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Why We Left the Episcopal Church

By The Rev. John Yates and Os Guinness
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When even President Gerald Ford's funeral at Washington National Cathedral is not exempt from comment about the crisis in the Episcopal Church, we believe it is time to set the record straight as to why our church and so many others around the country have [severed ties](#) with the Episcopal Church. Fundamental to a liberal view of freedom is the right of a person or group to define themselves, to speak for themselves and to not be dehumanized by the definitions and distortions of others. This right we request even of those who differ from us.

The core issue in why we left is not women's leadership. It is not "Episcopalians against equality," as the headline on a [recent Post op-ed](#) by Harold Meyerson put it. It is not a "leftward" drift in the church. It is not even primarily ethical -- though the ordination of a practicing homosexual as bishop was the flash point that showed how far the repudiation of Christian orthodoxy had gone.

The core issue for us is theological: the intellectual integrity of faith in the modern world. It is thus a matter of faithfulness to the lordship of Jesus, whom we worship and follow. The American Episcopal Church no longer believes the historic, orthodox Christian faith common to all believers. Some leaders expressly deny the central articles of the faith -- saying that traditional theism is "dead," the incarnation is "nonsense," the resurrection of Jesus is a fiction, the understanding of the cross is "a barbarous idea," the Bible is "pure propaganda" and so on. Others simply say the creed as poetry or with their fingers crossed.

It would be easy to parody the "Alice in Wonderland" surrealism of Episcopal leaders openly denying what their faith once believed, celebrating what Christians have gone to the stake to resist -- and still staying on as leaders. But this is a serious matter.

First, Episcopal revisionism abandons the fidelity of faith. The Hebrew scriptures link matters of truth to a relationship with God. They speak of apostasy as adultery -- a form of betrayal as treacherous as a husband cheating on his wife.

Second, Episcopal revisionism negates the authority of faith. The "sola scriptura" ("by the scriptures alone") doctrine of the Reformation church has been abandoned for the "sola cultura" (by the culture alone) way of the modern church. No longer under authority, the Episcopal Church today is either its own authority or finds its authority in the shifting winds of intellectual and social fashion -- which is to say it has no authority.

Third, Episcopal revisionism severs the continuity of faith. Cutting itself off from the universal faith that spans the centuries and the continents, it becomes culturally captive to one culture and one time. While professing tolerance and inclusiveness, certain Episcopal attitudes toward fellow believers around the world, who make up a majority of the Anglican family, have been arrogant and even racist.

Fourth, Episcopal revisionism destroys the credibility of faith. There is so little that is distinctively Christian left in the theology of some Episcopal leaders, such as the former bishop of Newark, that a skeptic can say, as Oscar Wilde said to a cleric of his time, "I not only follow you, I precede you." It is no accident that orthodox churches are growing and that almost all the great converts to the Christian faith in the past century, such as G.K. Chesterton and C.S. Lewis, have been attracted to full-blooded orthodoxy, not to revisionism. The prospect for the Episcopal Church, already evident in many dioceses, is inevitable withering and decline.

Fifth, Episcopal revisionism obliterates the very identity of faith. When the great truths of the Bible and the creeds are abandoned and there is no limit to what can be believed in their place, then the point is reached when there is little identifiably Christian in Episcopal revisionism. Would that Episcopal leaders showed the same zeal for their faith that they do for their property. If the present decline continues, all that will remain of a once strong church will be empty buildings, kept going by the finances, though not the faith, of the fathers.

These are the outrages we protest. These are the infidelities that drive us to separate. These are the real issues to be debated. We remain Anglicans but leave the Episcopal Church because the Episcopal Church first left the historic faith. Like our spiritual forebears in the Reformation, "Here we stand. So help us God. We can do no other."

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