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St. Augustine arguing with donatists
Charles-André van Loo
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Being a Proper Icon of Christ

By The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield

Donatism is a word that gets thrown around quite a bit in Anglican circles. I have heard it used, and I have even used it myself. It is also the trump card used by the Episcopal Church to accuse those who broke away from their church of being in the wrong. But, is this a legitimate claim? Are we using this accusation appropriately? I sometimes wonder.

To refresh everyone’s memory, during the Diocletian persecution in the 4th Century, some of the priests and bishops suffered while some denounced their Christianity. Once the persecution subsided, many of the denouncing priests and bishops recanted. After being examined by the Church, many of these men were reinstated to their former positions within the Church. However, some of those who suffered persecution but did not denounce their faith had problems with what happened to the denouncing clergy.

One of these objecting clergymen was Bishop Donatus Magnus. He held that those clergymen that denounced their faith and then recanted were unfit for their offices and, even worse, those same clergymen’s sacraments were of no

value. In other words, because these clergymen were unworthy of their offices, they were unable to absolve, bless, consecrate, confirm, marry, or ordain anyone. And, anyone who had received a sacrament received nothing because it was null and void precisely because of the unworthiness of the clergy involved. This is what became known as the heresy of Donatism: that the only way the sacraments are valid is if the clergy is worthy.

As any clergyman can tell you, such a standard is frightening. To be truly worthy seems impossible for mortal, fallen men. The Church took this issue to heart, examined it carefully, and rejected it. The official stand of the Church is that the sacraments are valid regardless of the worthiness of the priest because it is God and not the priest that makes the sacraments valid. But, like any good heresy, Donatism stuck around for a long time. It was not until the Muslim invasions of North Africa that this heresy was wiped out – temporarily.

However, be careful when you hear that someone is a Donatist. The accusation may be true, but generally speaking, what the



Our Core Value is:

“The Convocation of the West is Missionary, bringing people to Christ and meaningfully engaging in the transformation of the culture around us.”

The Vision of the Convocation is:

*“To STRENGTHEN existing churches;
To PLANT new churches; and
To RAISE UP missional leaders.”*

Episcopal Church was leveling against those Episcopalians who broke away was incorrect. Those who left did so because they believed the Episcopal Church had become heretical. Those who held that the sacraments were invalid because of the unworthiness of their priests may have broken away as well, but for most, it had more to do with the abandonment of the faith.

None of us can really claim that the sacraments of an unworthy priest are invalid IF the ordinations ARE valid. And this may extend to women who have been “properly” ordained priests and bishops.

Please recall some time back when a renegade Roman Catholic Bishop decided to do what some Episcopal Bishops decided to do in the 1970s – ordain women to the priesthood without permission. But, unlike the Episcopal Church, the Roman Catholic Church ordered the newly ordained female priests to renounce their ordinations. When they refused, the Pope excommunicated them. However, what we should all note is that the Roman Church never held the ordinations invalid. The women were excommunicated for disobedience, not invalid orders.

Though many of you may disagree with me, I would suggest that, if the women being ordained are ordained properly – meaning that if they were men, their ordinations would be valid – their sacraments are valid. But, the deeper question and the more important question for me is whether women should be ordained, even though they “can be” ordained. And this leads us to a host of other issues of which I feel we must be clear. This is especially important for us being both members of ACNA, which upholds “dual integrity” and of MDAS/FIFNA, which upholds an all-male priesthood and bishopric.

The first point that we must make clear is that a female priesthood is NOT a new controversy. It was discussed and resolved in the early centuries of the Church. Yes, some parts of the Church in some limited locations had ordained women to these roles, and this is precisely why the Church as a whole looked at this practice. It was the united Church that determined that women should not be ordained priests or bishops even though they were still being ordained deacons. And the reason why the Church decided this way had to do with the role of bishop and priest in the Church.

When the Church looked at whether women should be priests or bishops, it looked at whom Jesus Himself is and also at whom He chose to lead. Could Jesus have chosen women? We know that He chose for Himself twelve, the Apostles – and eventually a thirteenth, namely Saint Paul. All were men. But, could He have chosen a woman? After all, there were many women who were disciples of Christ and that would have been suitable candidates, the most suitable of which would have been the Blessed Virgin Mary. After all, if you hold to the Roman Catholic dogma that Saint Mary was conceived “immaculately”, then there could be no person more suited than a woman conceived without sin, who was filled with the Holy

Spirit, and who was the living Tabernacle, the Mother of God (the Theotokos). Yet, she was not made an Apostle. And, as we all know, the Apostles are the progenitors for the role of bishop. Likewise, from the role of the bishop, the Church eventually developed the role of priest.

This question, could Jesus have chosen a woman, in turn, goes to the crux of another controversy: Is Jesus really God Incarnate or just a holy prophet? Those who hold that Jesus could not have chosen a woman because of social pressure or some other like-reason, I submit, either have never read the Gospels or do not believe Jesus is Divine. Jesus broke many taboos of the time: He dined with sinners, and He associated with women. The perfect example of both is the woman at the well. With one encounter Jesus broke so many social customs and taboos that His own Apostles and disciples were shocked. But ultimately the point is that Jesus is God Incarnate. And being God, He is not limited by customs or taboos. After all, this is our Savior who was horribly scourged and died the most excruciating and humiliating death on the Cross for our sins. Do we really believe that a little social taboo would have stopped Him?

Bishops and priests serve in roles different than deacons, and therefore must be considered separately, as the united Church did. In the West, we say that bishops and priests are “in persona Christi”, which is Latin for “in the person of Christ.” In the East they say that bishops and priests are icons of Christ, which I find a more accurate description. To understand this point, we must look at another early Church controversy, which was also solved through one of the first seven Councils of the whole Church.

This controversy was started by iconoclasts who believed that there should be no images in a church because of the prohibition on graven images in the Old Testament. The Church decided that, if the image was “true”, like the cherubim carved and placed on either side of the Mercy Seat, then the image was acceptable. For this reason, icons of Christ, angels and saints are permitted.

For me, the most powerful section of the Old Testament that goes to this issue from the opposite angle is in Exodus. After the Israelites escaped Egypt and were encamped by Mount Sinai, Moses was delayed on the Mount communicating with God and the people demanded of Aaron to make them “gods.”

Now, here is an interesting point. Different translations, translate this passage differently. The King James and the New King James translates this passage so that the people demand Aaron make them “gods”, which would imply a return to idolatry. But the New American Standard translation and other translations have translated this same passage as “god”, which would indicate a different sin.

This difference is huge for me, and I believe it is rightly translated as “god”, which explains why Aaron was so ready to melt down gold and make the image. It also gives a totally different interpretation to these events.

With this interpretation, Aaron's pronouncement becomes much more significant and poignant:

"[Aaron] took this from their hand, and he fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.' Now when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, 'Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord.' So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings: and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play." [Exodus 32:4-6 New American Standard]

Aaron and the Israelites pronounced that this golden calf was to be an image of God. They shall sacrifice and honor this image as if it were the Lord. But the golden calf was a false image of the true God. Was it understandable that Aaron would do this? Certainly. The Israelites had been in Egypt for generations; they had married Egyptians; and they had been immersed in the Egyptian culture before they had ever received the Law. Culturally, this is all the Israelites knew. They wanted an image to worship – an image of the true God – of their God. The trouble is that it was NOT a true image. It was false, and it was therefore a corrupting image:



"Then the Lord spoke to Moses, 'Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have quickly turned aside from the way, which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshipped it and have sacrificed to it and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!'" [Exodus 32:7-8]

What we must face is the reality that being human limits us. And one way we are limited is that we are easily corrupted. As a teacher I can tell you that 90% of what we learn, we learn by seeing. And if the image is true, we will learn the truth of which we see. But, as true images produce true doctrine, false images produce false doctrines.

Bishops and priests are to be in the person of Christ or, in other words, images of Christ – icons of Christ. As with any icon, we are to look "through" the image to the real thing in heaven. That is why icons are called by some "windows into heaven." When any bishop or priest is celebrating the Eucharist, we should be looking through the bishop or priest to Christ. But a female priest, though holy and devoted to the Lord, fails to be this proper icon. We see her, not Christ. Or worse, we see a false image of Christ. And, as we can see from our Old Testament section from Exodus, we must eschew false images.

One of the most significant examples of this issue that I have ever seen was in a feminist conference in the

Episcopal Church. "The Living Church" had captured a picture where these attendees had taken a crucifix, cut off Jesus' body and placed a nude female body in its stead, attaching it to His head and the cross. The image was appalling, but it captures the problem of women as priests and bishops.

Now, let me make one thing clear: this is not an equality issue. I have worked with and for women. They were, almost all, brilliant women whom I had the honor of knowing and from which I learned. Women are fully capable of doing the "job" of a bishop or priest. It is not an issue of job description and abilities. And it is not an issue of ministry. Women, like men, are called to be part of the priesthood of the laity. We are all called to be lay ministers for Christ. We also know that there have been exceptional women since the beginning: Ruth, Abigail, Deborah, Mary Magdalene, Mary and Martha, and of course, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ our Savior. But man fell. He is weakened by the fall. And for that reason, God knows that the images we use must be true to prevent our corruption. Like I said before, it is not a question of "can" but a question of "should". Come the resurrection, we may not have this issue, but until then, we need to honor what God has ordained and try to

maintain it.

Now, can I be wrong? Certainly. However, I am also of the opinion that, if the universal Church made this determination to have a male priesthood and bishopric, then it will take an act of the universal Church to change it. And, if it truly is God's desire that we do so, He will make sure it happens.

But let us realize that our stand as to women in the priesthood and bishopric is not Donatism. It is not misogyny. It is, hopefully, a prayerful, thoughtful stand that must be respectful to our sisters in Christ, and our sisters in other Diocese within the ACNA. And, with prayer and humility, with study both of Scripture and Holy Tradition, and most importantly, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we may one day come to a mutual understanding. And I pray that we will soon come to this understanding, for the energy we spend on this issue distracts us from our ultimate mission – to spread the Good News of Christ and to baptize all who believe in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen and God bless,
The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield
Vicar General for the Convocation of the West

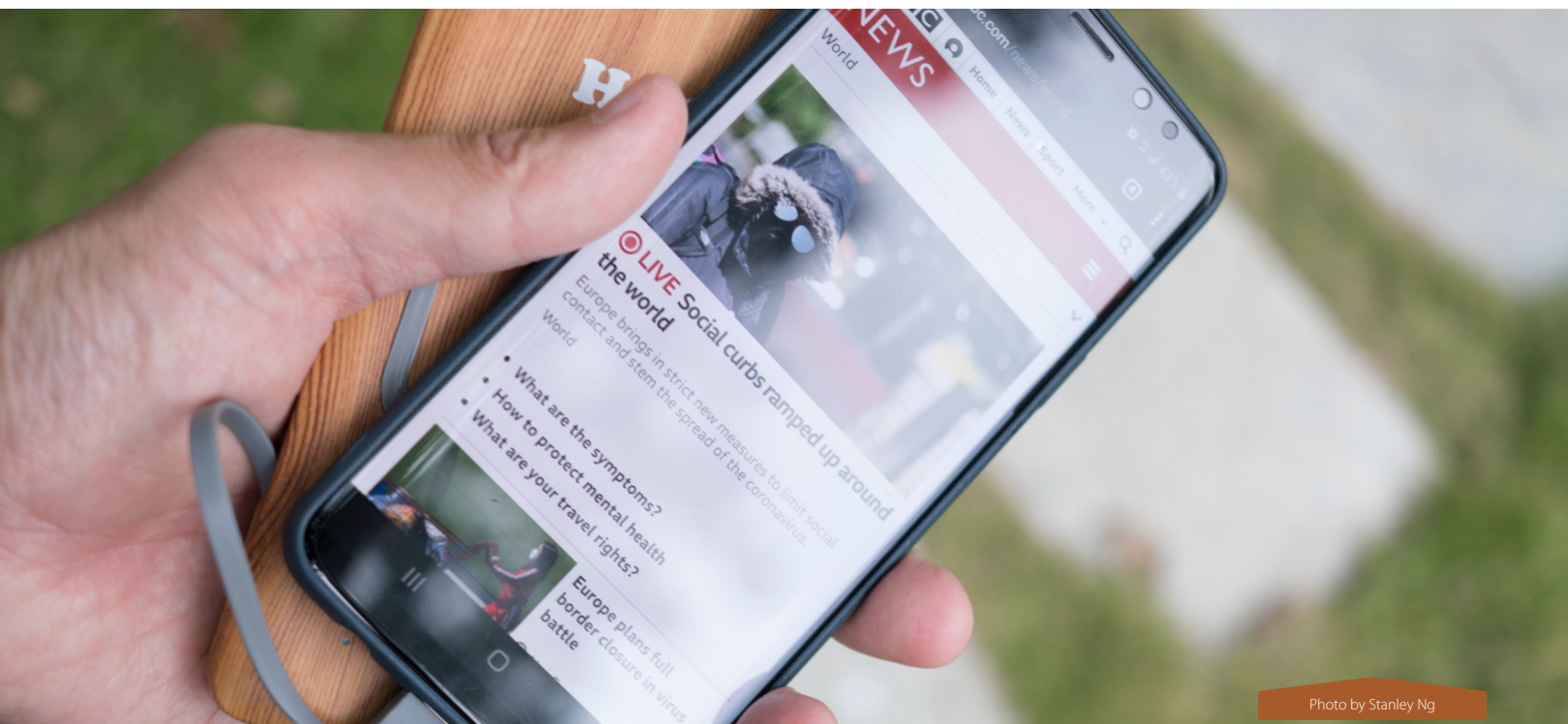


Photo by Stanley Ng

Little Ivan

By Bishop Winfiled Mott

He was a boy about my age, seven or eight, and he wanted to grow up and be a railroad engineer for his Uncle Joe. It was all there, in a text with large letters for my newly literate eyes to read. There was a big colorful drawing as well, showing little Ivan standing next to a large, beautiful locomotive with a big red star on the front. An insert in the corner sketched kindly Uncle Joe smiling down on the scene, with his bushy mustache and pipe. My Father, whose career was in railroading, had already passed on his love of the industry to me. Thus, it was the splendid locomotive that first caught my attention, but I felt a bond with little Ivan. At the time, our nations were in the middle of World War II.

Several years later, I was in the sixth grade. The war was won. Now my teacher was explaining to us that Uncle Joe was a brutal monster. He had enslaved little Ivan. Or maybe little Ivan would grow up to be one of those bad Russian Communists, it wasn't quite clear.

Now, much later, I understand what my teachers were trying to do. Yet something else happened instead. It struck me that both of these stories could not be true. Either Uncle Joe was kindly or he was a monster, but he couldn't be both. Contemplating this, it became clear that adult authorities could not be trusted to tell the truth, or even that there might be several sides to a story.

It was a profound lesson which has lasted me a lifetime, an immunization against propaganda equally from good guys and bad guys. Unintended as the lesson was from the viewpoint of my teachers, it was the best thing they could have ever given me.

Ever since, I question information given to me, even from those "usually reliable sources." Where is the hard data, the feed right from the site, the independently verifiable assertions? If that isn't there, neither is my credulity. On the flip side, I have seen lives ruined, careers wrecked, marriages destroyed, elected officials defeated, on the basis of false information.

Currently, the lesson of adult credibility is more relevant than ever. Two trends in particular have developed in recent years to greatly intensify the amount and force of fake news.

1) Journalism, as a professional career with strong ethics, has almost disappeared in America. A professional journalist is committed to objectivity, leaving opinion and viewpoint to the editorial page or to a properly identified quote from someone. If the journalist has a bias, he or she discloses it up front. Sadly, in the rush to profit from sensation or to propagandize a point of view, journalism has been replaced.

2) Truth itself has been declared relative in our society. There are now "pluriform truths," in the words of former Episcopal Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold. Objective truth does not exist, but your opinion counts for truth. "It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you believe in something."

The combination of these two factors means that journalism in America has been replaced by propaganda, the role the national Soviet newspaper Pravda (ironically, "Pravda" means "truth") formerly had in the USSR. The different is that in America, we can choose which propaganda we wish to hear. Fox News, MSNBC, CBS, ABC, Breitbart, New York Times, et al, each tells you a story. Sometimes reality is difficult to ascertain, let alone truth, in correlating the different pluriform truths

being told. These media have the advantage of a public, who may be educated in many things, but generally lack knowledge of history, the functioning of truly democratic politics and the world outside the U.S., making them gullible. And it means a society where there is no truth, replace with that which is approved of by our “influencers.” These latter are not obligated to truth, only to “correctness,” as defined by current trends and prevailing opinions.

“What is truth?,” rhetorically asked Pilate at the trial of Jesus, skeptical of ever hearing truth in his role as governor. It is an excellent question. “As a police officer, I have been lied to all my adult life,” said my friend (former) Bishop Sam Seamans, “It was ideal preparation for becoming a bishop.”

The Gospel, the Good News from God is, of course, also true. Again, we see the connection between being and message. The Gospel is identified as the Word of God. But the Gospel itself points us beyond the message to the being who is the Logos, the Word, Christ himself (see John 1). In Christ, the being and the message are integrated seamlessly. Likewise, we, who are absorbed in the Body of Christ are icons of truth even as we also proclaim the message.

Our evangelism consists of the truth of God, which is the Good News of God’s love. We live that in all our being, it is our message in all that we are, say and do. Even our failures, as we crawl back in repentance, become object lessons in God’s forgiving love.

And lest I too stray from reality, let it be noted that churches are as capable as the media or anyone else of garbling the truth, in our failure to understand what it is to be the Body of Christ. The world is confused and wandering among the lost paths of relative and pluriform truths, yet hungering spiritually for the truth that God is love is real. Instead, the churches so often give them stones of denunciation, political pressure, judgement, exclusion and self-righteous. The truth of Jesus is the path of loving forgiveness and caring concern.

As you pick among the ruins of American journalism and information media to try to glean a true picture of things, keep little Ivan in mind. People who lack both



The answer to Pilate’s question was standing in front of him. It is not a rhetorical question after all. Nor was the answer pluriform. On the contrary, it is singular and specific: “I am the way, the truth and the life,” says Jesus (John 14:6). Jesus’ use of “I am” here is a statement of his divinity. Truth is a divine attribute, not only uniform and absolute but unchanging as well. Jesus is truth, not only in what he says, but in his very being as incarnate God.

It is countercultural to today’s trendy pontification of relative but approved truths, but the Christian encounters and absorbs absolute objective and eternal truth when he or she enters the Body of Christ in baptism, and participates in the life of the Body in the Eucharistic feast. It is why the great Danish Bishop Nicholai Grundtvig notes that the Nicene Creed is ultimately true, not as printing on paper, but when confessed together by the Christian Body gathered around the Eucharistic altar. It is our being which is challenged by God to be true, not simply our messages.

truth and good intentions, some of them in churches, are hoping to form your worldview, without reference to real truth. Question their assertions, be skeptical of “facts” presented without sources and real verification. If you are a fan of Fox News, check it against PBS news, the New York Times or MSNBC, or visa-versa. For a look “outside the box,” I check online with the Irish Times, the evening news from Norway and Mexico, Aljazeera, and the Guardian. There are many good choices, but it takes effort to find them. In whatever information you spread yourself, be careful that your sources are accurate. Perhaps the most ignored of the Ten Commandments is the admonition against false witness (=fake news). Whether you originate it or pass it on from elsewhere, it is a basic and destructive sin.

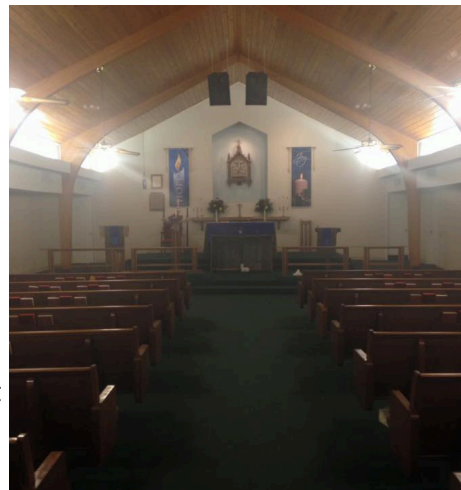
Above all, remember Truth is real, objective and quite good news. It permeates our very being (if we let it in). All else stands in relation to it, the ultimate reliable source. And it comes alive best when we confess it and live it in the Body of Christ.

Featured Church of the Month Holy Trinity Anglican Church - Hurst, Texas

Good day to all reading this,

I was asked by Cn. Penfield to write a short bio about our Church. Holy Trinity Anglican Church is located in Hurst Texas in between Dallas and Ft Worth and have been in our current building since 2003. HTAC began in 1992 as part of the newly formed Charismatic Episcopal Church, starting as a home church until sufficient numbers allowed the renting of space in a church. By 1998 HTAC was able to purchase its building in a neighboring city until Freeway expansion forced us to move into our current location.

HTAC has been served by 4 Rectors since its founding: Fr. Mike Cumbie, Fr. Ralph Dodd, Fr. Bob Tomlinson and myself, as well numerous assisting Priests and Deacons. We have been under 4 Bishops Bp. Kenneth Myers, Bp. Fred Fick, Bp. William Illgenfritz, and Bp. Lipka. HTAC has been on a journey through the years finally finding a port in the Missionary Society of St John the Evangelist as well as the Missionary Diocese of All Saints. Our numbers were around 50 before the start of Covid-19 and it has been a slow process getting our people back, but they are beginning to test the waters. During the pandemic we were closed to the public for about 2 weeks, and streaming service but by Easter 2020 we held an outdoor service and decided to open the doors and offer in person worship again. It is a slow process to get back to normalcy but we are maintaining.



Most of our outside ministries are still curtailed because of Covid, school ministry with local ISD as well as shut in ministries under lockdown. We assist with 3 ministries in our town, Mid Cities Women's Center, 6 Stones HEBISD assisting with Back to school programs and Sandy Anderson Evangelistic Ministry in India, China, and East Asia.

I am employed by American Airlines for 30 years, electrician by trade, married to Tammy Pruitt Rainey, 37 years and have 2 children, Ashton and Heath and 3 Grandchildren Elle, 7 Griffin 5, and Devin 1yr old. I have served at HTAC since 1999 as a Deacon, Assistant Priest and current Vicar for the past 8 years or so. I look forward to seeing what God has in store for HTAC and the MDAS in the future. Blessings.

Fr. Joel (Shawn) Rainey
HTAC Hurst Texas

Upcoming Liturgical Music Conference 2021 - Postponed



The October Music Conference has been postponed until next year, October 2022, because of the Delta Variant. Last year, the Convocation of the West planned to have a conference on Music. A little thing called the Pandemic delayed it by a year. We thought we were ready to proceed this year, but because of the Delta variant, the Governor of Washington State has implemented mask requirements for indoor activities. Additionally, he may eventually require COVID health passes. We therefore have decided to delay by another year this conference. We apologize in advance for any inconvenience that this cancellation may have caused. Please contact the Vicar General of the West, the Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield, if you wish to discuss this matter. And please continue to pray for the end of this plague.