

THE KEYS



Church of St. Peter the Apostle
Anglican Catholic Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic States
www.dmas-acc.org

The Rev. Peter Geromel OHI, Th.M, Rector
February 2022
<https://stpetersacc.org>

The Rector's Ramble (In and Out of Brambles)

Icons as Standing Stones

As we continue to look at different traditions in prayer, I had occasion to reflect on icons recently. Simply put, icons can focus and elevate our minds during prayer, and help calm our passions.

It is reported this last month by David Virtue that the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion “says that icon worship is the language of pagan philosophy, not biblical commandment.”¹ EFAC USA stated, “The icon or statue is said to participate in a greater reality, but the kingdom of God is not something out there, but right here, right now. Our worship needs to reinforce that reality.”² While the Anglican Catholic Church upholds the standards of all Seven Ecumenical Councils in her founding document, *The Affirmation of St. Louis*, we may easily ignore such condemnation at St. Peter’s in Christiansburg. Yet the inconvenient fact is that the EFAC still bears “Anglican” in its name, as we do. So, we can certainly comment.

Ironically, the EFAC has attacked icons for the very thing that icons are truly trying to reveal and remind us of! – that the Kingdom of Heaven is in our midst. This is why the Orthodox say, “Christ is in our midst. Glorify Him!” As is often the case, a little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing, and it is a failure to understand what pagan theology (as distinguished from pagan philosophy) really looked like way-back-when and this leads to all sorts of misunderstandings about things like icons. It is true that “pagan philosophy,” or more specifically neo-Platonic philosophy, does have an explanation as to how we receive a certain amount of grace by “participating in” or contemplating the “forms” or “ideas”. This “pagan” notion was translated by the Church Fathers. It became a perfectly acceptable and legitimate Christian intuition that to venerate and contemplate the picture of an angel is to become more angelic and that praying for the grace to be more angelic in front of a picture of an angel is helpful to this end. The EFAC argues, “we do not go to worship to participate in a reality greater than the one we already live in, having been adopted as God’s children by His grace.” Forgive me, this is a ridiculous statement. Certainly, every Christian believes that we do receive grace by going to worship and that worship distinctly communicates a reality greater than the one we currently live in. That’s what makes it worship! I’m suspicious that they actually agree with the very thing that they are trying to attack. If I don’t want to be more angelic, why would I go to worship?

And if I go to worship and want to be more angelic or saintly, contemplating and venerating an icon of an angel or saint certainly “communicates” to me “a reality greater than the one we already live in” by making the idea real and present right now. EFAC USA’s editor tries to explain his position further,

It is said that the icon or the statue points to, through, and beyond itself, such that what it signifies is very nearly what it is. Likewise, with liturgy. Anamnesis, the literal re-membling of the atonement, is said to signify the atonement so closely that it participates in the very atonement itself. Through worship (it is said) one can even “enter into” the paschal mystery.

This is the language of pagan philosophy, not biblical commandment. “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below” (Ex. 20:4).

Here is where a lesson is needed as to the distinction between false pagan theology and true biblical principles and the subsequent limits and freedom that come with biblical mandates. Again, it is true that a certain notion of participating in “forms” (to use the philosophical Platonic language) has some similarity to participating, contemplating, and venerating the icons (which are “forms” of divine realities) in Orthodox and Catholic theology, but there are a few differences too between pagan theology and Christian theology. Those differences are key.

One that bears mentioning is this: Pagan images and statues often portray something fundamentally and

¹ <https://virtueonline.org/evangelical-ministry-attacks-catholic-and-orthodox-churches-stand-worship?fbclid=IwAR1RVk7r9ZMDkyqRaPlkde0EeOZ63plhH5qergu0-11cAKrSMDmCXpETEKQ>

² <https://efac-usa.org/worship/>

theologically *different* from Christian images and statues. First, pagan images are often chimeric as well as symbolic, while Christian imagery is simply symbolic. That is to say that pagan images present distorted reality and distorted creation (creation not as God made it) – a crocodile tail with eagle’s wings and human feet. That’s what’s called “chimeric.” Second, they are often at least erotically arousing if not fully pornographic. (Contrariwise, icons are said to help curb passions, especially lust.) Modesty should require no further explanation but to say that, like the chimeric imagery, erotic imagery isn’t just distorted anatomically (various surgeries are often involved nowadays); it’s also disordered (portraying and communicating the idea of sexual gratification without suffering/personal growth in and through real relationships) and, thus, it is also stagnant. There’s no positive change. It’s a snapshot of something temporal and changing that we elevate to (idolize as) something that lasts “forever”. But it’s a lie. It doesn’t last.



PAGAN IMAGES

VERSUS

ICONS

Importantly, I’d like to add that “nude” art isn’t innately evil and, arguably, later Greco-Roman idols were quite realistic and impressionist, not distorted or chimeric. In this the later Greco-Roman might have been moving in a direction that accepted the beauty that God had made as God made it, rather than distorting it. Also important, this isn’t to say that our pictures of family members or pets on display at home should be destroyed. (Although the EFAC notion that they *are* okay while, remarkably, pictures of saints *aren’t*, isn’t consistent with “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything . . . on earth”. That is to say, since your picture of grandma is an image of something on earth, it logically violates this commandment as they read it. But no iconoclastic (icon destroying) evangelicals are running around burning grandma’s picture. So they aren’t consistent when enforcing this biblical commandment.) In addition, the pornographic and the chimeric nature of pagan imagery becomes an unhealthy projection of a way that we would prefer the world to be but just isn’t. I can’t fly with eagle’s wings (although the power of God, according to Isaiah 40:31, can help me to have energy that is metaphorically like eagle’s wings.) I can’t have a crocodile head with who knows what else, nor can I have a perfectly sexually gratifying body forever. The only comparable thing in icons is, in fact, angel’s wings. Such is minimal and modest compared to pagan idolatry, and angel wings were, in fact, commanded by God to be put on the ark of the covenant.

Icons, in contrast to pagan images, are quite the opposite and they present a fundamentally different viewpoint, one that corrects the pagan notion without obliterating a valid philosophical insight – that contemplating a form makes one more like the form. Pagan idols thereby turn one monstrous. But icons form you biblically.

In ancient Israel, the Hebrews erected standing stones to declare what God had done. The fact that these stones weren’t chiseled (just as the altar where sacrifice was made wasn’t chiseled) declared this fact in opposition to paganism. But note this further: Pictures, albeit idealistic and celestial, of the saints are also representations and memorials, like standing stones, of what God has done. First, he formed saints as men and women. (No chisel needed!) Second, he reformed them, as living stones (1 Peter 2:5), by adoption and grace, after his image - rather than whatever they were tempted to conjure up as vain images of themselves. (Again, no “chisel” needed!) It is, in fact, what God has done that we memorialize in iconography, just as much as in Old Testament times. Standing stones were tributes to victories God wrought for Israel. Icons are tributes to God’s victories over the stony hearts of men. And note further, icons are even better than standing stones, because it is what God is continuing to do, not just what God did in the past – because saints “go on from strength to strength in a life of perfect service.”

News and Information

Purification of the BVM, or Candlemas, will be celebrated Thursday, February 3rd at Noon.

Vestry meets February 16th. There will be mass at 7 PM followed by the meeting.

St. Matthias, will be celebrated Thursday, February 24th at Noon.

FEBRUARY, 2022

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		[1]	[2]	[3] 12 noon HC	[4]	[5] 5:00 p.m. HC
[6] 8:00 a.m. MP & HC 10:00 a.m. HE, SS EPIPHANY V	[7]	[8]	[9]	[10] 12 noon HC	[11]	[12] 5:00 p.m. HC
[13] 8:00 a.m. MP & HC 10:00 a.m. HE, SS SEPTUAGESIMA	[14]	[15]	[16] 7:00 p.m. HC 7:30 p.m. Vestry	[17] 12 noon HC	[18]	[19] 5:00 p.m. HC
[20] 8:00 a.m. MP & HC 10:00 a.m. HE, SS SEXAGESIMA	[21]	[22]	[23]	[24] 12 noon HC	[25]	[26] 5:00 p.m. HC
[27] 8:00 a.m. MP & HC 10:00 a.m. HE, SS QUINQUAGESIMA	[28]	LEGEND: HC - Holy Communion; FHE – Festal Holy Eucharist; HE - Holy Eucharist; SS – Sunday School; PG - Prayer Group; EP – Evening Prayer; MP – Morning Prayer; P&HU – Prayers and Holy Unction				

IN THE LORD'S SERVICE

If you cannot fulfill your assigned duty because of an urgent reason, PLEASE SECURE A REPLACEMENT.

Week beginning Sunday →	February 6	February 13	February 20	February 27	March 6
Altar Guild	B. Higginbotham	V. Williams	M. Slayton	B. Higginbotham	V. Williams
	J. Butterfield	B. Higginbotham	B. Higginbotham	J. Butterfield	B. Higginbotham
Coffee Hour	G. Terrell	S. Darby	C. Pappas	V. Williams	E. Paisley
Ushers	D. Drysdale	M. Slayton	P. Pappas	M. Slayton	G. Terrell
	P. Pappas	D. Drysdale	M. Slayton	G. Terrell	P. Pappas
Epistoler 8 a.m.	A. Butterfield	G. Mauney	A. Butterfield	A. Butterfield	G. Mauney
Epistoler 10 a.m.	T. Paisley	G. Terrell	P. Williams	C. Von Claparede	T. Paisley
Server	P. Williams	T. Paisley	P. Williams	P. Williams	P. Williams
Crucifer	W. Paisley	C. Von Claparede	W. Paisley	W. Paisley	W. Paisley

2022 Vestry (term end): Dan Drysdale (‘23), Lisa Olver (‘24), Ted Paisley (‘24), Marnie Slayton (‘22), Clemens Von Claparede (‘22), Phil Williams (‘23)