
Please Let Us Talk About Politics

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

Something is wrong with the way in which many of us are being forced to talk about politics these days. Or, I should say, something is wrong with the way in which many of us are being asked *not* to talk about politics.

It may be that faithful churchgoers have always been careful about how to talk about politics in church. But, recent attitudes seem more strident and combative. The tone of much recent political conversation appears to have been set by forces who want the public forever pitted against each other. Those forces are certain politicians, of course; but those forces are also certain media outlets, and certain pollsters, and even certain churches. Those forces are also social media algorithms, who show us on our devices mostly only that information with which they figure we already agree.

It is hard to venture any political opinion at all, without being branded a certain way, and then being ridiculed by those who are oppositely branded. Thus, many even-minded people have been asked, over and over again, simply to be quiet at family gatherings, or even at church gatherings. “Let’s not talk about politics,” our friends politely ask.

There is something wrong with this. For one, we are giving up our faithful responsibility, and our faithful desire, for education and informed opinion. Surely one of the unfortunate features of our present political landscape is lack of education. I mean this, of course, on both the right and the left, from both the so-called conservative and so-called liberal side of our political debates.

We have always had a political left and a political right in our culture, and in our church. And, for the most part, the Christian Church—certainly the established and seasoned and catholic (small “c”) denominations—have been places where conservative and liberal members alike have enjoyed the challenge and responsibility of relating faith and politics. But even those seasoned, “small-c catholic,” churches seem to be losing that comprehensive position.

I realize, and understand, that institutions are changing, if not collapsing. The traditional church is often named as one of those collapsing institutions, though I disagree with that assessment. But I worry about other “institutions,” too, which are not so easily named. In my opinion, traditional political parties sure look to be changing even more than the church. And what about the fine institutions of law enforcement and civic clubs? And what about our entertainment institutions – movies and television and internet and professional sports businesses? They are all types of institutions who are changing dramatically.

But the institution, or cultural assumption, which I particularly consider is education. Our institutions and expectations and assumptions of education—public and private—are changing. In particular, I wonder how much our citizens appreciate and desire a full, comprehensive, and challenging education.

The quickness and speed with which trivial “factoids” are delivered to our screens and devices works against the need that truth has for time. Yes, much truth—real truth—takes time. Truth takes time to receive fully, and it takes time to deliver fully. Fourth graders do not master American history, though they can appreciate elements of it. Educated citizens learn past the fourth grade level, and they actually learn to appreciate other points of view—even the uneducated points of view. Christians learn early the basics of our faith, but we take lifetimes to be fully formed by that faith. It takes a lifetime to be

educated.

My point is that we require some common assumptions, and common education, and common hope, to talk fruitfully about politics. The Christian Church, and communities of good faith, have often been the most important places where that conversation can take place. In the Church, we have set our own standards of common conversation. Let us not fall prey to those forces beyond the Church which seek to divide us and define us in different ways.

The Church has an important and sensitive role to play in our ongoing conversations about politics and about education. Many of you have spoken to me recently about that very role. Some of you are meeting in smaller and quieter groups to explore Christian faith and politics together. I hope those groups continue, and I hope others join those groups. I hope we start new groups. Our country, and state, and city, will always need people of faith who are willing to be brave and hopeful, even when we have legitimate political disagreements. People of faith are willing to be graceful, and excellent, and hospitable, even when others want us to be quick and partisan. Please let us talk about politics without accommodating ourselves to the prevailing divisions of the day. We have centuries of tradition, and centuries of education, in doing just that.

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

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