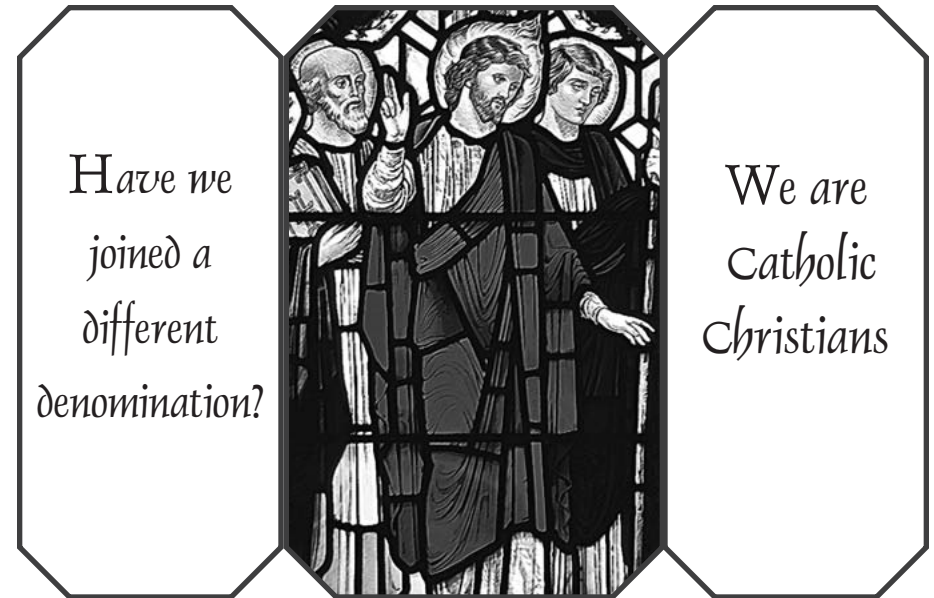


A REFLECTION ON OUR ANGLICAN IDENTITY



*Have we
joined a
different
denomination?*

*We are
Catholic
Christians*

BY THE RT. REV. JACK L. IKER
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Part 1

Have we joined a different denomination?

One of the allegations in the numerous lawsuits brought against us by the other side is the constant claim that “Iker left the Church and joined another denomination.” There are several problems with this, of course, beginning with the point that “the Church” is a much, much greater reality than the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America (sometimes called TEC for short). Add to this the fact that it was the Diocese of Fort Worth that left TEC (by a vast 80% majority vote at two successive diocesan conventions), not just me as the Bishop. I don’t even have a vote at diocesan conventions! And the third, we did not vote to join another denomination, but to realign with another jurisdiction of the worldwide Anglican Communion – the Province of the Southern Cone. However you cut it, we are still Anglicans or Episcopalians – two different words used for the same denomination all over the world.

As you are aware, TEC is an autonomous Province of the Anglican Communion, as is the Province of the Southern Cone. All 38 Provinces of the Communion share a common Anglican heritage and officially recognize the holy orders and sacraments of all the other Provinces (that is, we are in communion with one another). Just as TEC has dioceses in Central and South America (Honduras, Central Ecuador, Litoral Ecuador, Columbia, Venezuela, and others), so does the Southern Cone have recognized dioceses in North America (San Joaquin, Quincy, Pittsburgh and Fort Worth). We did not join another denomination; we realigned with another Province of the Communion.

In Scotland, we are called Episcopalians. In England, we are called Anglicans. Likewise, in Canada, the term is Anglican, while in the States, the term is Episcopalian. All are members of the same church family, holding a common faith and order. In border areas of these countries, church signs often have the wording that says

Far from having joined a “different denomination,” we have remained faithful to the witness of the Catholic Church of the ages. With our Lord Jesus Christ, we too pray for an end to our divisions and for a restoration of visible unity of Catholic Christians, both East and West.

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and traces its roots back to the Patristic age of the early Christian Church. This same Church, which predated the arrival of Augustine and his missionaries from Rome in the sixth century, is continuous with the Church of England that emerged from the sixteenth century Reformation. Reformed, yes, but not a new denomination; the Church of England still maintained the sacraments, creeds and holy orders of the undivided church of the early centuries, before the Great Schism of West and East in 1054.

Knowing this, Archbishop of Canterbury Geoffrey Fisher famously said, “We have no doctrine of our own. We only possess the Catholic doctrine of the Catholic Church enshrined in the Catholic Creeds, and these creeds we hold without addition or diminution. We stand firm on that rock.” And to that we might add that Anglicanism has no Scriptures of its own, no sacraments of its own, no holy orders of its own – just those of the Catholic Church that we have received. Fisher was right, as Anglicans we have no faith of our own.

Like the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church, orthodox Anglicans uphold the historic faith and order of the undivided Church. We are nothing more nor less than Catholic Christians, seeking to be faithful to the teaching of the early Church Fathers and the great Ecumenical Councils of the first centuries of Christian witness. With St. Vincent of Lerins, we affirm that the Catholic faith is that which has been believed “everywhere, always, and by all.” Wherever you find departures from this given faith and received order, you will find sectarianism, heresy and error.

With this in mind, we understand that the divided and fractured nature of Anglicanism today has been caused by heretical innovations and departures from the Church’s historic faith and practice. Two Provinces are especially to blame – the Anglican Church of Canada and the Protestant Episcopal Church in the USA. It is our Christian duty to speak out and stand against the errors advocated by these Provinces because they lead others into falsehood and away from salvation. All this to say nothing of the fact that deviations from the historic teaching of the Church have led to a serious state of brokenness and impaired Communion throughout Anglicanism.

In the Diocese of Fort Worth we stand against that. Our commitment as an orthodox Anglican diocese is to the faith and order of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. We seek to do nothing other than maintain and propagate the faith once delivered to the saints, which is rooted in Holy Scriptures and one with the Apostolic Teaching of the ancient church.

“Anglican/Episcopalian.” It means the same thing. Not long ago I saw the sign out front of St. James Church, Piccadilly, in London that used this exact phrase to describe their affiliation as a parish of the Church of England.

In addition, as you go around the world, you find that TEC is not the only Province calling itself The Episcopal Church. The name is used in the Sudan, the Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East, Scotland, Cuba, and the Philippines, just to name a few. It simply will not do for TEC to try to claim ownership and exclusive rights to the name “Episcopal”!

Denominational lines in Christendom are much wider than our adversaries seem to recognize. On a global basis, denominations are broad families of Christians who come from various historic traditions, based on common beliefs and practices. There are Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and so on, but within each of these groups there are a number of different jurisdictions. So let us say it once again: We have not joined another denomination, but remain part of the Anglican/Episcopalian denomination.

Let’s further illustrate this point by looking at some key legal, church documents pertaining to all of this. The Preamble of TEC’s Constitution says:

The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, otherwise known as The Episcopal Church (which name is hereby recognized as also designating the Church), is a constituent member of the Anglican Communion, a Fellowship within the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, of those duly constituted Dioceses, Provinces, and regional Churches in communion with the See of Canterbury, upholding and propagating the historic Faith and Order as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer.

Article I of our own Constitution of the Diocese of Fort Worth on “Anglican Identity” states:

The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth is a constituent member of the Anglican Communion, a Fellowship within the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, consisting of those duly constituted Dioceses, Provinces and regional Churches in communion with the See of Canterbury, upholding and propagating the historic Faith and Order as set forth in the Old and New Testaments and expressed in the Book of Common Prayer.

The Province of the Southern Cone has a similar statement in its Constitution:

The Anglican Church of the Southern Cone is established as a Province of the Anglican Communion, a branch of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church which professes the historic Faith and Order as contained in the Holy Scriptures, to conserve the Doctrine, Sacraments, Ministry and Discipline of the Anglican Church and as observed in the Book of Common Prayer and the administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies, in the form and manner of Consecration, Ordination or Institution of Bishops, Presbyters and Deacons and the Articles of Religion maintains the ecclesiastical unity of the Dioceses and Provinces legitimately established and that are in communion with the See of Canterbury.

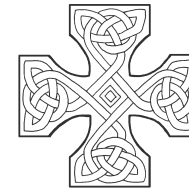
Before the “recent unpleasantness,” clergy and laity transferred freely from one Province to the other – bishops included – as circumstances required. Since our realignment in 2008, we continue to use the same Prayer Book, and Hymnal, buildings and polity, just as we did before. Who we are has not changed! Many of our people still call themselves Episcopalians – just not the kind that follow the innovations of the General Convention Church.

The churches of this diocese assert that we have “left” no one. They remain member churches in union with the Bishop and Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth, founded in 1982. All that our Diocese has done, acting by and through its duly constituted Annual Convention, is to amend our own Constitution and Canons in accordance with the procedures set forth in the governing documents of the Diocese.

And likewise, our diocesan church property has not gone and is not going anywhere! It remains in the name of the Diocesan Corporation, just as it has since the beginning, for the use of our congregations. The question being litigated right now is going to be whether TEC determines the identity of the persons elected to govern the Corporation and the Diocese, or whether this Diocese, pursuant to our Constitution and Canons, makes that determination.

It is clear from the above that both charity and truth require our adversaries to stop this silly little game of accusation that we “have left the Church.” Our time would be better spent praying for the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ than casting stones across our divisions.

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Part 2

We are Catholic Christians

In part 1 of this reflection, I refuted the allegation of our adversaries that this diocese has “left the Church and joined another denomination.”

On the contrary, we remain members of the worldwide Anglican Communion, which is a global fellowship of Christians in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury, sharing the same spiritual, sacramental, theological and liturgical heritage. This “fellowship” is described in the constitutions of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the USA, the Anglican Province of the Southern Cone, and the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth, as Anglican. The term is synonymous with Episcopalian and the Diocese of Fort Worth has not ceased being that. We are, by virtue of our place in the Province of the Southern Cone, constituent members of the Anglican Communion.

So much for the claim that we have “joined another denomination.” But on further reflection we see that there is a basic fallacy in assuming that Anglicans are part of a denomination in the first place. We are not. We are members of the Catholic Church, not a denomination.

I invite us all to look beyond the surface level of our Anglican identity, with its temptation to denominationalism, and go back to our heritage as catholic Christians. In those same constitutional provisions that I quoted in the previous article, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the USA, the Anglican Province of the Southern Cone, and the Diocese of Fort Worth, all declare that we are a fellowship within, or a branch, of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, maintaining and propagating the faith and order of the historic Church throughout the ages.

This means that we are not members of a sectarian, Protestant denomination, but of the Catholic Church. Remember, the Church of England, which came to be known as Anglican, existed before the Reformation