

Anglicanism: Protestant or Catholic?

The following excerpts are from The Primacy of the Bishop of Rome and the Ecumenical Dialogue by the Roman Catholic Franciscan theologian Father Adriano Garuti, O.F.M., a member of the staff of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the official Curial "doctrine department" which is responsible for the maintenance of theological orthodoxy and obedience to Papal teaching throughout the Roman Catholic Church.

The break [of the Anglican Church in the 16th century] with the See of Rome was without a doubt connected to, but not caused by, the divorce of King Henry VIII...The break actually found fertile ground in the widespread anticlericalism directed toward the Curia [the Vatican bureaucracy], and even more so in the awareness of the Church in England of its national specificity and its autonomy, already present in the Middle Ages and reinforced in the age of humanism...Indeed...under Henry VIII the break with Rome did not involve any doctrinal innovations.

The cornerstones of the [independent Anglican Church] were the *Book of Common Prayer* and the *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*, which rooted the Church in the life of the one nation. Together with the Ordinal, the said Articles constitute also the definitive doctrinal foundation of the Church of England in the initial period, even though they have never been considered a rule of faith.

The "Thirty-Nine Articles" constitute an authoritative exposition of the entire ecclesial body, but they do not assume a normative character with respect to the Anglican faith comparable to that exercised in the Roman Catholic sphere by the decrees and canons of the Council of Trent, and they never claimed to be a complete formulation of the faith of the church.

It cannot be said, however, that the Anglican tradition as a whole intended to break with the greater Catholic tradition with regard to the ministerial hierarchy and its functions: the undeniable break with Rome did not mean a break with catholicity, but rather a desire for reform of the Church from within, with a view to establishing a Church that would be *simul catholica et reformata* [both Catholic and reformed]...as demonstrated by the different editions of the *Book of Common Prayer*—which have given the Anglican Church the character of a *via media* between [Roman] Catholicism and Protestantism or as a *bridge Church* that intended to remain "Catholic but not Roman."

This became most apparent during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, who was looking for a *modus vivendi* with the papacy and who personally inclined toward an Anglo-Catholicism.... This intermediate position was characteristic of Anglicanism in its subsequent history as well.... It does not seem therefore in keeping with reality to label the Anglican Church as *Protestant*.

In reality, the Reform in England...did not seem inclined to renounce the principle based on an Episcopal foundation of the apostolicity of the Church. Therefore it cannot be considered as a variant of the phenomenon that took place, for example, in Germany or in Scotland, since the final separation of the Anglican Church from the Church of Rome was, in many respects, more similar to the separation from Rome of the Eastern Orthodox Churches than to that of the Lutheran or Calvinist Churches of Europe.

Laden with ambiguities, it was more a political than a theological separation, determined more by

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the temporal jurisdiction reclaimed from the Bishop of Rome than by the dogmas proclaimed by the See of Rome. ...It is necessary to bear in mind that the failure to recognize the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome over the Church of England constituted more of a political than a theological conflict. One could say that, at the most profound level, it was never the idea of the Anglicans to reject the Bishop of Rome, and even at the time of Henry VIII the rejection of papal supremacy was not a rejection of the bishop of Rome as such. It was rather a rejection motivated by the belief that he was virtually the prisoner of those European kings and princes who were determined to destroy England. This places the problem in a somewhat different light. The authority of the Roman Pontiff was considered, however, as more patriarchal than papal and therefore "foreign," irrelevant, and subject to the crown.

Thus it was a matter of a tacit opposition, based on theological and historical motives, to the view—typical of the time—of papal supremacy and of the temporal and spiritual jurisdiction of the Pope, [in

the Anglican Church's view] for lack of a foundation in Scripture, the Fathers, and early Church history that could vindicate the claim that the primacy was *de fide* or necessary to the essence of the true Church.

Therefore it can be concluded that Anglicanism—except for rare occasions—rejects not the papacy as such, but rather the supremacy of Rome; not the *principalitas*, but the universal sovereignty that concentrates all power in a sort of universal bishop. In reality one of the cardinal principles of the English reform was precisely the identification of the primacy in a regional or, more specifically, a national context.

A primacy of order or of dignity is thus recognized, which nevertheless is not always traced back to the will or direct institution of Christ. Moreover, the papacy must be exercised in a markedly collegial context and is limited to the role of the Roman Pontiff as the Patriarch of the West.