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## *Genius and Anglicanism and You!*

**An article for the *Cathedral Times* by Dean Sam Candler**

I was discussing prayer last Sunday during the Dean's Forum. In particular, I was analyzing the "Eucharistic prayers" of the Episcopal Church, those prayers which we use when we celebrate the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion. Like other Christians around the world, we Episcopalians call that service, "the Holy Eucharist." The word, "eucharist," means "thanksgiving," and we gather each Sunday to give thanks for God's salvation – in creation, in Jesus Christ, and in the consecrated bread and wine which are the real presence of Jesus for us.

Well, I shall say more on that definition of "eucharist" later (including next Sunday). There is another definition I want to clarify in this article. At one point in my presentation, I grinned and mentioned "the genius of Anglicanism." I heard later that people were wondering what I meant by "genius." Did I mean "genius" in the sense that Episcopalians had some innate intellectually superior ability?

Of course not! Like other healthy Christians, we Episcopalians ("Anglicans") certainly do value the use of our minds; we value reason in our spiritual lives. But "the genius of Anglicanism" does not refer to intellectual ability. By "genius," I mean the distinctive features of Anglicanism, the distinctive spirit of the way we pray.

In ancient Rome, the genius of someone was the guiding spirit or tutelary deity of a person or family (gens means "family"). According to the New Oxford American Dictionary, "genius" is late Middle English and comes from the Latin, 'attendant spirit present from one's birth, innate ability or inclination,' from the root of gignere 'beget.' The original sense 'tutelary spirit attendant on a person' gave rise to a sense of 'a person's characteristic disposition' (late 16th cent.), which led to a sense of 'a person's natural ability,' and finally 'exceptional natural ability' (mid 17th cent.)."

In other words, the history of our language recognizes that EVERYONE has a genius! Everyone has a distinctive characteristic, or spirit, about them. Our spiritual tradition, the Anglican tradition, also has a distinctive spirit. I happen to believe that "the genius of Anglicanism" is our tradition's ability to recognize spiritual truth in a broad and comprehensive way, our tradition's ability to recognize that "contraries do not necessarily contradict, nor need opposites always oppose" (to use William Porcher DuBose's lines).

But the larger point is that every Christian has a genius, some God-given gift which is distinctly yours. One sign of the mature Christian life is being able to recognize and claim your gift, your genius, your distinctive spirit and to live more and more fully into that identity.

Earlier this week, we celebrated All Saints' Day, and we remembered the souls of all the departed faithful saints around us. It was wonderful, it was holy, to remember so many distinctly different people – so different from each other but so blessed by God. We remembered the blessed saints on All Saints' Day. Each of those saints was a blessed soul. Maybe what we were really remembering was their genius.



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