
My Answers To Some Current Episcopal Questions

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip**

Is it a schism?

No. No one in the United States, or most other countries, took any oath to support the Archbishop of Canterbury. No one signed any sort of covenant. No one swore an oath to any creed outside the Apostles' or Nicene Creed.

In the United States, all people did was be baptized, like their forefathers and foremothers before them, proclaimed allegiance to Jesus Christ, served on the vestry maybe, agreed to support the diocese and to welcome the bishop when he or she came around. They enjoyed the warm sense of affection with the Church of England. They answered the duty to support occasional missionaries in other parts of the world, missionaries who most frequently connected with other persons who had a history with the Church of England. They connected to the Anglican Church and to the Anglican tradition by voluntary affection and history and breadth of spirit.

Is it a divorce?

No. No two individuals gave their very lives to each other "till death do us part."

Models of domestic relationships, such as marriage, are not always helpful as ecclesiastical models. Marriage is about one person committing a life to another person, usually a male and a female; groups, and churches, do not legitimately marry one another. But, even if ecclesiastical relationships were considered as marriages, no one is getting divorced here. For no one gave their life to another, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health.

Is it a tear in a fabric? (a rip in a fabric?)

No. It is a small fray in a beautiful tapestry of God's grace.

Is it a tear in a fabric? (a teardrop from God's eyes?)

Yes, it is very sad.

Is it a split?

No and Yes. It is certainly not a split in the mainline Episcopal Church. Within the governing system of the Episcopal Church, within General Convention, within Executive Council, within the House of Bishops, and within the House of Deputies, there is no dramatic and contested division. Decisions, for the most part, have been made decently and in order; and most of the body is quite whole.

However, certain individuals have certainly departed from identity with the Episcopal Church. In several cases, they have convinced their brothers and sisters to try to lead entire parishes out of the tradition and identity of the Episcopal Church. That tradition and identity is exactly what spawned those churches. Such maneuvers have sadly led to legal disputes about church property. Now, some individuals and leaders have also tried to convince entire dioceses to sever association with the Episcopal Church.

Oddly enough, most of those parishes and dioceses-and most of those individuals-want to remain "Anglican." They do not admit that the Anglican way is always voluntary, never coercive. The Anglican tradition has always been broad and local. It

is the reason most of you reading this are Anglicans.

The Anglican tradition is not the Roman Catholic tradition, a tradition governed ultimately by a primate with universal jurisdiction beyond local boundaries. The secular press is sorely tempted to see Anglicans this way, and they usually succumb to the temptation; the secular press wants everything to be decided and tidied up by some supreme pontiff or some worldwide synod or some super bowl. That is not the Anglican way; we live locally with allegiance to a universal Jesus Christ. Conflict is inherent in that arrangement, and we live through those conflicts.

It is also a "split" if one considers that some Anglican tradition bishops, like those from Nigeria and Uganda (with tremendous memberships) have declared that they will not attend the "Lambeth Conference" this summer. That conference, held every ten years since long ago in 1867, invites worldwide bishops who have Anglican heritage to a meeting for the interchange of ideas and for mutual support, not as a legislative or synodical body.

Is it a splintering?

Yes.

It is a splinter. I used to get a lot of splinters when I played in the woods, and I still do when I chop wood. A splinter is, by definition, very small. A tiny sliver off one of the big branches or off the main trunk slices off. A splinter is by no means an entire branch, nor does it cause the healthy branch much of a problem. It is tiny. It does cause some irritation, but it usually disappears soon.

Occasionally, a splinter is re-planted and actually grows strong. Such could be the case here. There are plenty of strong people who have splintered off from The Episcopal Church. They could easily start a new denomination that might last a generation or two. Or, they could easily be grafted into an existing branch, as some have done with African or South American dioceses.

So why is there so much attention being given to a little splinter?

The folks who are giving it attention are of three sorts: 1) There are those who are bored with any other kind of church activity. They are either afraid of growing with the gospel, or they are simply accustomed to giving attention to complaint. 2) There are also those who have vested interests in feeding the splinter. They do not want The Episcopal Church to grow and they point out its failings daily; they want the splinter to grow instead. 3) Finally, there are those who simply disagree with the election and consent and consecration of an honestly gay bishop in The Episcopal Church, and they are not finished talking about it.

So what should I do?

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Devote yourself to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers. God will cause the growth.

Sam Candler signature



The Very Rev. Sam Candler