



QUESTION: Do you think God hates the images made by human hands of Jesus Christ on the cross because it may be viewed by him as just another form of idolatry?

ANSWER: A lot of debate about this has happened in the church over the years. In fact, the Eastern Orthodox churches broke away from the Roman Catholic church specifically because they thought that they shouldn't use "icons" in worship. It's a difficult area. We are clearly not to worship any created image because God is spirit and infinite and creator of all, and he doesn't want us to "dumb down" his image by representing him as a tree or bird or any other created thing.

However, in the fullness of time, God DID become a person – a physical being you could represent in art and image. So is it bad to have an image of God when that image is of God's own Son? It would seem that it could be both a help and a hindrance in worship depending on heart and intent. It could hinder by creating an icon that our minds begin to think of as magical in a superstitious way. The church has done this with relics, the bones of dead saints. The way some people today flock to appearances of Mary or Jesus in bagels or shadows cast on buildings etc. is, I think, idolatry pure and simple.

However, images of Jesus can clearly enhance worship as we physical beings use all our senses to help grasp ideas and truths of the Redemption event. SO, I think what's important to note about idolatry is that it's primarily anything we ultimately devote our lives to as a god that is not God. It's any place we're trying to get Life that isn't God. Therefore, money or my country, or my spouse could all become idols even though they don't have an image I bow down to.

I don't think, therefore, that God inherently hates images of Jesus being used in worship. Keep in mind that God instructed the Jews to use beautifully decorated tools and furniture in the tabernacle and Solomon's temple was filled with rich images and beauty... Because these did not present a competing god that we look to apart from the Creator but rather focused God' people on God's words and works, and because they did not cause them to put magical powers in anything apart from God, they were not idolatry.

We are, after all, physical beings. Images, words, objects, smells, and sounds can all create a symphony of learning for us. How much more wonderful is this learning when it involves our relationship with the immortal, invisible God? So as long as an image of Jesus is a worship aid and directs us to the eternal, creator God and doesn't present an icon with magical, superstitious powers of its own, I don't think it's a form of idolatry.

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