

Littlewood United Episcopal Chapel-- Fremont, CA

This summer we continue our class meetings with public worship planned for Trinity V, the Saturday after Independence Day. Given evangelical societies also insisted “upon the necessity of general repentance to prevent a general scourge” at the start of each month (Bristol Minutes 1745), both kinds of meetings provide occasions for Godliness amid common Sickness & other chastisements.

Our change of heart, under heavenly rebuke, coincided while reading Jewel’s 1571 Homily ‘Against Peril of Idolatry’. While instructing our children upon the church catechism, they keenly asked why a painting of Christ was kept in our room of worship. Suddenly, the words of the Homily leaped forth, “they who privately held them [painted images] did err of a certain zeal, and not by malice: but afterwards they crept out of private houses into churches, and so bred first superstition and last of all idolatry amongst Christians” (p. 191)



Before reading this famous Anglican sermon we believed images good for instruction. Yet, the Homilist reminds men’s “corrupt nature to spiritual fornication” eventually inclined their idolatry. Indeed, if the poisons of men’s souls by setting up images are many, yea, infinite (says the Homilist), yet warnings against the same stumbling blocks by preaching are few, how can

weak brethren escape harm to their souls? (p. 243)

And, even if there are “a few picked and chosen men” who prove the lawfulness of images, what manner of pastors thrust their flock unto that which they confess is inexpedient (p. 253). So, foreseeing the infirmity of men, God assigns a general prohibition for the good of all (says Jewel) that none shall have a holy image. Moved by the love of others, as well as the interests of true piety, the Homilist exhorts abandonment of icons (p. 243).



Despite much stubbornness and delay on our part, we finally tore down our ‘heathen relic’. In place of the image of the Last Supper, we hung Claxton’s historical portrait J. Wesley conferencing with calvinist scholars like B. Ingram, G. Whitefield, and J. Hervey. This historical-secular style was generally accepted by Anglican divinity over images depicting Christ. It certainly was well-received by presbyterian friends-- healing an old sore.

American Protestants, who formerly shared the parentage of the English Church, once enjoyed a common culture. Our buildings were marked with “plainness and frugality”. And, rather than golden vessels, men had golden minds. God will not tempt us beyond what we can bear. He will provide a means of escape, “Therefore, my beloved, flee Idolatry” (1 Cor. 10.14). Jehovah Bless, CB