

Saints, Icons, and Relics

Fr. J. Wesley Evans

Veneration of the Saints

Defining a Key Term

The first thing to notice in veneration of the Saints is how the word "saint" is being used. Scripture does not make a distinction between Christians as saints and non-saints. "Saints" just mean Holy Ones which is the descriptor given to all Christians. However, later theology has developed the word "Saint" to refer also, but not in contrast, to a particular set of Christians who were extra virtuous or important to the Church.

Communion of the Saints

The foundation for the Saints in Christian spirituality is the theological principle of the "Communion of the Saints", that in some sense we on earth are still in fellowship with those in Heaven. The initial evidence for this idea can be found in the Book of Hebrews chapters eleven and twelve. The writer in chapter eleven moves through history to present various people who have faithfully served God as an example for faith. At the end he makes an analogy between these saints who have gone before and an athletic event, referring to them as "onlookers". (Heb 12:1) Later in Revelation there is a vision of God being surrounded by the saints in Heaven who are both aware and concerned about the events happening on earth. (Rev 6:10)

Traditionally, the Church has also interpreted the plethora of scriptural language that we are "one body" in a very real sense. There is a mystical or spiritual connection between all members of the Church. As the Church is not just those of us on earth, but also includes those in Heaven, so there is still a mystical communion with those Saints who have passed on. This is a reality of the New Covenant which was unavailable to those under the Old Law. Christians in the presence of God after death are now in a unique place of being "alive" until the resurrection in a way that was untrue before Christ and the atonement. This is why the devotion surrounding the Saints is found so strongly in the early Church but was not in Israel.

Early veneration of Saints

Venerating the Saints starts very early, going back to the time of St. Polycarp who was martyred in c.155 and was a disciple of the Apostle John.¹ In the account of his martyrdom the Christians are said to have desired to collect his remains, and that somehow in the context of that they honored the saints in such a way that others accused them of worship. In addition it is noted that these martyrs were celebrated on the anniversary of their martyrdom. Starting at an early date Christians would gather at the tomb of the martyrs and celebrate a Eucharist at the spot in their honor. After the end of the persecutions, when becoming a Saint did not require martyrdom, Christians continued this tradition of honoring or venerating particular Christians who had gone before.

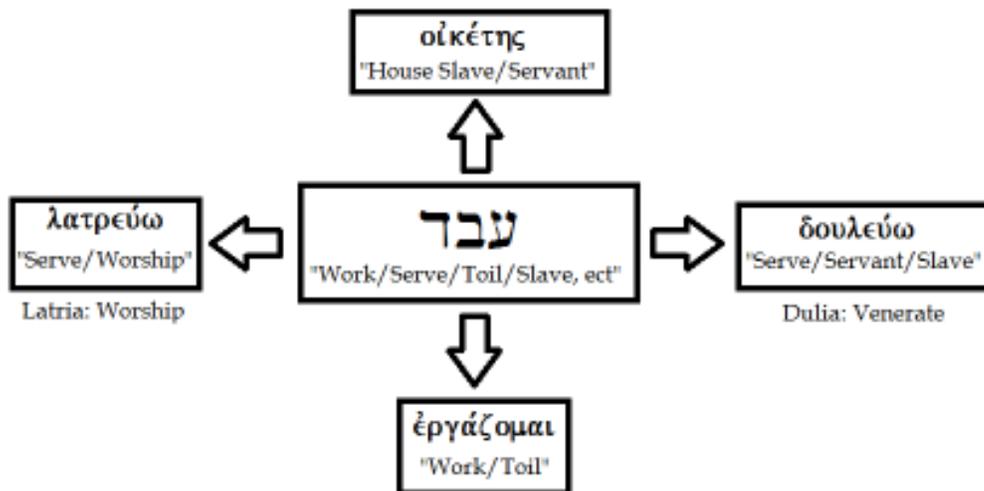
¹ *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 17-18

Latria and Dulia

To understand how some of this fits together, the difference between latria and dulia must be understood. The primary thing to remember is that these words are at root theological concepts which is more important than debates over etymology. In The Western Church “latria” is often rendered as “worship” or perhaps “adore”, whereas “dulia” is “venerate” and sometimes “honor”.

In considering the etymology, however, we encounter an example of what happens during translation. Both latria and dulia derive directly from two Greek words, λατρεύω and δουλεύω. Both are used by the translators of the LXX for the same Hebrew word עבד. This is important because this word is the one used in the prohibition against “worshipping” over gods in Deut 5:9. The verse more literally says that Israel shall neither “bow down” (הקיש) nor “serve” (עבד) other gods. Depending on the English translation, either word or none will be rendered “worship”. In this case the LXX used προσκυνέω for הקיש (bow down) and λατρεύω for עבד (serve).

Sometimes, however the LXX will also translate עבד as δουλεύω. This is a broader term that generally means “serve”, “work”, “or “toil” and is translated into several different Greek words depending on context. The choice of words reflects the nuance of the Greek meaning. λατρεύω is used exclusively of God, whereas δουλεύω is used mostly in contexts of people but with some exceptions. From this derives the Christian conceptual distinction between latria and dulia. It is also important to remember that when these terms were chosen, they were chosen in the native living language of the Greek people which overrides our modern word studies.



The other important word to consider is προσκυνέω, as it at times is translated as “worship”. This word is often used in the LXX of God, but also used of people. It means broadly to “bow down” and references a physical action which was a cultural sign of submission and service. In context of God it refers to the service we render to God as opposed to other gods and above other authorities. (Deut 5:9) With people it is also a sign of submission to authority, (Gen 23:7) or reverence. (Gen 33:1-4, 37:5, 47:31 cf Heb 11:21) The Hebrew הקיש for which the word προσκυνέω was chosen by the LXX has the same idea. Interestingly, even the English word “worship” is etymologically ambiguous being used for people until it became an exclusive word when directed towards God.

The more important concept is the theological difference in the words, and was already evident in the writings of St. Augustine during the 4th century. For Augustine the difference was between the object and the action. In terms of the object, it is a matter of creator and creature, God as creator receives the service of latria, but our fellow men can receive the service of love which is dulia.² A fuller explanation can be found in his reply to Faustus.³ Augustine asserts that latria is inherently tied up with the idea of sacrifice. Christians only “honor the memory of the martyrs” for the sake of imitation of their lives and to ask for their prayers. It is only God, however, who receives offerings on the altars, though the altars may be built in the memory of a martyr. The devotion given to martyrs is a sign of affection and love, not worship. The worship of latria is defined specifically and entirely as the offering of sacrifices. Martyrs and Saints are never to be offered sacrifices, but only devotion even if this devotion is expressed in physical ways. All this, of course, assumes there is some sacrifice being made. In denominations that have lost any concept of worship as primarily sacrifice this distinction will fall apart.

On the issue of Mary and hyperdulia the categorical distinction is probably not overly significant. “hyper” just means “above” or “greater”, so hyperdulia merely means “greater reverence.” This is a matter of degree rather than kind. Different persons are going to be revered more than others based on relationship. For instance one honors their parents more than another person's parents. One may revere their own King more than a Baron or Count. The only category distinction is between latria and dulia. Hyperdulia is just saying “the greatest honor, reverence, and devotion possible”. For most Anglicans Mary plays very little devotional role, and nothing is required in us except to honor Mary as a great woman of Faith, the Mother of Jesus, and the Theotokos.

Saints and Intercession

Similar to the latria/dulia issue, the idea of prayer and the Saints can get bogged down in debates of language. Primarily the concern is if “prayer” should by definition be considered “worship”. Even granting these terms are in some sense analogous would not *per se* refute the tradition. Much of the tradition is not praying to saints but asking them to pray for us. The traditional litany of the saints is “ora pro nobis” (pray for us). As seen from Hebrews 12:1 and Revelation 6:10 the Saints are interested in the events on earth and are in a position to petition God concerning them. It seems reasonable to conclude that if a person in Heaven knew of a particular concern they could pray while in Heaven just as easily, if not easier, as when they were on earth. In this sense the Saint is not being asked to perform any action other than remember a person and pray for them. More difficult, however, is the idea of asking a Saint specifically to perform an action of some kind, or grant some favor. This would be the closest idea to praying to a Saint. Though many Anglicans are comfortable with the “pray for us” much fewer are so with this later idea. This still does not imply “worship” of a saint because in both senses it is not “prayer” as worship but only as another word for “communication”. So the question overall is the possibility of communicating with the Saints to ask them for prayer or for favor.

Believing in the possibility of intercession from the Saints does not require attributing any form of omniscience or omnipresence to them. Instead it is possible that the pre-resurrection bodiless existence has means beyond our understanding for communication. Considering how little we know about Heavenly life there is no reason to reject any sort of possibility of

² St. Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity* I.6.13

³ St. Augustine, *Reply to Faustus* XX.21

this kind. At most we can say that Scripture gives no indication directly and thus it is a matter of Christian discussion and speculation. At worst it does not work, but God hears the request instead and responds according to his will. As long as the person does not replace God with the Saints, but instead uses the Saints and their intercession as a way of praising God through the Saint, then there seems little wrong with the practice even if speculative. Either way this practice seems to go back fairly early, certainly by the 4th century.

Icons

Art in the Early Church

Artistic depictions of Christ, the Virgin, Angels, Saints, and Biblical scenes were already common in the first few centuries of the Church. One of the earliest examples is from the mid third century (pre-Constantine) at the Dura-Europos church. This Church building was a house that had been converted, and in process was decorated with both events from the Gospels as well as an iconic image of Christ as the Good Shepherd. Around this time and up to the end of the 4th century the Christian catacombs in Rome display a prevalence of Christian art. Though there was at times some opposition to artistic representation in any form, in general the Church embraced the visual arts in their sacred spaces.

Iconoclastic Controversy

There have been two major periods of iconoclasm in the Church. First starting in the East and encompassing all of Christendom, the controversy of the 8-9th century created the Seventh Ecumenical Council at Nicea (Nicea II) which set the theology of icons and veneration. Later another period of iconoclasm would characterize the Reformation in Western Christendom. It is the former that holds more importance for the entire Church and the one to which the arguments of the Reformation merely revisited.

Though the early Church had some objection to images based on their Jewish heritage, conflict in the East with the growing Islamic world caused Christians in that area to reconsider their own use of images *in toto*, regardless of veneration. At the same time, the Monks were the primary producers of iconography and wielded significant political power in the Empire. It may have been a combination of this interaction with Islam and a desire to push back against monastic power that eventually lead the Emperor to begin the first period of iconoclasm.⁴

The Byzantine Emperor Leo III (716 – 741 AD) was convinced that the usage of images not only as veneration, but even as ornament, was idolatrous and needed to be purged. It is possible that theologically he was influenced by Bishop Constantius I in Phrygia who was in direct interaction with Jews and especially Muslims, and may have seen iconoclasm as a necessary apologetic to charges of idolatry.⁵ He initially only had the icons moved so as to prevent them being touched or kissed, but in 730 issued an edict removing and destroying all images, whitewashing walls, and in the same year replaced the Patriarch of Constantinople with an iconoclast. On the whole this iconoclastic fervor was a court movement of the royal family and military, while most of the people, clergy, and monks supported icons.

The son of Leo III, Constantine V, (741 – 775 AD) continued in his Father's footsteps and eventually called a Church council in 754 which condemned icons and supported only the Eucharistic elements as divine images of Christ. Only the Bishops in the Empire were

⁴ Gonzalez, Justo *The Story of Christianity Vol 1: Early Church to Reformation*, 260

⁵ Schaff, Philip *History of the Christian Church: The Medieval Christianity*, 455

present, however, as those under Muslim dominion were unable to attend and the Pope refused.⁶ Monks were persecuted and iconodules were condemned, but this council was never very well received by the general population of Christians.

Next on the throne of Byzantium was Leo IV (775 – 780) who was more moderate but continued the Imperial policy against images. It would be his wife Irene, however, who would eventually call a new council to support the iconodules. After the death of Leo IV the Empress Irene began to restore the images. As her son was still an infant she wielded imperial power until he came of age. She replaced the imperial guard with more sympathetic supporters as well as appointed a new iconodule Patriarch of Constantinople. In 787 she called the Seventh Ecumenical Council, the second to take place at Nicea. At the council the Bishops in attendance condemned the iconoclasts and ordered relics be put back into altars. (Canon VII) Though the Bishops in Islamic territory were still unable to attend, the Pope sent two legates and there was no later objection from the rest of the major Church metropolitans. At the end of the council many iconoclast bishops repented and an icon was brought in for all to kiss.

Over the next five rulers policy fluctuated. It was not until Empress Theodora that the iconodule position secured supremacy. After a successful push for the iconodules, and in support of the Monks, a local synod in 842 restored all images and declared the first Sunday in Lent should renew condemnations of iconoclasts. This developed in the Eastern “Day of Orthodoxy” when icons are paraded in the Church and heretics publicly condemned.

Interestingly, it took until the end of the 10th century for full acceptance by the Western Church. Though the Pope fully supported the Council it had resistance in the Frankish Church. It was difficult in Latin at the time to make the distinction between latria and dulia,⁷ this combined with a bad translation meant that the Church in the Carolingian Empire was appalled at the decision. There was also the factor of a political dispute between Charlemagne and Irene which did not help matters. With the help of Alcuin, Charlemagne produced the “Caroline Books” which took a moderate position allowing images as ornament but not veneration.⁸ This led to a debate with the Papacy who needed Charlemagne on their good side. Eventually by the 10th century the Frankish Church accepted the Seventh Council and images would persist in all of Christendom until the second iconoclastic issue of the Reformation.

Theology of the Seventh Council

The Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787 followed St. John of Damascus’s apologetic for icons and grounded its theology in the Incarnation. To some extent his reason is utilitarian, that the icons are books for the illiterate.⁹ The Damascenes major argument, however, revolves around the differences between the context of the Old Law and the New Covenant. Overall he cites three reasons for icons: God is now visible in the Incarnation, Israel needed stricter rules to keep them from idolatry, and Christ’s victory at least partially lifted the curse on human beings.

John is very clear on what is and what is not being depicted. He reminds his opponents that “we neither make images of the invisible God nor images of people and regard and venerate them as gods”.¹⁰ The Divine Nature is uncircumscribable,¹¹ and this

⁶ Ibid. 458

⁷ Gonzalez, Justo *The Story of Christianity Vol 1: Early Church to Reformation*, 260

⁸ Schaff, Philip *History of the Christian Church: The Medieval Christianity*, 467

⁹ John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, I.17

¹⁰ Ibid. I.5

invisible Divinity is not what is being represented.¹² What is being represented then is not God's inner nature, nor God the Father, but only "God made visible in the flesh".¹³ It is the Incarnation that separates Israel from the Church, and this effects how the Church interprets and applies the OT law. In this case God's reason for the commandment, that they had not seen a form, (Deut 4:15) changed once God took on flesh and could be seen.

Secondly he points out that Israel had a strict ban on images due to their propensity to slip into true idolatry.¹⁴ Though he points out even this was not nearly as strict as the iconoclasts argue for the Church, considering all the art in the Temple such as the images of Cherubim. (1 Ki 6:29) Not that the early Church did not deal with paganism, but by the time of John of Damascus the Empire had been Christianized so there was little real danger for the average Christian to worship a pagan statue. For John the prohibition in the Old Testament had more to do with the nations that Israel was called out of as well as their newness to the idea of monotheism and God's utter transcendence. The law was like a schoolmaster from which the Church has in some ways graduated.

Lastly, the difference in salvation between the Old and New creates a difference in context of icons to the Saints. though Israel never made memorials to humans, he argues Christ's resurrection has changed the context. In the Old Testament the dead were considered unclean. (Num 19:11) The early Church had a radically different view of dead bodies based on the belief in the Incarnation and Resurrection. The very bones were literally kissed and honored, and Christians would worship over the graves of the martyrs in the cemeteries and catacombs. John of Damascus was not the only to share this radical new view of human nature and it forms his rebuttal to the iconoclasts. Through the Incarnation human nature has been united to the Divine nature and Christians have been brought to life in a new way, their dead bodies no longer unclean but changed even prior to the future Resurrection.¹⁵ What it meant for the faithful Israelite to be "dead" pre-Christ and what it means for a Christian in the New Covenant can not be completely equivocated.

The Damascene points out as well some other minor issues with the iconoclasts. First, they are inconsistent. Even they honored the Cross, Gospel Book, and Eucharistic Bread and Wine according to his treatise.¹⁶ Secondly, their argument concerning the abuse of images by pagans is irrelevant. He reminds them that the pagans perform exorcisms as well, yet this does not forbid the Church from the same practice.¹⁷ Merely because something is done by pagans does not mean that something similar in form must be forbidden by the Church. Thirdly, he makes sure to assert that Christians are only to honor the icons and to venerate the saints, but worship God alone. God is honored when those whom he loves are honored.¹⁸ Thus the Saints receive honor of a lesser degree than God, but still receive some honor. It is important to note that he argues the honor is truly given to the person represented and not the image *per se*, as the veneration/honor of the image passes to the "prototype", the original person.¹⁹

¹¹ Ibid. III.24

¹² Ibid. III.6

¹³ Ibid. I.4

¹⁴ Ibid. I.8

¹⁵ Ibid. II.10

¹⁶ Ibid. I.16

¹⁷ Ibid. I.24

¹⁸ Ibid. III.33

¹⁹ Ibid. III.41

During the council St. John of Damascus declared that the iconoclasm subverts the incarnation,²⁰ setting the theological paradigm with which to view their decision. One of the issues the council had to deal with was linguistic. Obviously they were not advocating the worship of these images and so had to define their terms carefully, for which they consulted the Scriptures to guide their language. In their letter written to the Emperor and Empress the theologians of the Council give greater explanation of their reasons for the decision. Their argument begins with the etymology of προσκυνέω. They note the word derives from προς which means "towards" and κυνεῖν which means "kiss".²¹ Thus, they argued, they chose this word specifically because it denotes the idea of love and reverence which can be directed towards people. Several passages of Scripture are presented to support the wider usage of this term besides strict "worship" such as 1 Kings 20:41. They then distinguish this word from "worship in spirit", (τῆς ἐν πνεύματι λατρείας) applied to God alone. Acknowledging προσκυνέω can be used as a synonym for λατρεύειν, they also point out words can have a broad range of meaning and in this case προσκυνέω it has "many significations" and "wide meaning". They point out that several scriptures which use προσκυνέω in several different contexts demonstrates its shades of meaning.

During the intervening period between the Council and the final triumph of the iconodules, the theology of Icons would continue to be defended. One of the major arguments comes from St. Theodore the Studite. Most of his defense of icons is a restatement of St. John of Damascus, but he has the benefit of living after the Seventh Council. Like John he points out that the strict OT prohibition was given before the "age of grace", and was needed for those coming out of polytheism,²² this is also true because it was the Divine nature that cannot be given an image but the Church lives in light of the Word made flesh.²³ He also reiterates the mind does not stop at the icon, which is idolatry, but through the icon ascends to the "prototypes".²⁴ St. Theodore expands a little more on an idea found in St. John of Damascus, that icons are Scripture for the illiterate.²⁵ This is more than just functional he notes, but there is an actual similarity between verbal images and visual ones. He refers to the Gospels as images in writing. It is an assumption among iconoclasts generally that the sense of hearing is superior to the sense of sight, thus there is an underlying presupposition of verbalism.²⁶

His major contribution is a fuller defense of the connection between icons and the Incarnation. In the Incarnation "he who in his own divinity is uncircumscribable accepts the circumscription natural to his body."²⁷ There is a difference between the Divine nature and the human, Theodore is fully Chalcedonian. Therefore it is not the Divine nature which is depicted, but neither is it just the human nature *per se*, for that would divide the natures too much. Instead, he argues, in icons it is not essence (nature) but hypostasis (person) which is represented.²⁸ To argue that an icon can only portray the human nature and so thus be Nestorian is a categorical error over the nature of what an image "is". Due to the Incarnation

²⁰ Text from the Council can be found in Henry Percival (ed.) *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church*. in Schaff and Wace (eds.) *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers* Vol.XIV 521 - 587

²¹ See BDAG as well

²² St. Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons* I.5

²³ Ibid. III.A.53

²⁴ Ibid. I.13

²⁵ Ibid. I.10 cf John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, I.17

²⁶ "Verbalism" being defined as a privileging of the oral communication over visual. An implied idea that the "ear" is perhaps more holy than the "eye" in some sense.

²⁷ Ibid. I.2

²⁸ Ibid. III.A.34

Christ is both circumscribable and uncircumscribable,²⁹ thus as a person he can be represented even if his Divine nature cannot be depicted. Yet it is still one and the same Christ which is on the Icon, therefore Christ can be given a visual image in the same way the Gospels present a verbal one.

The following is the major extract from the final decision with commentary:

Ecumenical Decree	Comment
<p>We, therefore, following the royal pathway and the divinely inspired authority of our Holy Fathers and the traditions of the Catholic Church (for, as we all know, the Holy Spirit indwells her), define with all certitude and accuracy</p>	<p>The council did not believe they were doing anything new. By the time of the 8th century usage of religious art and veneration of icons had become prevalent at least in the Eastern Empire.</p>
<p>that just as the figure of the precious and life-giving Cross, so also the venerable and holy images, as well in painting and mosaic as of other fit materials, should be set forth in the holy churches of God, and on the sacred vessels and on the vestments and on hangings and in pictures both in houses and by the wayside, to wit, the figure of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, of our spotless Lady, the Mother of God, of the honorable Angels, of all Saints and of all pious people.</p>	<p>The iconoclasts also venerated the Cross, but the council argued this same type of veneration can used for images as well. As can be seen from this section the issue was not just Icons, but the entirety of religious art. The iconoclasts had reacted against all images, going against precedent for the plethora of Christian art that had been in existence since at least the 3rd century.</p>
<p>For by so much more frequently as they are seen in artistic representation, by so much more readily are men lifted up to the memory of their prototypes, and to a longing after them;</p>	<p>The first major argument for why they are not idols. They do not embody the representation but provide a “memory help”, or a type of visual focal point to contemplate the person being represented. There remains a distinction between Christ and his image.</p>
<p>and to these should be given due salutation and honorable reverence (ἀσπασμὸν καὶ τιμητικὴν προσκύνησιν), not indeed that true worship of faith (λατρείαν) which pertains alone to the divine nature; but to these, as to the figure of the precious and life-giving Cross and to the Book of the Gospels and to the other holy objects, incense and lights may be offered according to ancient pious custom.</p>	<p>Clarification of language: The three words used of the images all have Scriptural usage for people as well. “Salutation” is merely a greeting. (Luke 1:44, Col 4:18) “Honor” can be used of parents, widows, or Church elders. (Eph 6:2, 1 Tim 5:3, 1 Tim 5:17) “Reverence” is bowing towards someone out of respect or submission. (Gen 37:7-10) These three types of honor are allowed towards the icons as holy objects in the same manner as the Cross and Gospel Books. Note that these encompass all icons, including that of Christ. The icons are revered, but even</p>

²⁹ Ibid. III.A.4

	the icon of Christ is not worshipped according to the council. Incense and lights in the culture of the time were broadly acts of honor which could be worship but could also be less. "Worship" (latría) is reserved to the "divine nature" which is unseen.
For the honor which is paid to the image passes on to that which the image represents, and he who reveres the image reveres in it the subject represented.	The second major argument for why they are not idols. Following the first, they are not embodiments, thus the honor given to an icon is really give <i>though</i> it to the person depicted.
For thus the teaching of our holy Fathers, that is the tradition of the Catholic Church, which from one end of the earth to the other hath received the Gospel, is strengthened. Thus we follow Paul, who spake in Christ, and the whole divine Apostolic company and the holy Fathers, holding fast the traditions which we have received. So we sing prophetically the triumphal hymns of the Church, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem. Rejoice and be glad with all thy heart. The Lord hath taken away from thee the oppression of thy adversaries; thou art redeemed from the hand of thine enemies. The Lord is a King in the midst of thee; thou shalt not see evil any more, and peace be unto thee forever.""	Like the opening paragraph, they do not consider themselves to be doing anything new. Though the actual veneration of images was likely a development remember that the iconoclasts were opposed to all images for any reason, which we know from history was not true of the 3 rd century Church.

Icons vs. Idols

To understand Icons in contradistinction to idols it is important to look more closely into the second commandment which says:

"⁷you shall have no other gods before me. ⁸ You shall not make for yourself an idol [פִּסֵּל], whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁹ You shall not bow down [שָׁחָה / προσκυνέω] to them or worship [עָבַד / λατρεύω] them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God" (Deut 5:7-9)

Further context can be found a chapter earlier where God revealed more of the "why":

¹⁵ Since you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire, take care and watch yourselves closely, ¹⁶ so that you do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves, in the form of any figure -- the likeness of male or female, ¹⁷ the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, ¹⁸ the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth. ¹⁹ And when you look up to the heavens and see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all

the host of heaven, do not be led astray and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples everywhere under heaven. (Deut 4:15-19)

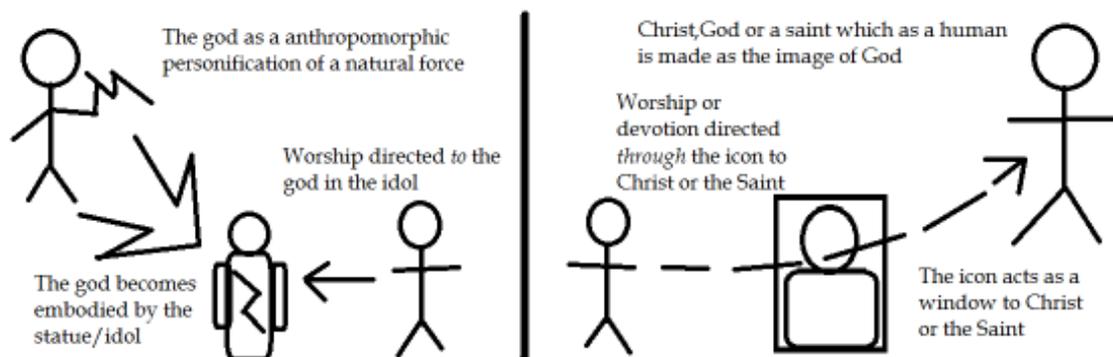
There are several observations about these two passages:

- 1- The main point is about monotheism, Israel is not to go after other gods. This is more important than religious iconography
- 2- The reason given in chapter Deut 4 is important: "Since you saw no form". Israel would have been unable to make an image of Yahweh because he did not show them an image to make.
- 3- There are two things besides making them that are forbidden: "bowing down" and "worshipping". These words should be seen primarily in context of point #1, the issue was other gods. This can be demonstrated by the ways in which these words function in other parts of the Old Testament. The word for "bow down" is also used of people, for instance in Genesis 47:29-48:1 Israel "bows down" at the foot of his bed, apparently towards Joseph, an act later praised by the writer of Hebrews. (Heb 11:21) Similarly, in the same section, Joseph bows in respect/honor to Israel. (Gen 48:12) Earlier, in fact, the dream that God gives Joseph has his family "bowing down" before him. (Gen 27:29) The word for "worship" in these verses merely means to serve or toil, and this is often used of people. (Gen 29:25, 2 Sam 16:19, Prov 12:9) The derivative of the LXX translation here is a word used more exclusively for worship of a god, and would be the word the Church would use to designate worship due to God alone (latria). However, in the Hebrew text the word has a wider, not narrower, meaning and can be applied to serving people. The issue is Israel should not serve other gods.
- 4- The Deuteronomy 4 passage if taken to the absolute conclusion of some would condemn the Torah as well. If any and all images within the context of a worship space are forbidden then the Cherubim should have been forbidden. (Ex 25:18, 26:1) Later the Temple would be even more elaborate and incorporate images of animals and plants, even though this was not commanded in the Covenant. (1 Ki 7:29, 36) The problem addressed here is not religious art, but the issue of worship and the order of creation.
- 5- Humanity has been made in God's image, so in a real way we are God's living icons. (Gen 1:26) We do not bow before creation, creation bows before us. The pagan nations had deified forces of creation, which to do so inverts the creation order by placing these forces or even the animals and plants above humanity. The issue here seems to be, again, primarily connected with the context and reason for the law: to reinforce, for a nation surrounded by polytheists, the idea that there is only one God as well as the fact that God did not show any form on Mt. Sinai.

Taking these five points into account, the context and reason when entering the era of the Christian Church are different. We are in a "new dispensation", so some things have changed. First, Israel by the time of Jesus had fully gotten the point about monotheism. So much in fact that one of the primary issues with the early Church was the charge of polytheism due to the worship of Jesus as God. This demonstrates that there was little danger in the early Christians truly setting up a pantheon. Secondly, and more importantly, the God who was hidden has been revealed in Jesus Christ. Christ is literally called the "image of the invisible God". (Col 1:15) The word "image" here is the Greek from which we derive the word "icon". This same word is used by the LXX for "idols", (2 Chron 33:7) as well as for the

image of God that the human race was made in. (Gen 1:26) This is why the Seventh Council only allowed icons of Jesus and not the Father. God the Father is still ineffable. The Holy Spirit can be represented allegorically in the same way that he became “visible” in Scripture, through a dove or fire. Sometimes the Father can be represented in art allegorically, but there are no icons of God the Father. Iconography is rooted in the Incarnation.

Also, we must make a comparison of what idols were in the Ancient Near East and what icons are. In the ANE the gods were in some way embodied by the statue or image. Much of the cultic ritual of the time involved treating the statue as if it was alive. The priests would clothe and even feed the statue, thus seeing it as clothing and feeding the god. Icons, on the other hand, work differently. They are more like windows than embodied objects. The honor given to the icon passed to the prototype, it does not “stop” at the icon because the icon is not the embodiment of the representation.



Liturgy and Spirituality

Usage of icons and images differs in the Western and Eastern Church. Icons overall are much more prevalent in the East where one will never find statues. The Eastern Church considers carved three dimensional images to be much closer to idols than flat images. For them there is something distinct in the flatness of a "picture" as opposed to a more solid carving. The Western Church, on the other hand, has taken the Seventh Council to allow for statues as well and does not make a conceptual distinction between flat or three dimensional representations. This is an extrapolation, however, as the iconoclastic controversy centered on pictures.

Another more theological difference is in connection with latria/dulia and images of Christ. The Seventh Council only allowed veneration (dulia in the Latin church) of images but not worship (latria). This would apparently include images of Christ. Though the honor given to his image would pass to him (the prototype) because it is his image it was still only specifically dulia. But if dulia passed through the icon to the prototype, and does not "stop at the icon", then why could Christ not be worshipped (latria) through his image? Though the East would keep officially only to dulia in these cases, the West would follow this to its possible logical conclusion. This was apparently being debated in the 13th century as indicated by St. Aquinas who supports the position for latria directed towards images of Christ. He argues that:

"Thus therefore we must say that no reverence is shown to Christ's image, as a thing--for instance, carved or painted wood: because reverence is not due save to a rational creature. It follows therefore that reverence should be shown to it, in so far only as it is an image. Consequently the same reverence should be shown to Christ's image as to Christ Himself. Since, therefore, Christ is adored with the adoration of "latria," it follows that His image should be adored with the adoration of "latria." (ST III.25.3)

The Western Church has tended to follow this logic. Determining the compatibility of this with the Seventh Council is a different issue. It is possible Aquinas is using "latria" differently, or perhaps just seeing a logical progression the Council did not take. The East has tended to object to this logic, however.

A final difference is that the West is much more likely to use allegorical images of the Father. The East interprets the Seventh Council's theology strictly on this point. The Divine nature, as well as God the Father, is unseen. Thus only through the Incarnation can the image of Christ be honored. The only images of the Father are Rublev's Trinity Icon because it depicts the three angels who appeared to Abraham, which some in the early Church interpreted as the Trinity in the Old Testament. This gets a pass due to the highly allegorical nature as well as Scriptural precedent. The Holy Spirit can be depicted in Scriptural forms as well such as a dove or fire. Mostly however only the Son is represented in iconography or religious art. The West, however, while keeping to the Council's decision on veneration of images in terms of the Father, makes a distinction here allowing for artistic representation for God the Father, though still in an allegorical sense. This allegorical sense is merely broader thus allowing more artistic freedom for imagery. These only appear in religious artwork, not in icons or statues for veneration.

History

There was a radical change in the view of dead bodies that occurred in the early Church. For ancient Israel the law declared dead bodies unclean. (Numbers 19:11) Culturally this downplayed devotion at tombs, though there were exceptions in the cases of the patriarchs and a few important prophets. Overall, however, the early Christians embraced the bodies of their dead martyrs in ways that indicated a different view than Israel. Instead of being unclean, the Early Church venerated these bodies as being holy, even touching and collecting them. They celebrated over the tombs of the martyrs, having worship services in graveyards, a practice which would have been unclean to the Jews and possibly weird to the pagans.

Originally this impulse seemed to develop entirely as a response to martyrdom. There was such great love and devotion towards the martyrs themselves that their very bodies, and later clothing, became objects that were treasured. Though the theological justification came later, the early Church argued for this new view of relics based on both seeing a pattern in Scripture as well as a new view of the human body, or any physical object, in light of the resurrection.

2 Kings 13:21 was especially important for early defenders of relics because it associates bones of a saint with performing a miracle. When a dead man was thrown into the grave of Elisha, as soon as it touched the bones the person revived. This direct cause-effect of the relics of a dead saint is the same idea found in Christian relic-miracle stories. Jesus is also presented as healing via touch of the physical objects he wears. In both Matthew 14:35-36 and Mark 6:56 people are said to be healed by merely touching the fringe of his cloak. Luke records a somewhat more extensive instance where a woman suffering from chronic hemorrhaging snuck behind Jesus and touched the fringe. (Luke 8:43-46) This healed her instantly. Though in these cases the source of the healing is always Christ, the medium of the healing power is the physical clothing Jesus is wearing. In Acts this healing via physical medium seems to continue. The miraculous healing powers of the Apostles were such that even their shadows were sought. (Acts 5:15-16) Other times various pieces of clothing from Paul, such as handkerchiefs and aprons, were taken to the sick to the sick or possessed and cured. (Acts 19:11-12) The early belief in relics was merely the continuation of these ideas and that these healing powers would continue after the saint's death.

What allowed this belief to an extent was the new view of the human body as a result of the Incarnation. Now that God had taken on human flesh the human body was truly made holy in a way not previously believed. Because of the close association between the physical and spiritual, those Christians who had been exceptionally sanctified, such as through martyrdom, were believed to have bodies which had partaken of this sanctification as well. Combined with the belief in the intercession of the Saints, a focal point of which was their relics, the early Church believed this devotional practice to be justified.

The earliest reference to Christians venerating the bones of martyrs is from the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 17-18 written in the mid 2nd century. It was the "adversary", the writer says, who desired to prevent the Christians from keeping any "memorial" of him which is described as his "holy flesh". The veneration given to this holy flesh was such that the Christians were accused of worshipping it. After the martyrdom, the Christians took the body "more precious than the most exquisite jewels, and more purified than gold" and placed it in a worthy place so as to regularly celebrate his martyrdom.

By the 4th century Christians have begun to collect relics more frequently and also carry them around on feast days, something for which they are mocked by Julian the Apostate.³⁰ After the death of St. Anthony some followers acquired his sheepskin and garments considering them to be “precious treasure”.³¹ These are connected primarily with the imitation of the Saints virtue rather than anything miraculous, but do show a connection with even items of clothing by the Saints. St. Basil the Great shows evidence that relics by that time were connected with the foundation of a Church in some way.³² He seems to have a personal interest in the relics of martyrs,³³ and makes the theological connection between the sufferings of soul and body with the glorification of the soul with the same body, thus the glorification of the martyrs bones being collected.³⁴ St. Jerome describes Christians venerating martyrs tombs,³⁵ sometimes through use of lighted tapers before them in shrines dedicated to them.³⁶ In some cases they apply “their ashes” to eyes, possibly for healing purposes.³⁷ His primary argument is that these bodies are not to be seen as “unclean” accusing an opponent of relics to be “one with the Samaritans and the Jews who hold dead bodies unclean and regard as defiled even vessels which have been in the same house with them, following the letter that kills and not the spirit that gives life”.³⁸ St. John Chrysostom gives more theological underpinning for relics, particularly as channels of grace.³⁹ Chrysostom argues based on 1 Kings 13:21 that the bones, and even tombs, of those made holy become holy themselves and “filled with spiritual grace”. He believes that in the New Testament era this is even greater. He states that “grace is more abundant” and the “energy of the Spirit is greater” so that a person who touches a Saints tomb is able to “win great power”.

Entering into the late 4th and early 5th century St Augustine both encourages honor to the relics of martyrs as well as cites examples of healing connected with them.⁴⁰ In *The City of God* 22.8 he argues from several miraculous events that happened as a result of Saints shrines. Some of these healings take place through objects taken from the shrine such as flowers or oil. One example is from merely touching the bars at a Shrine, and one interesting one recounts a dress taken to the shrine and brought back. Considering Augustine’s position and influence it is safe to say these beliefs were common in the Church at the time in North Africa. Augustine was not the only major theologian to defend relics, however, and by the mid 5th century Christian apologists argued that God had replaced the pagan heroes and temples with Christian martyrs and Churches with relics.⁴¹

As the earlier examples showed the Middle East, and Augustine represents Africa, so the Western Church too indicates by at least the 5th century a practice of devotion to relics. In a letter by Pope Celestine to the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus, the Pope exhorted the council to listen to John the Apostle “whose relics we venerate”.⁴² The Emperor Valentinian

³⁰ James Bentley, *Restless Bones*, 42

³¹ St. Athanasius, *Life of St. Anthony*, 92

³² St. Basil, *Letters* 49

³³ *Ibid.*, 155

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 197.2

³⁵ St. Jerome, *Letters* 46.8

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.1

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.8

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 109.1

³⁹ St. Chrysostom, *Homily on St. Ignatius* 5

⁴⁰ St. Augustine *Letter* 212 and *City of God* 22.8

⁴¹ James Bentley, *Restless Bones*, 41

⁴² Henry Percival (ed.) *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church*. in Schaff and Wace (eds.) *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers* Vol.XIV 221

accused clergy of being grave robbers due to their desire to relocate relics inside Churches,⁴³ and when Pope Gregory sent Augustine as a missionary to England he sent with him relics along with liturgy and Gospel books.⁴⁴

Moving into the 7th century and later relics as seen to be a very common devotional aspect of the Church. The first translation⁴⁵ of relics to be within the city of Rome was c.648, as prior to that date burial in city inside the walls was illegal.⁴⁶ Relics become intertwined with a theology of intercession of the Saints as shown by the Venerable Bede who grounds the effectiveness of relics in this intercession.⁴⁷ By the Seventh Ecumenical Council at Nicea relics in altars had apparently become standard practice. (Canon VII)

Relics were highly valued in the Medieval Western Church being collected, bought, and even showing up frequently in wills. King Richard II, for instance, bought a relic supposedly of one of the Holy Innocents off a merchant in exchange for not having to pay customs tax for two years.⁴⁸ During this time much of the abuses of relics unfortunately flourished. Two particular issues for the medieval Church were authenticity and problems surrounding acquisition.

Authenticity was exacerbated by the plethora of competing relic copies. Thus even relics that would be more reasonable, unlike the bones of the Holy Innocents or Jesus' swaddling clothes, suffered from several shrines claiming to be the possessors. The True Cross was perhaps the most common, though some legends attributed this to the miraculous ability of self-multiplication.⁴⁹ Other times a relic, such as the body of St. Telio, were said to have duplicated so as to end any dispute over where it would be buried.⁵⁰ This last issue was not unimportant, for the right relics with the right prestige could make or break a monastery or pilgrimage church. Authenticity was usually argued on the basis of several factors.⁵¹ First the various miracles recorded at the Saint's shrine, which was a common practice. These miracles, usually healing, would indicate the favor of the Saint there and so prove the relic as truly theirs. Second, authenticity was often indicated by visions. One famous example is the supposed vision during the Crusades that revealed the location of the Holy Lance, one of several claiming that title. Thirdly, and tied with issues of acquisition, were miracles connected a type of justified "holy theft". At times relics were stolen and they ability to steal them was itself often guided by a vision for authenticity.⁵² These thefts also served another purpose in showing the favor of the Saint in the new location. The ability to steal the relic was seen as the permission by the Saint to do so, and thus not technically "theft". This practice mostly died out by the 13th century, though relics were still often plundered in war.⁵³ Ultimately authenticity mattered little. It was the devotional function of the relic that was primary and more important that it was accepted.⁵⁴

In terms of acquisition, as already mentioned, theft played a major role until the 13th century. The second issue of acquisition was in buying and selling. Relics as a source of grace

⁴³ James Bentley, *Restless Bones*, 40

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 46

⁴⁵ "translation" of a relic is the technical term for transporting to a new resting place.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 59

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 54

⁴⁸ R.N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe c.1215 - c.1515*, 159

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 160

⁵¹ Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind*, 34, 209-210

⁵² *Ibid.* 209

⁵³ R.N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe c.1215 - c.1515*, 159

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 160

are not technically supposed to be sold. This was often done anyway, however. What can be sold was never the grace of the relic but, as in the case of “third class” relics, only the value of the object itself is sellable. Anything else would be buying grace and considered to be simony.

The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 attempted to correct many of the developed abuses.⁵⁵ It directly places the blame for those who “disparage” the Christian religion on those who abuse relic devotion. Authenticity of relics was now to be entirely handled by Rome. This, it was hoped, would cut down on inauthentic relics, though many approved relics would continue to be called into question. At least it provided the mechanism to regulate a relic industry that had gotten out of hand. Even more at issue were those who made money from the relic trade. The council forbade relics from being sold and condemned those who told “lying stories” or had “false documents” about relics in a “desire for profit”. This last issue would include many of the miraculous tales which now had to be more thoroughly vetted. In the end, however, relics formed a powerful part of popular devotion and proved very hard to regulate.

Classifications

The Western Church has traditionally divided relics into several categories. Technically these are not classifications of either veneration or “effectiveness”, but only logical divisions for the sake of ordering.

- I. First Class: A physical remain of the Saint
 - a. Insignes: Whole body, or at least most of the head/ arms/ legs
 - b. Non-insignes
 - i. Notabiles: Hands and feet, ect.
 - ii. Exiguae: Smaller, such as fingers and teeth
- II. Second Class: Some object of the Saint, such as a shirt
- III. Third Class: Usually a piece of linen that has touched a 1st or 2nd class. These are the one most often for “Sale”.⁵⁶

Noah’s Ark

The ship used by Noah during the flood of Genesis 6-8. According to Genesis it landed on Mt. Ararat. (Gen 8:4) It is unclear if this would be the same as the modern Ararat mountain range in Turkey, or if any of the ship would be left if so. In some Jewish legends the bodies of Adam and Eve were taken on the Ark and remain there.

Ark of the Covenant

The Ark of the Tabernacle and Temple as described in Exodus 25:10-22. Inside were the two tablets of Stone on which was written the Law. For at least a period it may have also contained the Staff of Aaron as well as two jars of the Manna of the Wilderness. It’s present location is unknown and vary from under the Temple Mount to inside the Church of Mary Zion in Ethiopia.

⁵⁵ 4th Lateran Council, Canon LXIV

⁵⁶ Technically Relics cannot be bought or sold as a relic. What one is buying is only the piece of cloth. One cannot charge extra for the object being a relic itself.

Mandylicion of Edessa

According to legend this is the first Icon of Christ. King Abgar of Edessa was said to have been sick and sent a messenger to Jesus to ask for healing, which according to one legend Jesus returned a hand written reply. Jesus declined to visit, but the messenger was supposedly a painter who made a image of Jesus to take back to the King. Another variation of the legend at the time, however, instead calls this Icon "acheiropoietos" or self made. In this version Jesus wiped his face on a cloth which created the image. There is, unfortunately, no reference to a physical icon of this legend until the 6th century. The 6th century icon claiming to be the Mandylicion would eventually be taken to France after the sack of Constantinople and then lost during the French Revolution.

Veil of Veronica

According to legend a woman named Veronica wiped Jesus' face with a linen cloth while he carried the Cross. This caused an image of Jesus' face to be imprinted upon it. Today several places claim to have the original Veil. There does appear to be several copies made of the same image, possibly from an earlier artifact.

Sudarium of Oviedo

Claimed to be the head covering of Christ in the tomb, this is a blood stained linen cloth kept in Oviedo, Spain.

True Cross

One of the relics claimed to have been found by St. Helena on her pilgrimage to the Holy Land. For some time it was kept at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and brought out primarily on Good Friday for veneration. During the Crusades it was taken into battle but lost at the Horns of Hattin in 1187 to the Islamic army under Saladin. It has since been lost, though the Titulus may still reside in Rome.

Crown of Thorns

According to legend, this object was discovered by St. Helena along with other relics of the crucifixion. It was venerated in Jerusalem until the 11th century before being moved to Constantinople and then being later taken by Baldwin II at the Sack of Constantinople in 1204. It was bought by the French King Louis IX and moved to the Church of Sainte-Chapelle in Paris which had been built for it. It survived the destruction of the French Revolution and now resides in Notre Dame Cathedral under the guardianship of the Knights of the Holy Sepulcher.

Holy Lance (Lance of St. Longinus / "Spear of Destiny")

The first reference to this relic was from a pilgrim to Jerusalem who described seeing it and the Crown of Thorns (St. Antoninus, AD 570), a similar date to the earliest attestation of the name Longinus associated with the Lance. After the Persians took Jerusalem in AD 615 a broken tip was taken to the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. This piece in AD 1244 was then given to St. Louis by Baldwin and placed in the Sainte Chapelle where it disappeared during chaos of the French revolution. The rest of lance seems not to be mentioned after AD 670, and by AD 715 St. Willibald fails to mention it at all. This larger piece was, however, attested by Russian pilgrims to Constantinople, and also by Sir John Mandeville (AD 1357). After the Turks took the city in 1453, it was given as a gift in 1492 to Pope Innocent VIII and is now stored in the dome of St. Peter's. Another lance was found in 1098 at the siege of Antioch by Peter Bartholomew through a claimed vision of St. Andrew and is now in Echmiadzin, Armenia. The lance of St. Maurice in Vienna was used as early as AD 1273 for coronation ceremonies, yet its likely either a copy or a relic with a piece of a nail from the true cross in it.

Shroud of Turin

A linen shroud with the image of what appears to be the crucified Christ. It is claimed to be the burial shroud of Jesus, and one can indeed see the wound marks, pierced side, and wounds on the head. The unusual aspect of this relic is that it is a "negative" image. Using a traditional film camera and taking a picture of the shroud reveals in the film negatives a clearer image of on the shroud and showing it to be the "positive" image. The provenance and dating of the Shroud are highly contested. It is now kept in Turin, Italy.

Holy Grail

Perhaps the most shrouded in legend, the cup used at the last supper is often also said to have caught some of Christ's blood on the Cross. Some traditions have the Grail taken by St. Joseph of Arimathea to the British Isles, particularly to Glastonbury where some say it resides under the Chalice Well. Other traditions place in eventually in Spain in a Cathedral at Valencia where it remains to this day. As a legend it was an important part of the Arthurian literature of Medieval Europe.

Manna of the Saints

Oil that is said to secrete from the tombs of particular saints. The most famous is the Manna of St. Nicholas which is collected on his feast day, mixed with holy water, and distributed.