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## *The Vigor of Anglican Christianity*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,  
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We're off and running. Last Sunday morning, during the Dean's Forum, I began an eight-week series on "The Vigor of Anglican Christianity." Many of you were there, and you learned-I hope-the primary mantra of the course: "Henry VIII did not start the Episcopal Church! (or the Anglican Church!)"

Who did start the Anglican Church? Was it Elizabeth I, or maybe Hilda of Whitby? (Who was Hilda of Whitby?) No; it was, of course, Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, who started preaching a gospel of repentance and grace to some back country back in the first century. His followers were earnest, if a little unformed; they were truly converted with the news that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. With that confirmation of grace and hope, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, they continued that gospel beyond their homeland. An old antagonist, Saul of Tarsus, was converted; and he changed his name. As "Paul," he spread that gospel even further through the Roman Empire.

Probably through Roman soldiers who were somehow Christian, that gospel reached the farthest regions of the Roman Empire, the Islands of Britannia. Christianity grew in the British Isles by freely adapting local customs, honoring indigenous religious instincts, and being so far away from the centralized structures of Rome.

What developed in the lands that would be England, Ireland, and Scotland was a Celtic Christianity which was different from the Christianity of Rome. Styles of dress were different, but so were such things as computing the date of Easter. By the seventh century, there were at least two different Christian traditions. In 664, at the Synod of Whitby (where the Abbess Hilda actually supervised both women and men), the King decided that the date of Easter would follow the Roman rather than the Celtic custom.

Did that change things? No, a particularly Anglican Christianity continued to develop both within the Roman Church and without it. England would see continuing conflict over the issue of spiritual and temporal authority. Were English clergy to be obedient to a foreign pope or to their country's king? Thomas a Beckett would lose his life over that issue.

Most of us remember that Henry VIII had personal pressing needs which put him at cross purposes with the Pope. But we may not know that Henry VIII never really changed the Roman character of church liturgy and organization. His was just another story of English conflict over authority. If any one person other than Jesus was responsible for the character of the Anglican tradition of Christianity as know it today, that person has to be Queen Elizabeth. She honored both the local expressions of Christian authority (the Protestant dimensions) and the ancient councils, creeds and traditions (the Catholic dimensions). When Anglicans in the American colonies found themselves citizens of a new country, the United States of America, they kept their Anglican customs but separated themselves from the actual authority and supervision of the Church of England; again, this development was a story about authority.

In whatever generation of church conflict we find ourselves, the Anglican tradition offers a style of graceful resolution that honors the universal and the particular-the global and the local. Anglican Christianity contains some colorful and faithful characters. This is the history and tradition that we will be studying in the next seven weeks during the Dean's Forum, through the season of Lent. Join us!

Sam Candler signature



The Very Rev. Sam Candler

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