
Rowan Williams On Ego

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

The question was a deliberately probing one, addressed to the Archbishop of Canterbury: "To what extent can you say that 'Ego' has played a large role in the recent disputations and conflicts of the Anglican Communion?"

The question came from a new friend of mine who is actually from Canada. It was his and my privilege to be among a group of Anglicans committed to supporting the work of the Anglican Communion and spending a little time with the Archbishop of Canterbury last week.

In response to that question, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, was obviously not about to point fingers or to single out leaders who might fit a description called "most egotistical!" In fact, he smiled in careful consideration before answering the question; but he did answer it.

"I have what I call "the Williams theory of Ego," he said. (I am paraphrasing my own remembrance of his answer.) Here, he laughed and playfully slapped his wrist, in acknowledging his own ego by having grandiosely titled his answer "the Williams theory."

"Everyone has an ego," he explained. "But there are two sorts of "Ego." There is the sanctified ego, and there is the unsanctified ego. The unsanctified ego, he said, speaks strongly; but that ego ends up leaving everyone around feeling, somehow, less. Less confident, less holy, less good, less who they really are.

On the other hand, Archbishop Williams continued, the "sanctified ego" is like the ego of someone like Desmond Tutu. Everyone knows that Desmond loves being Desmond. He has a strong ego. But the result of his presence is that one feels more of who they really are. One feels more confident, more holy, more who they really are. The sanctified ego empowers other people to be true to who they really are. The sanctified ego builds up other people.

Again, I am paraphrasing these remarks. Perhaps Rowan Williams has written of this "theory" more clearly elsewhere. But his short answer stays with me this week.

Is my presence empowering to others, or does my presence lessen others? That is a good question for each of us as we try to lead a holy life. Each of us should have an ego. And I hope that our ego, our sense of self, is strong and resilient. But I also pray that we learn to turn our egos to God for sanctification.

Is my ego empowering to others, or does my ego lessen others? That is actually the right question for any of us involved in conflict. At one level, Archbishop Rowan Williams did not directly answer the question about conflict in the Anglican Communion. But his answer suggests the question that any of us should ask, in whatever conflict we might be involved: "Does my ego build up others, or does my ego lessen others?"

Sam Candler signature



The Very Rev. Sam Candler

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