

I am the Lord thy God. Thou shalt not have strange gods before me.

What does the first Commandment command, and what does it forbid? It commands us to acknowledge the true God and worthily honour Him; it forbids idolatry, superstition, and every species of impiety.

The honour of God is assaulted by tempting God, sacrilege, and simony. To tempt God is to say or do something that tries to find out if God is all-wise, almighty or merciful; as when a person exposes their life to danger to see if God will work a miracle to save them. Sacrilege is the contemptuous treatment of a person, place or thing dedicated to God, such as receiving holy communion in a state of mortal sin. Simony is the selling of spiritual goods.

The worship of false gods is giving creatures the attention and affection that are due only to the one true God. Modern forms of worshipping false gods are secularism, which claims that this world is the only one worth living for; hedonism, which makes earthly pleasure its only aim; and communism, which denies the existence of God and looks to human happiness in a classless society in this life and not in the life to come.

To acknowledge the true God is to recognize His existence and His sovereign dominion over all people. The true God is the living personal God, the creator of heaven and earth, whose existence the universe proclaims.

I say that the universe proclaims the existence of God; for it is not faith alone which teaches us there is only one God; reason itself asserts and demonstrates it. For, if ever so small a house argues a workman who has built it, and if it would be folly to ascribe it to chance, how far greater the folly to ascribe to chance the universe, so grand and so beautiful in all its parts and proportions, and not to acknowledge a workman, all-wise and all-powerful, to whom it owes its existence. Now, this workman, is God.

We are not only to acknowledge, but we must also worthily honour, God. This worthy honour or suitable homage we render Him by faith, hope, and charity, which are the three theological virtues, and by the virtue of religion, which ranks first among the moral virtues.

By faith we render homage to the supreme truthfulness of God.

By hope to His goodness towards us.

By charity to His amiability and to His infinite perfections.

By the virtue of religion we render to God the worship which is His due. The more we exercise ourselves in the performance of the duties of religion, the better we observe the first Commandment. Those without religion do not observe it, and fail in the observance of their first duty, even when they fulfil all the others.

The veneration of angels and saints does not break the first commandment as we are praising God for the graces He bestowed upon His creatures and recognise His greatness in their holiness. An artist is not offended if you praise their work, neither is God offended if we praise His work in His creatures.

The worship of God is adoration, that of angels and saints is veneration. Only God is to be adored; all others are to be honoured as creatures whose dignity depends entirely upon God.

The veneration of images, pictures and relics is lawful because the honour paid to the image passes on to the one it represents. People can become superstitious in the use of sacred images but this does not occur if the teachings of the Church are followed.

As regards ourselves, my brethren, let us honour the Lord our God; He is worthy of it by reason of His infinite perfections, and by reason of His favours and blessings. If we fulfil well this fundamental duty, we shall fulfil all others and we shall be blessed of God; for, says He, I am the Lord thy God, showing mercy unto thousands of generations to them that love me and honour me (Exod. xx. 6).