

---

## *An Admiration of Queen Elizabeth II*

**An article for *The Cathedral Times*  
by the Very Rev. Sam Candler  
September 18, 2022**

May Queen Elizabeth II rest in peace. I am no royalist. Further, my country, a former colony, is neither part of the 56-country Commonwealth nor one of the 14 constitutional monarchies that feature the Queen on their currency (as is Canada). And, my own church, The Episcopal Church, is not under the authority of the Church of England, though we share the honorable and Anglican heritage.

Still, I paid attention and paid my respect to the memory of Queen Elizabeth II in the past week, as much of the world did. Hers was an ambiguous and dignified role, and it takes time to reflect on what we are remembering. At its most positive, we have been remembering a woman with a hereditary and wealthy role, who played that role extraordinarily gracefully and well. It is a role, however, that most people would not create again from scratch. Most of us do not believe in absolute monarchies any longer, but we accept monarchies that try to function within constitutional democracies.

I was taken by what one opinion writer said, "To function in an otherwise normal democracy, a hereditary monarchy requires that the citizenry accept a bit of fiction — namely that one family, standing above politics, can represent the nation and its values." ([Serge Schmemmann, in \*The New York Times\*, Sep 11, 2022](#)). I agreed with Hari Kunzru on the psychological value of the queen, that "the British elite have always understood that the monarchy is a screen onto which the people project their own fantasies" ([Hari Kunzru, in \*The New York Times\*, September 11, 2022](#)). But that projection goes far beyond Great Britain; the entire world was impressed with the psychological value of Queen Elizabeth III!

Last week, I began to receive questions about whether we, at the Cathedral of St. Philip, would be preparing a special memorial, for our British community. I received questions about whether we would remember Elizabeth II among the deceased with her baptized name or her royal name (we used both).

As a church, we pay attention to any death. They are all holy. Last week, I was returning from the funeral of a friend in Tennessee when I heard the news of Queen Elizabeth. I was also preparing to officiate at a funeral, the next day, at the Cathedral of St. Philip. For me, these deaths were just as important as the one that the world was fixated on. The death of anyone is a time to remember, and a time to give thanks, and a time to love.

Upon the death of such an impressive figure of Queen Elizabeth II, there will be many who use the occasion to lament colonialism and monarchy; and they will be right. Others will rightly wonder whether anyone can ever play the role of Queen, or King, as graciously as she did. Many of us will simply take the time to give thanks for her, as we do at any time of death.

None of us gets to choose which family we are born into. But almost every one of us inherits something from that family – sometimes trouble and sometimes privilege. In whatever family we are born, it falls to us to live our lives gracefully and honestly, with service and respect. Perhaps it is this feature of Queen Elizabeth II that merits the highest admiration: she committed herself to disciplined service. She would not even have been queen had her uncle not abdicated the throne. It was not what she expected, as a child. But she accepted the role, and she served with it. From speaking on the radio at a young age, to signing up in the military to service vehicles, to visiting 117 countries over time, she used her position to serve.

That is the leader we do well to admire and to respect, no matter how that leadership was acquired. We do well to admire the leader who serves. And Queen Elizabeth served, with discipline, for better or worse. Yes, many of us projected our values and hopes and disappointments upon her. Many of us watched her negotiate the

same sorts of domestic and family troubles, divorces and untimely deaths, that all of us have had; we watched her negotiate the same sorts of political troubles that we all know of. She did so gracefully and admirably. That grace and strength is something that can teach us all.

Finally, I agree with still another commentator, Fareed Zakaria, "We live life as individuals, but also as part of a society. And to make society function well, we've always needed some norms that ask the individual to step back, to sacrifice some ego, and to play a role in a larger project. No one has performed those duties better than Queen Elizabeth II," ([on Global Public Square, CNN, September 11, 2022](#)). Of course, there may well be some people who have performed those duties "better" than Queen Elizabeth II, but there is no need to compare! This week, I join those who remember her service. No institution is perfect these days, but we all need them. Within her institution, she showed the world how to serve. May Queen Elizabeth II rest in peace.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip