

Excerpted from *Janson's History of Art*, Fifth Edition, 1995, 251-2.

The Holy Bible, Exodus 20:1-5

Exodus, the second book of the Old Testament, is one of five books traditionally attributed to Moses (these five are the Hebrew Torah). Exodus tells of the departure of the Jews from Egypt in the thirteenth century B.C. In chapter 20, God speaks to Moses on Mount Sinai and gives him the Ten Commandments. The second commandment pertains to images.

And the Lord spoke all these words: I am the Lord thy God,
who brought thee out of the land of Egypt....
Thou shalt not have strange gods before me.
Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing, nor the
likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the
earth beneath, nor of those things that are in the
waters under the earth.
Thou shalt not adore them, nor serve them.

Pope Gregory I (reigned 590-604) From a letter to Serenus of Marseille

Bishop Serenus apparently moved to discourage excessive acts of devotion to paintings in his church by having the images destroyed. In this letter of 600 A.D., Pope Gregory the Great reprimands him, reminding him that images serve to teach those who cannot read. This remained the standard defense of figural painting and sculpture in the Western church through the Middle Ages.

Word has...reached us that you...have broken the images of the saints with the excuse that they should not be adored. And indeed we heartily applaud you for keeping them from being adored, but for breaking them we reproach you.... To adore images is one thing; to teach with their help what should be adored is another. What Scripture is to the educated, images are to the ignorant, who see through them what they must accept; they read in them what they cannot read in books. This is especially true of the pagans. And it particularly behooves you, who live among pagans, not to allow yourself to be carried away by just zeal and so give scandal to savage minds. Therefore you ought not to have broken that which was placed in the church not in order to be adored but solely in order to instruct the minds of the ignorant. It is not without reason that tradition permits the deeds of the saints to be depicted in holy places.

NOTE: Your reading assignment also includes [Byzantine Art, APAP](#)