

allowed by the Church to pray to images since they have no ears to hear or power to help us. The Church allows for the veneration of images as long as the honor is directed towards Christ and His saints.

On a related issue, some Christians may object to the veneration of images of the saints since they believe that honor should be directed towards God alone and not towards Mary or the saints (1 Tim. 1:17). This objection arises from a confusion between divine honor (adoration - supreme honor proper only for God) and respectful honor proper for men. According to the Bible, the people of God bowed down before King David to show him honor (2 Sam. 24:20; 1 Chron. 29:20; 21:21). Obadiah in **1 Kings** 18:7 fell prostrate before Elijah showing him reverence for being a prophet of God. In the Ten Commandments, we are told to honor our mother and father (Deut. 5:16). Even Jesus defended and obeyed this Commandment (Mark 7:9-13; Luke 2:51). At least for Mary, our honor to her is in imitation of Jesus, her Son (1 Cor. 11:1). The Church allows for the veneration of the saints and their images as long as it remains honor proper for men. It is good to honor the saints for their love and trust in God (Matt. 22:31-32; Heb. 11:1-12:1).

The Catholic Church has not altered the Ten Commandments of God. The Church has not dropped the "Second Commandment" as the booklet alleges. The Catholic numbering scheme may differ with the Protestant numbering scheme, but this is due to a difference in tradition and not an alteration of God's Commandments. Unfortunately the Bible is not clear on how to divide or number the Ten Commandments. If this difference is scandalous, it would be interesting to know

what the author of the booklet thought of Jesus Christ when He reduced God's Commandments to the Two Great Commandments in **Matt.** 22:36-40. Finally the Church strictly condemns the adoration (divine worship) of statues, images or even the saints, since this is idolatry and in direct violation of the First Commandment. For Christians a crucifix should not be considered merely as a statue of Jesus hanging on a cross, but as a reminder of the high cost of our salvation as well as His words to us:

*"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."*  
[Mark 8:34]

NIHIL OBSTAT: Reverend M. James Divis,  
S.T.L. Censor Librorum

IMPRIMATUR:

Most Reverend Fabian W. Bruskewitz, D.D.,  
S.T.D. Bishop of Lincoln July 11, 1995

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Lincoln, NE 68501-4272 Used with  
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**The Evangelization Station**

Hudson, Florida, USA

E-mail: [evangelization@earthlink.net](mailto:evangelization@earthlink.net)

[www.evangelizationstation.com](http://www.evangelizationstation.com)

Pamphlet 138

## Graven Images: Altering the Commandments?

Phillip B. Liescheski

*And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and every one who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." So Moses made a bronze serpent...*

Numbers 21:8-9

Recently we received an 80-page booklet entitled "What's Behind The New World Order?" It can be traced back to the writings of Ellen G. White, foundress of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. According to this booklet, the Catholic Church is behind the New World Order. The booklet claims that this is true, since the Church is the beast of Revelation (Rev. 17). It attempts to prove this claim by exposing the "marks of the beast." Due to limited space, only one charge will be considered. This is a common charge used against the Catholic Church.

According to this booklet, one "mark of the beast" is the alteration of God's Commandments. The booklet claims that the Catholic Church dropped the "Second Commandment" which forbids "graven images", i.e. statues. Allegedly the Catholic Church condones statue worship.

Now one version of the Ten Commandments can be found in the fifth chapter of the **Book of Deuteronomy** (also Exodus 20). Comparing **Deut.** 5:6-21 in a Catholic Bible with that found in a Protestant Bible reveals no essential differences. A few words may differ but that is due to differing translations. The major difference is not

content but how Catholics and Protestants traditionally divide up and number these Commandments. Unfortunately the Bible lumps the Ten Commandments all together without division or numbering. (The verse numbers are no help since they were added by Bible scholars many centuries after Christ.)

Traditionally Catholics consider **Deut.** 5:6-10 as the First Commandment, verse 11 as the Second Commandment, verses 12-15 as the Third Commandment and so on. Verse 21 is split up into the Ninth and Tenth Commandments - distinguishing the desire (lust) to commit adultery from the desire (greed) to steal. This division scheme was advocated by St. Augustine in his writings on **Exodus**. Traditionally Protestants consider **Deut.** 5:6-7 as the First Commandment, verses 8-10 as the Second Commandment, verse 11 as the Third Commandment and so on. Verse 21 is kept together as the Tenth Commandment.

According to the RSV Bible and Catholic Tradition, the First Commandment is:

*(6)I am the LORD your God,...(7)You shall have no other gods before me. (8)You shall not make for yourself a 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; (9)you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, (10)but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. [Deut. 5:6-10; RSV]*

Verse 7 forbids the worship of other gods, while verses 8-9 forbid the making of graven

(carved) images that would be worshipped as gods, i.e. idols. Now worshipping statues with divine honor is one way of worshipping other gods. Verse 7 is a general statement of the First Commandment, while verses 8-9 give a specific case of this Commandment. Verses 9-10 present the punishments and rewards that are associated with these Commandments.

By combining together **Deut.** 5:6-10 into one Commandment, the Catholic Church is accused of altering the Commandments and covering up God's command forbidding graven images. Suspicions are further fueled when Catholic books only present the general form of the Commandment, **Deut.** 5:7, in order to expedite memorization. Now one must ask the question: "Does God forbid the making of statues, or does He condemn the worship of statues?" If God condemns the divine worship of statues, then the Catholic division scheme is justified since these images would be "other gods before" Him. A separate Commandment based on **Deut.** 5:8-10 would be redundant.

Now if God simply forbids the making of graven images, then there are problems elsewhere in the Bible. First, in **Exodus** 25:18-21, God commands Moses to make two statues of angels (cherubim) for the top of the Ark of the Covenant. Later in **Numbers** 21:8-9, God commands Moses to make a bronze serpent, so that the people who were bitten by snakes could look upon it and be healed. Now it is true that centuries later King Hezekiah destroyed it; however, this action was done because the people worshipped it as a god (2 Kings 18:4). In the Gospel, Jesus compared Himself to the bronze serpent (John 3:14). Continuing in the Old Testament, the inner sanctuary of the Temple contained two large

statues of angels according to **1 Kings** 6:23-28. In the following verses, Solomon also had the walls of the Temple decorated with carved images of angels, palm trees and flowers (1 Kings 6:29ff). During the Babylonian Captivity, Ezekiel had a vision from God about the design of the new Temple. According to **Ezekiel** 41:17-25, this new Temple contained graven images of angels and palm trees. These passages in the Bible indicate that God does not forbid the making of statues. If God truly condemned the making of graven images in the "Second Commandment", then He must have changed His mind later in the Old Testament.

The Catholic Church during the Council of Trent (1545-1563) issued a clear statement concerning images and statues. According to the 25th Session of this General Council:

*The images of Christ and of the Virgin Mother of God, and of the saints are to be had and retained particularly in churches, and due honor and veneration are to be given them; not that any divinity or virtue is believed to be in them on account of which they are to be worshipped, or that anything is to be asked of them, or that trust is to be reposed in images, as was of old by the Gentiles, who placed their hopes in idols; but because the honor which is shown them is referred to the prototypes which these images represent; so that we through the images which we kiss...or bend the knee, adore Christ and venerate the saints, whom they represent. [The Canons & Decrees of the Council of Trent (TAN Books, 1978) p. 215-6].*

The Church does NOT compel her members to kneel or pray before images. No one is