

# Anglican Claims and the Old Religion

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## CHAPTER I. THE ANGLICAN "CONTINUITY" THEORY

Australia is the newest of new worlds: but her people are deeply aware - and, in general, proud - of their links with a mother country of ancient tradition. They owe allegiance to a monarchy which is older than any hereditary Kingship now in Europe: they have Parliamentary institutions which are patterned on the Parliamentary Constitution of England, which has grown up through centuries of development, without any radical breach with past history. Our law is English law, which has evolved continuously in the same fashion.

The patriotic Australian, like the patriotic Englishman, though he may be a radical, is not a "revolutionary" in the sense of wishing to destroy this inherited bond with the past. He believes that there is something very valuable in the continuity of a system which preserves the ancient essential loyalties, while it is still flexible to the requirements of a changing world. The example of other Western countries shows him that a working community organisation of this kind cannot be created artificially: that the habit of legality, of universal allegiance to a political system and readiness to act within its framework, is a root of freedom which cannot be pulled up with impunity.

It may well be that the rushing tide of revolutionary change in our own time will impose a strain to which even British adaptability will prove unequal at last: but, so far, the essential structure has survived even the fury of war which spread death and destruction through the homeland and changed the shape of our own Australian world. The imposing facade of the free British system still stands in a world shaken with war and revolution: its peoples confess proudly the solidarity of their institution with those existing through a history of splendid achievement.

### Anglican Conservatism

This reflection on the English outlook is necessary if we are to understand certain claims made on behalf of the Anglican Church - the Church which has been the chief vehicle of Christian tradition in England since the seventeenth century; and which is regarded, even today, as expressing most fully the religious viewpoint of the English and their daughter - nations. These peoples love to think of themselves as the political inheritors of Magna Carta, of the rights secured by the 17th century Revolution, and gradually extended to all classes by the series of Reform Acts which began in 1832. They tend to ignore the fact that there are certain points at which the "natural" development was modified by quite violent changes, and that there are distinct cracks which have been neatly patched over by the Whig historians and lawyers.

It is the same desire for solidarity with the past which leads adherents of the Church officially "Established" in England to attach some importance to the claim of "continuity" in the sphere of religious tradition. The Anglican likes to believe that the ancient parish churches and cathedrals of England are truly his own: that the Anglican Bishops are true and lawful successors of the old English hierarchy who sat in the thrones of St. Augustine, St. Cuthbert, St. Chad and the other holy founders who first brought the Gospel to the Angles and Saxons. In order to do so, however, it is necessary to "reinterpret" the greatest revolution, of all the English nation's history - the English Reformation.

### "Rags of Popery"

This claim to traditional "legitimacy" has been assisted by the fact that the outward organisation of the new Church establishment in the 16th century retained a good deal of the ecclesiastical "machinery" of the past. The former names of high Church officers were retained - they occupied the ancient Sees and used the ancient symbols. The new service book in English adorned with the dignity and splendour of Cranmer's prose - incorporated traditional elements largely, while purging out the Catholic teachings denied by the Reformers. The festivals of the old religion were mostly retained, and the saints were celebrated, if no longer prayed to. Indeed, the lack of logic in the new Prayer Book is to be attributed chiefly to the desire to retain ancient words and uses - we see revolution and tradition mingled in the strangest fashion in the address to the Communicant, which combined two sentences drawn up to express conflicting doctrines.

These "Rags of Popery" in Church of England rites were pleasing to Queen Elizabeth, but exasperating to the stern

Puritans, whose inspiration came from Calvinist Geneva. Their spirit was that of the fierce and implacable Scot, John Knox, who said, "burn the rookeries (monasteries) and the rooks will fly out," and who cared as little for the tradition of the Middle Ages, as the Bolsheviks for that of the Holy Russia of the Czars. I intend to show, in the course of this study, how absolute and complete the spiritual breach with the past has been in English religion, despite elaborate official pretences of legal continuity: but it is important to realise the real desire for legitimacy which lies behind the zealot's attempts to deny the radical cleavage.

### **"Modern Romanism"**

We must also understand the reaction of the Anglican, both English and Australian, to what he calls "Modern Romanism" - and his denunciation of it as an intruder and stranger, despite the Papal origins of English Christianity, and the long ages of English loyalty to the See of Peter. For the "Second Spring" of Catholicism in England has not been due to the work of the tiny remnant which preserved the traditional Faith through the darkness of the 18th century; it began through the influx of a new Irish population, combined with the enthusiasm of a group of converts, who derived much of their inspiration from abroad. The development of ideas, doctrine and organisation in the Catholic Church since the 16th century has gone on outside the life of England: there is much that is strange and new, without connection with historic English Catholicism. The new Catholic hierarchs were not allowed to assert their claim to the English heritage by using the old Catholic episcopal titles. There are new religious Orders, too - Jesuits, Redemptorists, Passionists, and many others, who played no part in old England. Even the liturgy has been modified - the old English "Uses" of Sarum, Lincoln and the rest having been suppressed in favour of the Roman Missal now used uniformly in the Latin West. Irish descended priests - Irish descended parishioners, with a sprinkling of converts - Roman liturgy. "What," asks the English or Anglo-Australian nationalist, "has *this* Church to do with our life or traditions?" Names such as "the Italian Mission," "Modern Romanism," express this feeling - that the Church, returned from her long exile, has become an alien in her former home.

### **The Theory of Continuity**

The theory of continuity, as I have indicated, was put forward in order to explain away and minimise the fact that English religion has suffered a radical revolution which has changed the whole character of the nation's life. Now, the great and vital change which made the others possible was the separation of England from Catholic unity by the denial of the Pope's authority. The "Compleat" Protestant will be satisfied to claim that this Roman authority was a usurpation first made perhaps, at an early date, whereby the organisation of the Church's life has been perverted, its freedom destroyed, and its teaching corrupted. This is not enough for the Anglican, however. He wishes to show that the Papal authority was usurped, not only in the Church generally, but in the English Church especially. If he can show that the Christianity to which England was converted was something other than "Romanism," then the formation of a new national Church in the 16th century can be upheld, not as a successful revolution repudiating the English past, but as a restoration of liberties lost in the later Middle Ages, and a purification from superstitions which, had gathered around true religion in that time.

"Romanism," according to this theory, was a phase through which the Anglican Church passed in its earlier development - a stage which may have been inevitable, and even beneficial for a time, but which she has now outgrown. As the nation attained full self-consciousness, she threw off the swaddling clothes of childhood and resumed her birthright of religious freedom - just as she resumed, in the Stewart age, the Parliamentary liberties set aside during the Tudor period in order that the national structure might be centralised and ordered under strong government.

### **"Ecclesia Anglicana" in History**

This theory has to face the very grave difficulty that the whole history of the pre-Reformation "Ecclesia Anglicana" is closely identified with that of the Western Church as a whole. That Roman authority was continuously asserted and recognised in England is unquestionable: that there was no variation from the teaching of the Roman Church is equally certain. Between the days of Pelagius in the Roman-British Church, and those of Wyclif in the fourteenth century, England was not affected with any heresy of the least importance. Finally the whole history of the Reformation shows both the clergy and the mass of the people very reluctant to depart from Catholic orthodoxy.

The Anglican will reply, however, that in every period the "national" claim of the Church to independence can be seen

running like a thread, and that it is asserted against Rome from time to time by the clergy, and more often by kings and barons. He lays emphasis on those facts which suggest divergence between the English Church and Rome, whether liturgical or political, and he interprets them in accordance with his theory.

So, in the first stages of English Christian history, Anglicans are anxious to minimise the importance of the Roman Mission of St. Augustine and St. Paulinus, and to emphasise the part played by St. Aidan and the Celtic monks. The reason is that the former mission was directly sent by Pope Gregory I and held its authority from the Holy See, while the latter belonged to a Church which had been cut off from contact with Rome and developed independently as regards its rites and discipline. If English Christianity can be presented as a Celtic foundation, the acceptance of the Roman discipline and rite at the Whithy Synod can be made to appear as the imposition of an alien authority.

During the Saxon period, the organisation of the Church was much relaxed, and the Canon Law loosely applied, while the appointment of ecclesiastical rulers was assumed by the kings. Hence, the Norman Conquest, which tightened up discipline, reforming the Church on the Continental model, can be claimed as a new interference from without with the national rights of the English Church - though it is generally allowed that the results were in many ways good. After this "Roman" authority is increased by the new claim to rights over episcopal appointments, and by constant Papal interference in the working of English ecclesiastical life. It culminates, in the time of John and Henry III, in the "Papal tyranny" of Pope Innocent III and his successors, over the English Church. Its "liberties," however, are asserted in Magna Carta, and defended by such men as Archbishop Langton and Bishop Grosseteste, who resisted the Papal tax-gatherers.

The refusal of homage by Edward I and his anti-clerical legislation, are hailed as triumphs for the "Anglican" spirit of opposition to Roman Claims; later, the acts of "Provisors" and "Praemunire" attempted - though without great effect - to get rid of the control of the Pope in English Church affairs. The work of Wyclif, the "Morning Star" of the Reformation, set the seed of a purified Christian Church, which was destined, after germinating in obscurity, to ripen in the sixteenth century. The spirit of Lollardy, growing side by side with Nationalism amid the Roman corruptions of the old Church, prepared her for the change which was to restore her true form. From that change she emerged still traditional, but purified, Catholic yet liberal, incarnating the tolerant and comprehensive religious spirit of the nation, standing as a conciliatory "Via Media" between "Roman" Catholicism and Protestantism.

### **The Points of Criticism**

Now, in criticising this "continuity" theory of Anglicanism, it will be necessary, *first*, to show that the origin of English Christianity came from sources which acknowledged the authority of the Holy See; *secondly*, that the controversies of the Middle Ages on purely political and legal matters did not affect the general recognition of Papal authority in spiritual matters, any more than Franco's disagreement with Pius XII about the appointment of Spanish Bishops affected his own Catholic Faith or that of the Church of Spain. Finally, it must be demonstrated that the Reformation was not the reconstruction of the ancient Catholic Church, but its destruction - by savage violence - and replacement by a new State ecclesiastical organisation, whose connection with the old religion consisted chiefly in the fact that - like the Babylonians who carried the temple vessels from Judah - it "inherited" the property of the Church by usurpation.

After this, I shall show that the true tradition of the ancient "Ecclesia Anglicana" was maintained by the witness of the English "Recusants" - the small, faithful remnant who unceasingly protested against the revolution of the sixteenth century.

## **CHAPTER II.**

### **THE EARLY ENGLISH CHURCH**

The beginnings of the British Church are wrapped in legend. Its origins have been variously ascribed to St. Joseph of Arimathea and to Pope Eleutherius (173-188), but few traces of British Christianity have been found by modern research before the reign of Constantine. English tradition, however, preserves the names of a few saints, notably the martyr, St. Alban; and British bishops are recorded as having taken part in several early Western Councils. In the fifth century, a British cleric, Pelagius, taught a heretical doctrine about Divine Grace, which St. Germanus came from Gaul to combat. With the Saxon Conquest the eastern and central parts of the island lapsed into paganism, apparently, as the Roman culture was wiped out: but Christianity lived on among the Western Celts in Wales, Cornwall, Cumbria and part of South-west Scotland.

## **The Conversion of the Saxons**

The reconversion of the land was carried out in the seventh century A.D. by missionaries from two sources, Rome and Ireland. The Roman mission, sent by Pope Gregory the Great, with St. Augustine at its head began preaching in Kent and the neighbouring kingdoms of the south, and proceeded to a notable victory in the north in the conversion of King Edwin of Northumbria by St. Paulinus. But this success proved only temporary; at Edwin's death the missionaries were expelled from the north, and there was a widespread lapse to paganism.

About the Roman character of this mission there can be no doubt. As Abbe Duchesne says, the new Church was "clearly a colony of the Roman Church." The very names and arrangement of the churches in Canterbury, where St. Augustine fixed his See, were imitated from those in Rome. Controversy, however, has been raised about the character of the Christianity reached by the Irish Monks who next entered the field. In 565 they had set up a monastery at Iona in Scotland; and after the fall of Edwin men from Iona entered Northumbria, headed by St. Aidan, and converted St. Oswald, its king. They founded the Abbey of Lindisfarne, on Holy Island, off the mouth of the Tyne, which became the great missionary centre of the north.

## **The Celtic Churches and Rome**

These Celtic churches, of Gallic and British origin, differed in many ways from the Church of Rome in their discipline and liturgical observance; and these differences have been magnified to the point of claiming them as separate churches, independent of the Holy See. It may be pointed out, however, that the issue of Papal supremacy was never raised at all between the Celtic and Roman clergy in England. The Irish Church owed its foundation chiefly to the great St. Patrick, whose "Armagh Canon" recognised Rome as the final court of appeal in all religious controversies, and whose establishment of the Primatial See was only carried out after a visit to Rome in the reign of Leo I, in order to secure authority for his acts. The great Irish missionary, St. Columbanus, is strong in his assertion of the Roman claims. In a letter to Pope Boniface, he writes, "We Irish, though dwelling at the far ends of the earth, are all disciples of St. Peter and St. Paul... We are bound to the Chair of Peter... on account of the two apostles of Christ, you (the Pope) are almost celestial, and Rome is the head of the whole world, and of the Churches." Cardinal Gilroy and Cardinal Griffin themselves could hardly go further than describing the Pope as "almost celestial"!

There is no evidence that St. Columba or St. Aidan held any different doctrine from this as to Roman supremacy: and the matter is not mentioned by St. Bede as having been discussed by St. Augustine at his meeting with the Welsh bishops. Had there been any question of the spiritual authority of Rome, the envoy of the Pope himself would hardly have allowed it to be passed over in silence!

In the final decision between the Celtic and Roman rites - at Whitby in 664 - St. Colman was the Celtic protagonist. From the story of their debate given by St. Bede, it is clear that he fully assented to the claim of Petrine supremacy made by his opponent, St. Wilfrid, and that he acknowledged St. Columba's authority as inferior to that of St. Peter - even though he would not abandon his customs. Indeed, in the early days of missionary labour, the controversies between the two groups did not prevent inter-communion and peaceable co-operation. It was the practical inconvenience arising out of the double observance which led to disputes, later inflamed by a certain ill feeling. Those who read the pages of St. Bede, the chronicler of the English missions, and himself a fervent "Roman," cannot fail to be struck by his moderation and justice to the memory of the Celts. He makes not the least suggestion that they were "heretics," though he regarded the obstinacy of some of them about their customs as a grave error.

## **The Questions at Issue**

The questions between the Celtic and Roman missionaries were not, then, concerned with faith in the unity of the Church under the See of St. Peter, but simply with differences of custom and observance. The Churches of the West, in these early times, while united in their belief, varied a good deal in their rites of worship. That such differences of rite have nothing to do with orthodoxy is made clear, even today, by the existence of the Catholic "Uniate" Churches of the East, whose ceremonial rites, Liturgical languages, vestments and Church law are all different from those of the Roman Church, with which they are in full communion. The ancient Celtic divergence's were slight in comparison with those of these Oriental Churches: they had arisen largely because of the isolation in which they had developed during the age of

confusion which followed the collapse of the Western Empire. For the rest, while Rome's final authority in faith and discipline was always maintained as a principle of orthodox Faith, it was only slowly that regular Papal administrative control grew up, even in the West: in the East, the older Patriarchates were always completely self-contained for purposes of ordinary government. It is essential that the principle of the supreme spiritual authority of the See of St. Peter - as testified by a long series of early witnesses - should not be confused with the practice of centralised Papal monarchy as it grew up in the West later on. The powers then exercised had always been inherent in the Roman See in virtue of the unique status given to St. Peter by Christ; but their unfolding occurred in a natural way, according to the laws of human historical development.

There were three main differences which caused the dispute in the English churches: the date of the observance of Easter, the form of the tonsure used by clerics, and some obscure difference of rite in the administration of Baptism.

The Celtic churches still adhered to a method of calculating the date of Easter which had been generally abandoned in the west after 457; while in Rome, a new system had been introduced from Alexandria in 525. This Easter question was unimportant in theory, but in practice a great nuisance - as, for instance, in the Court of Oswy of Northumbria, where the Queen (who was from the south) kept the Roman Easter and her husband the Celtic. In the matter of the tonsure, the Romans shaved the crown, the Celts the front of the head from ear to ear - a custom declared (probably untruly) to have been derived from the pagan Druids. Neither party was willing to abandon its customs; to the Irish, in particular, every detail of the tradition of St. Columba was sacred; and in communities where all life is regulated by ancient tradition, changes assume an importance which can hardly be imagined by modern men, living in a world of flux. Accurate, scientific history was yet unborn; it is worth noticing, in the matter of Easter, that neither St. Wilfrid nor St. Colman knew the real origins of the observances for which they disputed - so each of them attributed to his own custom an Apostolic character and sanctity which neither really possessed, the Celt claiming an Eastern origin for his usage which belonged, in fact, to the Roman.

In this matter the Papacy was concerned simply for a convenient uniformity, urging the Roman use when advice was sought, but without any attempt to go further than exhortation.

### **The Work of St. Theodore**

The old English Church came into existence at a time when there was no English nation, or even the framework of such a thing; and the unity of England herself was mainly due to the civilising and organising work which the Church achieved.

The greatest of Church organisers was St. Theodore of Tarsus - a Greek of St. Paul's own city. His very presence in the See of Canterbury testifies, first to the non-national character of the Church he ruled; and secondly, to the solidarity then existing between England, Rome and the East in matters of Faith and Church authority. It was St. Theodore who created a regular organisation in what had hitherto been the English mission field, fixing the Bishoprics and dividing up St. Wilfrid's enormous See of York. The quarrel about this question between the two saints resulted in one of the most famous appeals from England to Rome, St. Wilfrid's claim for restoration being granted "by the orders of the Apostolic See." In the Synod of Hertford, held in 673, St. Theodore introduced himself to his clergy as "appointed Bishop of Canterbury by the Apostolic See."

St. Theodore left the English Catholic Church united under the central control of Canterbury, while the land was still divided among a number of kings. That unity was broken later, however, by the creation of the Archbishopric of York for Northumbria in 735 - once again by direct Papal action. A third Archbishopric - Lichfield - was both created and suppressed by Papal authority, in response to the request of the Mercian kings. In the Council of Cloveshoe, at which the latter decision was approved in 803, the Assembly declared "with one voice," that their Faith was "that which was planted in the beginning by the Holy, Roman and Apostolic See, under the direction of the most blessed Pope Gregory."

### **Christian Worship of the Anglo-Saxons**

The worship of the newly founded Churches was Catholic in the strictly "Roman" sense. The Churches, altars, vestments and liturgies give evidence of a firm belief in the Sacrifice of the Mass, which was offered for the living and the dead. The usage of Communion under both kinds existed - but the fact that one kind was allowed to be given outside Mass shows that the view held of its sufficiency was that of the present day Church. It was identical, too, with it in the belief in Purgatory, in the use of prayers for the dead, and prayers to the saints - above all, in the cult of the Blessed Virgin

Mother of God. The veneration of sacred relics, such as those of St. Cuthbert and St. Oswald, was practised everywhere in Britain and Ireland.

Pilgrimages to Rome were frequent, in spite of the difficulties of journeying; and a number of kings and rulers visited the shrine of the Apostles. The first English hostel there owed its foundation to King Ina of Wessex, who resigned his crown to die piously in the Holy City. Offa of Mercia established the offering of "Peter's Pence"; Alfred the Great was taken to Rome as a child by his father. King Ethelwulf; and in later years, amid all his difficulties, repeatedly sent envoys and gifts to the Pope. Canute, the Danish conqueror, went on pilgrimage in 1027. Every Archbishop received from Rome the "Pallium" or sign of authority which had been given first to St. Augustine, and many paid a personal visit to the Pope in order to receive it. It is interesting to note that this ancient symbol of office is still represented in the official crest of the Anglican See of Canterbury, though the Roman authority which it symbolises has been repudiated since Elizabethan times!

In the days of misfortune, when the Danish invasions degraded and ruined English civilisation, the Church suffered most of all in the general disaster. The destruction of monasteries - among them St. Bede's glorious Jarrow - led to the shipwreck of culture. Ignorance and laxity prevailed, with immorality among clergy and laity alike. The Western law of celibacy, indeed, proved impossible to enforce among the secular clergy until long after the Conquest; but in other respects the Church's life was regenerated by the reforms of St. Dunstan, the restorer of monasticism. A second period of decay set in, however, with the disorders and miseries of the reign of Ethelred the Unready, which was ended only with the reforms of the Norman age.

### **Church and State**

To speak of the English Church as a "National Church" during this period is to use a term which is simply meaningless since the nation itself did not yet exist. The people still spoke three different languages; and the Danish invasions introduced a new alien element which took long to assimilate even after their conversion. Loyalty was still mainly given to the local chief or Earl; and such sanctity as the Kingship possessed before men was given to it by the Church, whose consecration had changed the King from a tribal war chief into an anointed ruler representing God's authority in the temporal sphere.

The Church was, indeed, much bound up with the life of the monarchy. On account of their superior learning in a barbarous age, as well as the sacredness attributed to their office, clerics often played a political role more important than that of kings or nobles. Bishops and Abbots sat in the great Council, the "Witan," the Bishops judged side by side with the Earls in the shire courts - for there was as yet no clear separation of jurisdictions. It is true also that, while the Pallium remained as the symbol of Papal authority, the custom grew up whereby the King nominated Bishops and Archbishops, since much depended on the loyalty of such mighty lords as the rulers of the Church had become. But to see in this any real resemblance to the position later claimed by Henry VIII and Elizabeth in ecclesiastical affairs is to misconstrue the whole sense of Anglo-Saxon history.

The authority of Rome in spiritual things was again and again asserted in the course of that history - it was never challenged or denied in principle. It is only necessary to compare the position of such a prelate as St. Dunstan even with that of Archbishop Laud - the most powerful among the later Anglican Church rulers - to see the difference. Certainly, the indignant saint, when he dragged the wretched King Edwy by main force from his mistress' side back to the Coronation feast he had dishonoured, had no inkling that he was laying sacrilegious hands on the person of the Supreme Governor of the Church of England.