, then bishop of Rome, and commanded him to cast all images out of the churches, which he, trusting in the friendship of a pine and mighty prince, refused to do.

[33 : 16] And both he and his successor Stephanus III, who assembled another council in Italy for images, condemned the emperor and the council of Constantinople of heresy, and made a decree that the holy images, for so they called them, of Christ, the blessed virgin, and other saints, were indeed worthy honour and worshipping.

When Constantine was dead, Leo IV, his son, reigned after him, who married a woman of the city of Athens, named Theodora, who also was called Hyrene, by whom he had a son named Constantine VI, and dying whilst his son was yet young, left the regiment of the empire and governance of his young son to his wife Hyrene.

These things were done in the church about the year of our Lord, 760. Note here, I pray you, in this process of the story, that in the churches of Asia and Greece there were no images publicly by the space of almost 700 years, and there is no doubt but the primitive church next to the apostles' times was most pure.

Note also that when the contention began about images, how of six Christian emperors, who were the chief magistrates by God's Lord to be obeyed, only one, which was Theodosius, who reigned but one year, held with images.

All the other emperors and all the learned men and bishops of the East Church and that in assembled councils condemned them, besides the two emperors before mentioned, Valens and Theodosius II, who were long before these times, who straightly forbade that any images should be made, and universally after this time all the emperors of Greece, only Theodosius accepted, destroyed continually all images.

[34 : 49] Now on the contrary part, note ye that the bishops of Rome, being no ordinary magistrates, appointed of God out of their diocese, but usurpers of princes' authority contrary to God's word, were the maintainers of images against God's word, and stirrers up of sedition and rebellion, and workers of continual treason against their sovereign lords, contrary to God's law, and the ordinances of all human laws, being not only enemies to God, but also rebels and traitors against their princes.

These be the first bringers in of images openly into churches, these be the maintainers of them in the churches, and these be the means whereby they have maintained them, to wit, conspiracy, treason, and rebellion against God and their princes.

Now to proceed in the history most worthy to be known, in the nonage of Constantine VI, the empress Hyrene, his mother, in whose hands the regiment of the empire remained, was governed much by the device of Theodore Bishop, and Theratius Patriarch of Constantinople, who practiced and held with the Bishop of Rome in maintaining of images most earnestly, by whose counsel and entreaty the empress first most wickedly digged up the body of her father-in-law, Constantine V, and commanded it to be openly burned and the ashes to be thrown into the sea, which example, as the constant report goeth, had like to have been put in practice with princes' courses in our days, had the authority of the Holy Father continued but a little longer.

The cause why the empress Hyrene thus used her father-in-law was, for that he, when he was alive, had destroyed images and had taken away the sumptuous ornaments of churches, saying that Christ, whose temples they were, allowed poverty and not pearls and precious stones.

Afterward the said Hyrene, at the persuasion of Adrian Bishop of Rome and Paul the Patriarch of Constantinople and his successor Theratius, assembled a council of the bishops of Asia and Greece at the city Nicaea, where the Bishop of Rome's legates being presidents of the council and ordering all things that they listed, the council which was assembled before under the Emperor Constantine V and had decreed that all images should be destroyed, was condemned as an heretical council and assemble, and a decree was made that images should be set up in all the churches of Greece and that honour and worship also should be given unto the said images.

[37 : 03] And so the empress, sparing no diligence in setting up of images, nor cast in decking them in all churches, made Constantinople within a short time altogether like Rome itself, and now you may see that come unto pass which Bishop Serenus feared and Gregory I forbade in vain, to wit, that images should in no wise be worshipped.

For now, not only the simple and unwise, unto whom images, as the scriptures teach, be specially a snare, but the bishops and learned men also fall to idolatry by occasion of images, yea, and make decrees and laws also for the maintenance of the same.

So hard is it, and indeed impossible, any long time to have images publicly in churches and temples without idolatry, as by the space of little more than one hundred years betwixt Gregory I forbidding most straightly the worshipping of images, and Gregory III, Paul and Leo III, bishops of Rome, with this council commanding and decreeing that images should be worshipped, most evidently appeareth.

Now when Constantine, the young emperor, came to the age of twenty years, he was daily in less and less estimation, for such as were about his mother persuaded her that it was God's determination that she should reign alone, and not her son with her.

The ambitious woman, believing the same, deprived her son of all imperial dignity, and compelled all the men of war with their captains to swear to her that they would not suffer her son Constantine to reign during her life, with which in dignity the young prince, being moved, recovered the regiment of the empire unto himself by force, and being brought up in true religion in his father's time, seeing the superstition of his mother Hyrene, and the idolatry committed by images, cast down, break, and burned all the idols and images that his mother had set up.

[38 : 47] But within a few years after, Hyrene the empress, taken again into her son's favour, after she had persuaded him to put out Nysephorus his uncle's eyes, and to cut out the tongues of his four other uncles, and to forsake his wife, and by such means to bring him in hatred with all his subjects, now further to declare that she was no changeling, but the same woman that had before digged up and burned her father-in-law's body, and that she would be as natural a mother as she had been kind daughter, seeing the images which she loved so well and had with so great cost set up, daily destroyed by her son the emperor, by the help of certain good companions, deprived her son of the empire, and first, like a kind and loving mother, put out both his eyes and laid him in prison, where, after long and many torments, she at the last most cruelly slew him.

And this history, joined to Eutropius, it is written, that the sun was darkened by the space of seventeen days most strangely and dreadfully, and that all men said that for the horribleness of that cruel and unnatural fact of Hyrene and the putting out of the emperor's eyes, the sun had lost his light.

But indeed, God would signify by the darkness of the sun into what darkness and blindness of ignorance and idolatry all Christendom should fall by the occasion of images, the bright sun of his eternal truth and light of his holy word by the mists and black clouds of men's traditions being blemished and darkened, as by sundry most terrible earthquakes happening about the same time, God signified that the quiet state of true religion should by such idolatry be most horribly tasked and troubled.

And here may you see what a gracious and virtuous lady this Hyrene was. How loving a niece to her husband's uncles, how kind a mother-in-law to her son's wife, how loving a daughter to her father-in-law, how natural a mother to her own son, and what a stout and valiant captain the bishops of Rome had of her for the setting up and maintenance of their idols or images.

Surely they could not have found a more fit patron for the maintenance of such a matter than this Hyrene, whose ambition and desire of rule was insatiable, whose treason continually studied and wrought was most abominable, whose wicked and unnatural cruelty passed media and progne, whose detestable parasites have ministered matter to poets to write their horrible tragedies.

[41 : 02] And yet certain historiographers who do put in writing all these her horrible wickedness for love they had to images, which she maintained, do praise her as a godly empress and assent from God, such as the blindness of false superstition, if it once take possession in a man's mind, that it will both declare the vices of wicked princes and also commend them.

But not long after the said Hyrene, being suspected to the princes and lords of Greece of treason in alienating the empire to Charles, king of the Frankens, and for practising a secret marriage between herself and the said king, and being convicted of the same, was by the said lords deposed and deprived again of the empire and carried into exile into the island Lesbos, where she ended her lewd life.

Whilst these tragedies about images were thus in working in Greece, the same question of the use of images and churches began to be moved in Spain also, and at a library a noble city now called Granate, was a council of Spanish bishops and other learned men assembled, and there, after long deliberation and debating of the matter, it was concluded at length of the whole council after this sought in the 36th article.

We think that pictures ought not to be in churches, lest that which is honoured or worshipped be painted on walls, and in the 41st canon of that council it is thus written, We thought good to admonish the faithful that, as much as in them lieth, they suffer no images to be in their houses, but, if they fear any violence of their servants, at the least let them keep themselves clean and pure from images.

If they do not so, let them be accounted as none of the church. Note here, I pray you, how a whole and great country in the west and south parts of Europe, nearer to Rome a great deal than to Greece in situation of place, do agree with the Greeks against images, and do not only forbid them in churches, but also in private houses, and do excommunicate them that do the contrary.

[42 : 55] And another council of the learned men of all Spain also, called Concilium Tolutanum Dur Deciimum, decreed and determined likewise against images and image worshippers. But when these decrees of the Spanish council at Libri came to the knowledge of the bishop of Rome and his adherents, they, fearing lest all Germany also would decree against images and forsake them, thought to prevent the matter, and by the consent and help of the prince of Frankens, whose power was then most great in the west parts of the world, assembled a council of Germans at Frankfurt, and there procured the Spanish council against images aforementioned to be condemned by the name of the Felician heresy, for that Felix, bishop of Aquitania, was chief in that council, and obtained that the acts of the second Nicene council assembled by Hyrene, the holy empress, whom he heard of before, and the sentence of the bishop of Rome for images might be received, for much after this sort did the papers report the history of the council of Frankfurt, notwithstanding the book of Carolus Magnus, his own writing, as the title showeth, which is now put in print and commonly in men's hands, showeth the judgment of that prince, and of the whole council of Frankfurt also, to be against images and against the second council of Nice assembled by Hyrene for images, and calleth it an arrogant, foolish, and ungodly council, and declareth the assemble of the council of Frankfurt to have been directly made and gathered against that Nicene council and the errors of the same, so that it must needs follow that either there were in one prince's time two councils assembled at Frankfurt, one contrary to another, which by no history doth appear, or else that, after their custom, the popes and papists have most shamefully corrupted that council, as their manner is to handle not only councils, but also all histories and writings of the old doctors, falsifying and corrupting them for the maintenance of their wicked and ungodly purposes, as hath in times of late come to light, and doth in our days more and more continually appear most evidently.

Let the forged gift of Constantine and the notable attempt to falsify the first Nicene council for the pope's supremacy, practiced by popes in St. Augustine's time, be a witness hereof, which practice indeed had then taken effect, had not the diligence and wisdom of St. Augustine and other learned and godly bishops in Afrique, by their great labour and charges, also resisted and stopped the same.

Now to come towards an end of this history and to show you the principal point that came to pass by the maintenance of images. Whereas, from Constantinus Magnus' time until that day, all authority, imperial and princely dominion of the Empire of Rome remained continually in the right and possession of the emperors, who had their continuance and seat imperial at Constantinople, the city royal, Leo III, then Bishop of Rome, seeing the Greek emperors so bent against his gods of gold and silver, timber and stone, and having the king of the Franks or Frenchmen named Charles, whose power was exceeding great in the West countries, very applicable to his mind for causes hereafter appearing, under the pretense that they of Constantinople were for that matter of images under the Pope's ban and curse, and therefore unworthy to be emperors or to bear rule, and for that the emperors of Greece, being far off, were not ready at a beck to defend the Pope against the Lombards, his enemies, and others with whom he had variance, this Leo III, attempted a thing exceeding strange and unheard of before, and of incredible boldness and presumption.

For he, by his papal authority, doth translate the government of the empire and the crown and name imperial from the Greeks, and giveth it unto Charles the Great, king of the Franks, not without the consent of the forenamed Hyrene, Empress of Greece, who also sought to be joined in marriage with the said Charles.

For the which cause the said Hyrene was by the lords of Greece deposed and banished, as one that had betrayed the empire, as you before have heard. And the said princes of Greece did, after the deprivation of the said Hyrene, by common consent, elect and create, as they always had done, an emperor named Nicephorus, whom the bishop of Rome and they of the west would not acknowledge for their emperor, for they had already created them another.

[47 : 03] And so there became two emperors, and the empire which was before one, was divided into two parts, upon occasion of idols and images and the worshipping of them, even as the kingdom of the Israelites was an old time for the like cause of idolatry, divided in King Roboam his time.

And so the bishop of Rome, having the favour of Charles the Great by this means assured to him, was wondrously enhanced in power and authority, and did in all the west church, especially in Italy, what he lust, where images were set up, garnished and worshipped of all sorts of men.

But the images were not so fast set up and so much honoured in Italy in the west, but Nicephorus, emperor of Constantinople and his successors Scouratius, the two Michaels, Leo, Theophilus and other emperors, their successors in the empire of Greece, continually pulled them down, break them, burn them and destroyed them as fast.

And when Theodorus, emperor, would at the council of Leon have agreed with the bishop of Rome and have set up images, he was by the nobles of the empire of Greece deprived, and another chosen in his place.

And so rose a jealousy, suspicion, grudge, hatred and enmity between the Christians and empires of the east countries and west, which could never be quenched nor pacified, so that when the Saracens first and afterward the Turks invaded the Christians, the one part of Christendom would not help the other.

[48 : 24] By the reason whereof, at the last, the noble empire of Greece and the city imperial Constantinople was lost, and is come into the hands of the infidels, who now have overrun almost all Christendom, and possessing past the middle of Hungary, which is part of the west empire, do hang over all our heads to the utter danger of all Christendom.

Thus we see what a sea of mischiefs the maintenance of images hath brought with it, what an horrible schism between the east and the west church, what an hatred between one Christian and another, councils against councils, church against church, Christians against Christians, princes against princes, rebellions, treasons, unnatural and most cruel murders, the daughter digging up and burning her father, the emperor, his body, the mother for love of idols most abominably murdering her own son, being an emperor, at the last, the tearing in sunder of Christendom and the empire into two pieces, till the infidel Saracens and Turks, common enemies to both parts, have most cruelly vanquished, destroyed, and subdued the one part, the whole empire of Greece, Asia, the less, Thracia, Macedonia, Epirus, and many other great and goodly countries and provinces, and have won a great peace of the other empire and put the whole in dreadful fear and most horrible danger, for it is not without a just and great cause to be dread, lest, as the empire of Rome was even for the like cause of images and the worshipping of them torn in pieces and divided, as was for idolatry the kingdom of Israel in old time divided, so like punishment as for the like offence fell upon the Jews will also light upon us, that is, lest the cruel tyrant and enemy of our common wealth and religion, the Turk, by God's just vengeance, in likewise partly murder and partly lead away into captivity us Christians, as did the Assyrian and Babylonian kings murder and lead away the Israelites, and lest the empire of Rome and Christian religion be so utterly brought under foot, as was then the kingdom of Israel and true religion of God, where unto the matter already, as I have declared, shrewdly inclineth on our part the greater part of Christendom within less than 300 years space being brought in captivity and most miserable thralldom under the Turks and the noble empire of Greece clear everted, whereas if the Christians divided by these image matters had holden together, no infidels and miscreants could thus have prevailed against Christendom, and all this mischief and misery which we have hitherto fallen into do we owe to our mighty gods of gold and silver, stock and stone, in whose help and defence, where they cannot help themselves, we have trusted so long, until our enemies, the infidels, have overcome and overrun us almost altogether, a just reward for those that have left the mighty living God, the Lord of hosts, and have stooped and given the honour due to him to dead blocks and stocks, who have eyes and see not, ears and hear not, feet and cannot go, and so forth, and are cursed of God, and all they that make them, and that put their trust in them.

Thus you understand, well beloved in our Saviour Christ, by the judgment of the old learned and godly doctors of the church, and by ancient histories ecclesiastical, agreeing to the verity of God's word alleged out of the Old Testament and the New, that images and image worshipping were in the primitive church which was most pure and uncorrupt, abhorred and detested as abominable and contrary to true Christian religion, and that when images began to creep into the church, they were not only spoken and written against by godly and learned bishops, doctors and clerks, but also condemned by whole councils of bishops and learned men assembled together.

Yea, the said images by many Christian emperors and bishops were defaced, broken and destroyed, and that above 700 and 800 years ago, and that therefore it is not of late days, as some would bear you in hand, that images and image worshipping have been spoken and written against.

Finally, you have heard what mischief and misery hath, by the occasion of the said images, fallen upon whole Christendom, besides the loss of infinite souls, which is most horrible of all.

[52 : 34] Wherefore let us beseech God that we, being warned by his holy word forbidding all idolatry, and by the writings of old godly doctors and ecclesiastical histories, written and preserved by God's ordinance for our admonition and warning, may flee from all idolatry, and so escape the horrible punishment and plagues, as well worldly as everlasting, threatened for the same, which God, our Heavenly Father, grant us for our only Saviour and Mediator, Jesus Christ's sake.

Amen.