

vances by summoning a council of 350 Catholic bishops to Nicea, where it was appropriately established that whoever declared that the images of saints must be destroyed should be permanently excommunicated. And the Constantinian Synod was condemned there. The very next year she called the same Fathers to Constantinople and she wanted that synod, and not the Constantinian one, to be called the Seventh Ecumenical Council. There are, however, those who believe that that synod was declared the Seventh [Ecumenical Council] under Pope Eugene II when Michael was the emperor in Constantinople.

**Chapter XIII.** The heresies of Felix of Urgel regarding images were condemned in Frankfurt during the reign of Charlemagne.

But her son Constantine, the sixth of that name, adopted the advice of wicked men and annulled the very salutary decrees of the council. Pushing aside his mother, he assumed sole rule of the empire and took pleasure in the blinding and slaying of many men. But Irene, his mother, would not tolerate his crimes and, impelled by the nobility of her character, had her son seized, blinded, and thrown into prison, where he suffered the just punishment of his impiety and sacrilege. And Irene restored images.

In the same way, the heresy of Felix was extinguished almost as soon as it began through the efforts of Pope Hadrian and Charlemagne. For when Charlemagne was subduing the Hungarians because of their almost daily raids, he came with his nobles to the eastern portion of his realm (where the Franks originated) in Germany, and there, in the year of our Lord 793 summoned a synod of French and German bishops to congregate in Frankfurt, over which presided Bishops Theophilatius and Stephen, legates of the Holy See. It condemned the heresy of Felix and forbade anyone, under threat of excommunication, to destroy images or teach that they should be abolished.<sup>25</sup> Hence the pestilential disease developed no further for 730 years. But now, in the year of our Lord 1522—if the story is true—the heresy of Felix is spreading out once again from the north. Luther, Karlstadt, and Melancthon—men cut off from the Church of God—are its authors. But it is our best hope that he who overthrew with punishments and torments the sacrilegious men who destroyed images of the saints

<sup>25</sup> On the condemnation of the Spanish bishop Felix of Urgel and Eck's narrative, Iserloh, "Die Verteidigung," 81; contrary to what Iserloh states, however, Eck knew the *Libri Carolini*: see N. Harpsfeld, *Dialogi* (Antwerp, 1566), 563 and 594f.

[will not allow]<sup>26</sup> these iconoclasts to escape the just punishment for their impiety and sacrilege. And just as the most Christian prince Charlemagne repressed the heresy of Felix and converted the Saxons to the faith, so now our glorious caesar Charles [V], the Catholic king, shall cut back the reborn heresy and shall prevent the Saxons from abandoning the faith.

The spokesmen whom Michael sent to the emperor Lothar, Lothar sent to the Apostolic See, which rules in all matters concerning faith. There they were instructed by Eugene II that the heresy of abolishing images of Christ and of the saints had been condemned by five councils—three in Rome, one in Nicea, and another in Frankfurt—and he exhorted them to persuade the emperor to restore images.

**Chapter XIV.** The decrees against those who remove images.

Gregory II<sup>27</sup> severely rebuked Serenus,<sup>28</sup> bishop of Marseilles, because he had destroyed some images. He wrote to him and said: It has been reported to us that inflamed by an inconsiderate zeal you have destroyed some images of the saints on the grounds that they should not be worshipped. That you have forbidden them to be worshipped we certainly praise. But we disapprove of your destroying them. Tell us, brother, if you have ever heard that a priest did what you have done. For it is one thing to worship a painting; it is another thing to learn from the story the picture tells what is to be worshipped.

For this reason, in the Seventh Synod (not that one called the Constantinian) the oath regarding the destruction of images, seeing that it concerned something illegal, was in part useless. For we read in the acts of the fourth session of the Seventh Synod that John, a delegate from the east, said: The speech of our Father Sophronios signifies that it would be better for the oath-taker to commit perjury than to keep his oath for the breaking of sacred images. And we say that because certain people are excusing themselves from this oath. The patriarch Tarasios said that since Father Sophronios knew the goodness of God, for that reason he wanted to violate the impious oath.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> The text of this sentence is corrupt and the verb is missing.

<sup>27</sup> Eck here confuses Gregory I, from 590 to 604, whose famous letter to Serenus he quotes, and Gregory II, 715–731. For the letter by Gregory I (the Great) on images, see Introduction, note 18.

<sup>28</sup> Servius in the original: see above, note 14.

<sup>29</sup> Note on margin: "Non habeo iam ad manum acta illa synodorum quia plures volunt illa tractata in vi synodo. Hoc tantum verissimum: quod Tharasius vii

Here it is clear that before the time of Gregory no priest did what our sacrilegious men Luther and Karlstadt are endeavoring to do. It is also clear that the synod judged the removal of images to be illegal, and that even if an oath has been taken to do so, it ought not to be observed. But our headless cynic and epicurean theologians are striving with all their strength to do this, even though they have not taken an oath.

I find in this regard one ruling of the Synod of Constantinople which reads as follows: We decree that the holy images of our Lord Jesus Christ, Deliverer and Saviour of all, be adored with the same honour as the book of the holy Gospels. And further on it says: Therefore, if someone does not worship the icon of Christ the Saviour, let him not see his form when he comes to be glorified in the glory of his Father and to glorify his saints, but let him be kept away from his communion and his light. Now, may Luther and his fellows in crime see what sort of anathema strikes them. But, as John said [Rev. 22:11]: And he which is filthy, let him be filthy still.<sup>30</sup>

#### Chapter XV. The fallacious reasons advanced by the iconoclasts.

Now that we have secured our positions, it remains for us to break the strength of our adversaries and undermine their foundations. It appears they have five main grounds for taking the opportunity to commit such crime and impiety. The first is that it is in Exodus 20[:4ff], where God's commandments are given, that images are prohibited. The text says: Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.<sup>31</sup> The second is that Scripture praises King Hezekiah by saying that afterwards there was no king in Judah like him. And it was he who threw down the hill-shrines, smashed statues, cut down the sacred groves, and also broke the brazen serpent which Moses had made (2 Kings 18[:4]), although God himself ordered it to be made (Num. 21[:8]).<sup>32</sup> To these passages must be added what the Saviour said to the

synodo catholice interfuit." The acts of the fourth session of Nicea II are in G.D. Mansi, *Conciliarum Collectio*, vol. 13 (Florence 1767), 1-156; the section referring to the oath, *ibid.*, 62ff.

30 The acts of this council, which convened in the years 869-870, are also in Mansi's *Conciliarum Collectio*, vol. 16 (Florence, 1767), 1-534; the section quoted by Eck, *ibid.*, 161-162.

31 On the Decalogue, see Karlstadt, notes 8 and 22.

32 On Hezekiah, see Karlstadt, note 15.

woman of Samaria (John 4[:21-23]): Believe me, the time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship without knowing what you worship, we worship what we know. It is from the Jews that salvation comes. But the time approaches, indeed it is already here, when those who are worshippers will worship in spirit and in truth,<sup>33</sup> for the Father seeks such to worship him. God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth.

Moreover, many troublesome and serious dangers seem to arise from the use of images. When a man thinks too much about images and the corporeal things around him, not only might he be touched by idolatry, but also, because of the wavering of his fantasy and the mocking co-operation of the invisible enemy, he might turn from devotions and pious thoughts to thinking impure and obscene things. That is to say, he may turn from spiritual matters to corporeal and carnal things. For danger can easily threaten those who have too much contact with the image of nude saints. Who can doubt the possibility that someone while meditating might cling so intensely to the crucifix that the crucified Lord disappears and he remains alone together with the two thieves. Thus also a shameful and indecent picture of holy virgins may lead to abominable thoughts.

Finally, a certain good, learned man (whose name, out of respect, I do not mention, as he would definitely wish)<sup>34</sup> perhaps unaware that this matter had formerly been so often defined by [ecclesiastical] councils, discusses at great length this question concerning the removal of images. First, he says that images are prohibited by the inviolable Ten Commandments, although he dilutes that objection of the Jews. Again he insists that not only must one guard against the execrable crime of idolatry, but also against whatever might pollute the conscience of simple folk, such as the pestiferous and shameful adoration of images which immediately drives away all the care and protection of God. Finally, he rejected the reasons offered by ecclesiastical writers in defence of images, especially those of St Thomas Aquinas, on the grounds that this kind of cult of images was established by none of the apostles nor by any canonical ruling. On the contrary, it is rejected with the highest contempt and accusation,

33 In referring to John 4:21-23, Eck contradicts Karlstadt and other Reformers who held that this passage condemned any cult of a physical object.

34 The unnamed man whose views are discussed in this passage must be Paulus Ricius, the convert from Judaism, whose discussion of the Mosaic Law is also mentioned and rejected by Emser. See Emser, note 8.

according to that which the apostle says: And they changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man [Rom. 1:23]; or again: Flee from idolatry [1 Cor. 10:14], that is from images. From this it follows that because it proceeds from the permission of images and it leads to eternal ruin, the suspicion of idolatry is worse than the results of ignorance, forgetfulness, and lukewarm devotion. Therefore, he concludes by saying that the corrupt seed of an unhealthy custom generated the use of images in the Christian community (like the seeds of wild grape in the vineyard or of darnels in the most carefully cultivated field of wheat). Furthermore, he believes that it was impossible to eradicate the use of images from the heathens who were used to the simulacra because the crazy and torpid mass of those people preferred to forget the pious religion of Christ rather than the vain veneration of simulacra.

This is finally his conclusion: But I nevertheless, with all due deliberation, dare to declare this one thing, that since the orthodox faith of Christ has now been restored to fullness, it would not be harmful (save only it would involve struggling against the excesses of a long established custom), but on the contrary, proper and laudable, to build churches and chapels stripped of statues of the saints. Indeed, this, and not physical images made by hand, would raise the minds of men to the elevated and ethereal spirits of the saints. And also it would save the weak from temptation.

**Chapter XVI.** The first argument is dismissed and the reason for venerating images explained.

In the first place, it is clear—if these matters are judged correctly—that it is the abuse of images, rather than images themselves, that is prohibited. For God, in Exodus, does not simply prohibit sculptures and images, but, rather, forbids the making of statues to which a divine cult is offered in the manner of the idolaters. For after the passage just mentioned, the text continues: You shall not bow down to them nor worship them. Here we touch upon the decisive reason, and that this is so is made clear in the immediately following chapter (Exodus 25) when God orders images of the cherubim to be made. Thus God did not want the people, who were otherwise prone to idolatry, to make frequent use of images, so that they would not fall into the vain practices of the pagans, as did happen on other occasions.

But now, in the period under the Law of Grace, when men are no longer so inclined to idolatry, no such danger exists. And the reason justifying the use of images, in such a way that they can pose no danger to the laity,

is simple and singular, and that is, according to the great Basil, that the cult, veneration, and respect shown to an image does not go to the image itself but to the archetype; to that which is represented. Therefore, God prohibited images because the people were inclined to idolatry, and yet the priests, whom we may not presume to be so inclined, had images of the angelic cherubim in the Holy of Holies, so that by looking upon them and contemplating the celestial order the mind of the high priest would be elevated.

John of Damascus offers this elegant explanation. Just as the Jews and Greeks sacrificed in different ways, so there are differences between pagan and Christian images. Pagan images, in which the foolish pagans believed divinity lurked, were dwelling places of demons. Christian images are representations of Christ, of Mary, and of the saints. For just as we do not worship the material with which the Gospels are written, neither do we worship the material from which the cross is made, but rather what the type and figure express. Therefore, Christians observe the intention of the Law and Law-giver since they use images as instructors, counsellors, and as things which awaken interest and not as things which have a divinity hidden within them.

St Augustine, in Book III, chapters VII and VIII of *Christian Instruction*, also attributes this kind of difference to signs. The Church rejected the useless representations of the Gentile gods and accepted the images of Christ and the saints, and the signs of the sacraments related to God and the saints.

And it seems to me that St Augustine rendered pious and learned judgments on this issue in Book XXII of *The City of God*. While the cult of idols will be thrown to the city of the Devil, he teaches that martyrs are rightly venerated because of the many miracles they received from God, to the end that the true God is worshipped. And I cannot entirely pass over in silence two passages in the same work. One is what he says about the miracles of the saints. The martyrs perform them, or rather God does, either in answer to their prayers or using them as co-workers, to advance the faith. We do not believe the martyrs to be our gods, but rather that we and they have one god. The other is when he says: We do not build temples to our martyrs as if to gods, but as memorials to dead men whose spirits are with the living God. Nor do we erect altars in them on which we sacrifice to the martyrs, but we offer a sacrifice to one god, the martyrs' and ours. They are named in a particular part of that sacrifice as men of God who conquered the world in confessing him, but the priest who makes the sacrifice does not call upon them. For in fact he sacrifices

to God and not to them, even if he sacrifices in their memory, since he is God's priest and not theirs.

It seems proper to cite these most vigorous words of the holy Father St Augustine, as learned as he was saintly, because he teaches us not only in what manner images of the saints should be venerated, but also [how] the saints themselves should be. For whatever problem Augustine touched upon, he solved wisely and prudently, although some, considering all things, place Jerome many steps before him.

Thus the meaning of the declaration of the synod is clear (whether it was the sixth or the seventh does not matter, so long as it is understood that it was not the one called the Constantinian Synod). It says: Christians do not call venerable images gods, nor do they serve them as gods; nor place hope of salvation in them; nor expect a future judgement from them. We venerate and worship them in memory and recollection of the early martyrs, but we do not serve them or any other created thing with a divine cult.<sup>35</sup>

So now we understand in what sense we ought not to make a graven image, and that is to worship and adore it as a god.

**Chapter XVII.** Reflections on the brazen serpent, and also an argument that the fact that we ought to worship in spirit and truth does not abolish images.

Whatever can be said about the brazen serpent is certainly not against the use of images; on the contrary, it strongly confirms it. For although in Exodus the Lord prohibited graven images, nevertheless soon after, in Numbers 21, the Lord said to Moses: Make a serpent of bronze and set it as a sign, so that everyone who is bitten, when he looks upon it, shall live (Num. 21[:8]). Thus God, in this passage, ordered a graven image to be made, but this was to be understood as a sign or to be destroyed, as the text clearly explains. Because the people, who were greatly inclined to idolatry, later took the serpent not as a sign, but worshipped it as a god, Hezekiah rightly destroyed that which had been made by the command of God.

Now the Church steadfastly maintains the first custom, holding images to be signs and not gods and therefore continues to use images. But if somewhere people take an image to be a god and not merely a sign, it

<sup>35</sup> Eck wants to avoid confusion between the two councils, one of which he considers invalid: see above, note 20. The 'declaration' reported by Eck can be found in the acts of Nicea (second) of 787: see Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 64.

must be destroyed. For as Pope Stephen rightly concluded, if the ancients made things without blame which later generations turn into error and superstition of some kind, those things must be destroyed by their successors without delay and with great determination.

Similarly also, the word of the Saviour does not exclude images. For true worshippers, admonished or instructed as they are by images, still worship in spirit and in truth if the prayers go to the prototype, as has been established by St Basil. For wherever a man prays, he prays in spirit and in truth, especially in the period under the Law of Grace when both the prefigurations of Moses have been removed and the dark falsehoods of the pagans have been dispelled. So it was also with David when he said: Let my cry come before thee, O Lord; give me understanding according to thy word (Psalm 118[:169]). And it is no less true when he says: In thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple (Psalm 5[:8]). So it was with Hezekiah as quoted in Isaiah: Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and done that which is good in thy sight (Isaiah 38[:3]). So it was with St Paul: I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with understanding also; I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also (1 Cor. 14[:15]).

Now certainly, whoever would want thus to exclude external images on account of the spirit, with equal reason should also include in this ban physical signs of the sacraments, all religious ceremonies, and even the text of Scripture together with all vocal prayer. Therefore it is clear that images do not prevent us from worshipping in spirit and truth, but, on the contrary, stimulate us to do so.

**Chapter XVIII.** The other arguments against images are dismissed and a concluding statement is appended.

Here, without much difficulty, we can refute the fourth argument brought forward against images, which blames the extravagance of painters who sometimes create images which are too licentious. It also blames the improvidence of those who pray. But it is not the use of images itself, or looking at them that does this, as the argument assumes, but rather the worshipper who clings excessively to the image. This shackles his heart, as if it were bound with ropes, so that it is not borne upward, or is even dragged downward by impure thoughts. Therefore, the faithful man ought to use images only as a sign, so that through them he be instructed, admonished, and stimulated; and through them he be immediately lifted up in spirit to thoughts of God and the saints. But if he becomes more

wayward because of the sign (as the argument assumes) then it is not surprising if the meaning of the sign is lost on him. Jean Gerson, the most Christian chancellor of the University of Paris, in his book, *On the Private Spiritual Exercises of Simple People*, demonstrates this with many examples, all of which could be used here.<sup>36</sup> But for the sake of brevity I will merely direct the zealous reader to that book.

From all this it follows that the faithful must worship in spirit and in truth, both with images and without images.

The good man we spoke of above must be judged according to the conclusions to which he bears witness. Because he refers everything to the judgement of the Church, with which he wishes to live, learn, and find rest, the errors must be given the best possible interpretation, although this was not his practice in argument against me, upon whom he inflicted many insults. But let God have mercy on us and preserve us.

Therefore, in response to his first assumption—that it is necessary to guard against that which tempts the simple—I simply do not admit that images tempt the simple. For they can make use of images correctly by the single and simple insistence that images refer to what they represent. However, the worship of images is destructive if it is idolatrous, that is if it involves the belief that something like a divinity resides in the images, as we have explained at some length. Then he erroneously rejects the explanations of St Thomas Aquinas, to whom he normally defers, inasmuch as the use of images in the Church, as we explained earlier, was introduced by Christ and the apostles. The fact that he cites the apostle concerning images of idols does not stand in the way of images of the saints, for we have learned the difference between the pagan and Christian images from John of Damascus and St Augustine. Consequently, we do not accept his interpretation of the statement: Flee from idolatry, that is to say, from images, for not all images are idols (unless he is prepared to say the cherubim on the mercy seat are idols), even if all idols are images. Thus his fear of idolatry arising from images is groundless, unless perchance it might come from men of his race, the Jews. But since they are blind and obstinate, as he himself complains about them, so great a good coming from images ought not to be impeded because of the perverse interpretation of the Jews. For if they wanted to listen, the one

<sup>36</sup> The work is today attributed to a follower of J. Gerson: *Oeuvres completes*, ed. Glorieux (Paris, 1960), vol. 1, 58. Gerson did write a short piece on indecent images, *Adversus lascivas imagines*, which, however, does not deal with religious art.

right way which separates the use of images from idolatry would easily be pointed out to them. But they have ears and do not hear.

His surmise that the apostles were unable to tear the pagans away from the use of images is also false. He cannot prove this from any source and therefore it is easily disregarded. Moreover, the opposite can be said, as we have clearly demonstrated.

As to his advice, farewell to it. For it is not seemly to destroy with his new considerations what the Church determined in five councils with much discussion and mature deliberation, although I fully believe that he wrote with good intention and acknowledges himself to be an obedient son of the Church.

It is clear, therefore, that the use of images in the Church must not be abolished at all. For it has Christ and the apostles as its authors, and the approval of the entire Church in five councils, despite sacrilegious emperors who attacked it for a hundred years. We ought to maintain the use of images of the crucified Christ and the saints because they instruct us and frequently remind us of them. Because of this, the saints and chosen of God, through the mercy of the Father, remember us in their prayers and seek for us the rewards of their merits so that one day we may be made their fellow citizens. Praising the Lord forever, Amen.

This treatise by Eck was finished on the 8th of March 1522.

To the glory of God alone.