

**THE “MIDDLE WAY” IS STILL A WAY:
ANGLICANISM AS A DISTINCT *VIA MEDIA*
FROM AT LEAST THE SIXTH CENTURY**

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Introduction: Is Anglicanism a Distinct *Via Media*?

It is common to describe Anglicanism as a *via media* (“middle way”) between Roman Catholicism and “one form or another of Protestantism.”¹ Ideally, this is supposed to denote Anglicanism’s ability to be both catholic and reformed – to comprehend the best of both traditions, while avoiding certain pitfalls. However, the danger exists that a *via media* approach could lead to an “Eutychian” Anglicanism. That is, just as Eutyches’ Christology was condemned for making Jesus into a *tertium quid* (“third thing”), neither God nor man because he was a confused mixture of both, Anglicanism’s *via media* could describe a confused mixture of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. No one would be quite sure what Anglicanism *is*, and the *via media* would be nothing more than a twofold *via negativa*!

Unfortunately, some may rightly claim that this is the precise state of Anglicanism “on the ground.” With so much breadth within the Anglican Communion, any particular parish may indeed be a confused mixture of Catholic and Protestant, defining itself by what it is *not* – either not a “Romish” high church or a “dirt-low Evangelical” church. Describing the comprehensiveness of *anything* involves clarifying the limits of comprehension. As Stephen Sykes observes, “comprehensiveness is, therefore, *per se*, a radically unclear notion, requiring qualification to give it precision; and it is for this reason that when it is used in Anglican apologetic it has to be used in contexts which make clear both what is comprehended and what is

¹ Stephen Sykes, John Booty, and Jonathan Knight, eds., “Glossary,” in *The Study of Anglicanism*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 506.

still excluded.”² A twofold *via negativa* will not suffice. To be sure, defining what Anglicanism *is* will involve a differentiation from what it is *not*. However, to be a useful definition, it must go beyond this negative distinction to a positive description.

I contend that Anglicanism is a *distinct via media*. That is, Anglicanism is more than just a confused mixture which is neither Protestant nor Catholic. It is a particular way of following Jesus Christ in the world, and it has been a distinctive *middle* way at least since the arrival of St. Augustine and other evangelists on behalf of Pope Gregory the Great in Kent in 597.³ This distinct *via media* has led to distinctives in Anglican polity, spirituality, liturgy, and the sacraments – the most important of which I will discuss below. However, I am well aware that tracing the origins of a distinctively Anglican church to the sixth, and not the sixteenth, century is a matter of some controversy. Therefore, allow me to defend my position at the outset.

How Old is Anglicanism?

It is significant that the first chapter of the classic work *The Study of Anglicanism* is titled “From the Reformation to the Eighteenth Century.” Indeed, the first section of that chapter is titled “The First and Formative Century of Anglicanism: 1509 to 1611.”⁴ In justifying this decision – to begin an account of the history of Anglicanism at the Reformation – Sykes and Booty said the following:

In order to do some justice to the issue which is at stake we have to distinguish between claims and observations. It is indeed true that the Anglican reformers of the sixteenth century and the apologists of the seventeenth went to great lengths to *claim* that the Church of England lived in continuity with the undivided Church of the early centuries. It is also the case that many modern Anglicans *claim* that their Church does not constitute or cultivate a separate denominational identity. Despite these claims, one is bound to

² Stephen Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism* (New York: Seabury, 1978), 8.

³ John R. H. Moorman, *A History of the Church in England*, 3rd ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1994), 12–13.

⁴ William P. Haugaard, “From the Reformation to the Eighteenth Century,” in *The Study of Anglicanism*, ed. Stephen Sykes, John Booty, and Jonathan Knight, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 3.

observe that the *de facto* distinctness of Anglicanism begins in the sixteenth century, and that the seventeenth-century apologists devoted the most strenuous efforts to distinguish their Church from both Roman Catholicism and non-conformist Churches.⁵

I agree that the Reformation led to a *significant development* in the distinctiveness of Anglicanism. However, I disagree that the Reformation led to the *origin* of Anglicanism as a distinct *via media*.

Granted, if the question is “when did Anglicanism emerge as a distinct *via media* between Roman Catholicism and European Protestantism?” then, of course, it would be nonsensical to claim that Anglicanism’s origin, thus defined, predates the emergence of European Protestantism (in the sixteenth century)! So, if that is indeed the question, then I will happily join Sykes, Booty, and others in claiming the Reformation as the origin of such an Anglicanism.

However, I do not think it is necessary to frame the question of Anglican origins in a way that necessitates the sixteenth century as the answer. Indeed, doing so seems to suggest that the Anglican Church – or whatever it was before the sixteenth century – was somehow an external observer of the development of the Christian Church throughout its first fifteen hundred years. When, thanks to the uppity monk, Martin Luther, the nameless island church was called upon to “choose ye this day” and join the fray, it instead decided to make its own team! Of course, I am oversimplifying. Nevertheless, certain accounts of Anglican origins seem to presuppose something very much like this scenario.

The scenario is not entirely wrong. To some extent, due to its existence as the church of an island nation, the *ecclesia Anglicana* (“English Church”) was an external observer of certain

⁵ Stephen Sykes, John Booty, and Jonathan Knight, eds., *The Study of Anglicanism*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), xii–xiii.

developments on the continent. However, it was still very much a part of the catholic Christian Church, from the very first existence of Christians upon the island, perhaps in the late first century!⁶ Its existence as an island, and as a mission field of Rome after 597, led to the development of a distinctively Anglican way of being Christian – a way which intensified, but did not originate, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

To substantiate my pre-Reformation claim, I rely on the work of J. Robert Wright.⁷ As Wright notes, because the first recorded use of the term “Anglicanism” was by John Henry Newman in 1838, “in one real sense, the sense in which contemporaries would have acknowledged the existence of the term, the study of ‘Anglicanism’ can only begin with the nineteenth century.”⁸ Yet Newman himself claimed that Anglicanism had much earlier origins, stating in his *Apologia* (1864): “Anglicanism claimed to hold that the Church of England was nothing else than a continuation in this country [...] of that one Church of which in old times Athanasius and Augustine were members.”⁹ Therefore, it seems that we must ask “with Richard Hooker, but in a different context today, ‘where our Church did lurk, in what cave of the earth it slept for so many hundreds of years before the birth of Martin Luther?’ (*Ecclesiastical Polity* III.i.10).”¹⁰

The legal evidence cited by Wright is worth quoting at length. Halsbury’s *Laws of England* states the following:

In law the Church of England [...] is that branch of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church which was founded in England when the English were gradually converted to Christianity between the years 597 and 686 [...]. The accepted legal doctrine is that the Church of England is a continuous body from its earliest establishment in Saxon times

⁶ Moorman, *A History of the Church in England*, 3–5.

⁷ J. Robert Wright, “Anglicanism, Ecclesia Anglicana, and Anglican: An Essay on Terminology,” in *The Study of Anglicanism*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 477–83.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 477.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 479.

[...]. When the statutes to exclude papal jurisdiction were passed in the reign of Henry VIII, the Church of England was regarded as an existing church and there was no intention to vary from the congregation of Christ's Church, but the papal authority in England was regarded as a usurpation.¹¹

Admittedly, this is but an example of English self-understanding, and not that of a disinterested external observer. However, given its legal context, I believe that this self-understanding carries significant weight.

Furthermore, in answering the question “did a ‘Church of England’ replace a ‘Church in England’ at the time of the Reformation?” Wright offers a litany of evidence that an understanding of the “Church of England” (which was something more than merely geographical) emerged much earlier than the Reformation.¹² To summarize:

- (1) the medieval phrase *ecclesia Anglicana* was translated as “Church of England” in the later Middle Ages;
- (2) Pope Alexander III (1173) and Archbishop Hubert Walter (1195) corroborated this understanding;
- (3) around this time, the *ecclesia Anglicana* was understood to include Wales as well as England;
- (4) Archbishop Henry Chichele (1434) acknowledged other churches as roughly corresponding to the *ecclesia Anglicana*;
- (5) in the middle of the twelfth century, *ecclesia Anglicana* synonymously replaced *ecclesia Angliae* (“Church of England,” as in the letters of St. Anselm) and *ecclesia Anglorum* (“Church of the English,” as in the *Historia Novorum* of Eadmer and the *Ecclesiastical History* of the Venerable Bede);
- (6) *Anglicanus* meant “English” in medieval usage, deriving from the noun “Angland,” first recorded in the late ninth century
- (7) according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the earliest sense of the word “Anglican” matched *Anglicanus*: “of or peculiar to the English ecclesiastically.”¹³

Based on this evidence, Wright concludes that the study of “Anglicanism” must begin earlier than John Henry Newman’s first use of the term in 1838. “If the term is to be used descriptively, and not narrowly or prescriptively, it must finally go back conceptually/doctrinally to the New

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 480.

¹² *Ibid.*, 479–81.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 480–81. References for each item in the list can be found on pp. 482–83.

Testament and historically/geographically to the martyrdom of St. Alban in the ‘patristic’ period of ‘Anglican’ church history.”¹⁴ Now, it is difficult to say much, due to lack of evidence, about the period between the martyrdom of Alban (c. 304) and the arrival of Augustine (597).

However, I believe it is sufficiently precise to claim that the distinct character of Anglicanism emerged by the sixth century, not during the sixteenth.

It is Old. So What?

One more digression before I discuss the distinctives of Anglican polity, spirituality, liturgy, and the sacraments. For the sake of integrity, I must first address the objections of Paul Avis. In making his case for a more dynamic and dialectical definition of Anglicanism than even the “static” *via media* approach allows, Avis claims that, while describing Anglicanism “as a synthesis of catholic, protestant and liberal elements is correct,” it “does not get us very far. It is not sufficient to bring out the distinctive character of Anglicanism.”¹⁵ Why? Because both the Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic church have incorporated catholic, protestant, and liberal elements as well. That is, because to some degree Christians now share these things in common, they cannot function as Anglican distinctives.¹⁶ Furthermore, he concludes his essay by noting that, on his interpretation, “the distinctive identity of Anglicanism is located in the sphere of theological method and the understanding of authority that informs it, rather than in terms of liturgy, spirituality or polity.”¹⁷

To be clear, I want to acknowledge and encourage the increased commonality among the various branches of Christ’s Church. However, to retroactively remove these things shared in

¹⁴ Ibid., 481.

¹⁵ Paul Avis, “What Is ‘Anglicanism’?,” in *The Study of Anglicanism*, ed. Stephen Sykes, John Booty, and Jonathan Knight, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 468.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 475.

common from the historical and distinct identities of each denomination seems to be a revisionist and reductionist mistake. To be sure, Anglicans should not imagine that, in claiming to be inheritors of the riches of the “undivided” patristic Church, they are sole heirs. After all, all Christians are co-heirs, both with Christ (Rom. 8:17) and also of the history of Christ’s Church. However, receiving the riches of our history surely involves acknowledging the intricacies, distinctions, and divisions within the story of the Church throughout the ages.

Finally, the distinction between theological method and authority, on the one hand, and liturgy, spirituality, and polity, on the other hand, seems to be an artificial one at best. Because I think Avis too intelligent to deny the connection between these things, I interpret his distinction as a reminder that a proper definition of Anglicanism will not only address Anglican “conclusions” or “positions” on various issues, but also the methodology and ethos which have led to those conclusions. That is, the question is more complicated than “what do Anglicans think about _____?” Nevertheless, answering the question “what makes Anglicanism distinct?” surely involves talking about distinct Anglican positions in polity, spirituality, liturgy, and the sacraments. To these four areas I now turn, tracing Anglican distinctives in each – from the arrival of Augustine at Kent in 597 to the death of John Wesley in 1791.¹⁸

The Origin of a Distinct Anglican *Via Media*: 597

Although Christianity took root in England sometime during the first two centuries AD, its growth was severely curtailed by the invasions of the Jutes, Angles, and Saxons in the early fifth century. The Christian faith in England languished on the brink of extinction for over one hundred years, kept alive by the grace of God through the Western strongholds of Celtic

¹⁸ John Wesley’s death is, admittedly, an odd place to end. I am limiting my discussion to the content covered in Gerald R. McDermott’s Fall 2016 Anglican History & Doctrine course from August 31 to October 14, 2016.

monasticism in Wales and Ireland.¹⁹ For this reason, Pope Gregory the Great (ruled 590-604) sent a small team of missionary monks to England, led by Augustine, in 596. After an attempted fearful return to Rome, they arrived in Kent early in 597 and were warmly greeted by King Ethelbert of Kent, and his Christian wife, Bertha.

On Christmas in 597, it is claimed that Augustine baptized over ten thousand converts in the region of Canterbury.²⁰ It was a period of rapid growth, to say the least! The late sixth and early seventh centuries were also when a distinctly Anglican way of being Christian emerged, at least in the areas of polity, spirituality, and liturgy. I will begin by discussing polity.

Distinctives of Anglican Polity

Now, in a meaningful and purposeful sense, Anglican polity is *not* distinctive. That is, when it comes to the governance of the Church, Anglicans are not unique in holding to the historic threefold office of bishops, priest, and deacons. However, when it comes to polity as the intersection of authority and politics, Anglicanism does have a distinct approach to the relationship between ecclesiastical and monarchical authority, between Church and State, and also the relationship between England and Rome.

This distinctly Anglican approach to polity *intensified* at the Reformation. As Norris notes, “it was not in episcopacy [that] the English Reformers saw the distinctive mark of their system of church government. What set the English church apart was precisely the principles and the fact of royal, as opposed to papal, supremacy.” In England, “monarch and bishop stood or fell together, as James I [reigned 1603-1625] asserted, and Charles I [reigned 1625-1649] and his

¹⁹ Moorman, *A History of the Church in England*, 8–9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

archbishop [William Laud] demonstrated.”²¹ Commenting upon the Elizabethan reforms toward a *via media* ideal, Moorman rightly observes that, although “the fundamental doctrines and constitution of the Church remained the same,” the “chief constitutional change lay in the position of the sovereign as ‘Supreme Governor’ [of the Church]. This title had not been used before, though many sovereigns had acted as such without claiming the title.”²² He cites William the Conqueror, who reigned from 1066 until 1087, as an example of monarchic rule over ecclesiastical matters.²³

However, the uniquely Anglican relationship between Church and State, and between England and Rome, began in the late sixth and early seventh centuries. Consider the relationship between King Ethelbert of Kent and Pope Gregory the Great, as revealed by a letter from Gregory to Ethelbert:

The reason why Almighty God raises good men to govern nations is that through them He may bestow the gifts of His mercy on all whom they rule. We know that this is so in the case of the English nation, over whom you reign so gloriously, so that by means of the good gifts that God grants to you He may bless your people as well. Therefore, my illustrious son, zealously foster the grace that God has given you, and press on with the task of extending the Christian Faith among the people committed to your charge.²⁴

King Ethelbert was far from unique, however, in being viewed as a Christian ruler and monarch.

As Moorman notes:

In Anglo-Saxon times the boundary between Church and State was far less clearly drawn than it has been in more recent days. The king was regarded not only as head of the Church but as ‘the vicar of Christ among a Christian folk’ a title which he could never have claimed after the rise of papal power in the eleventh century. Practically all appointments to bishoprics and abbeys were made by the king himself, apparently with little opposition, and many of the king’s advisers and servants were ecclesiastics. In the

²¹ Richard A. Norris Jr., “Episcopacy,” in *The Study of Anglicanism*, ed. Stephen Sykes, John Booty, and Jonathan Knight, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 334.

²² Moorman, *A History of the Church in England*, 212.

²³ *Ibid.*, 212; cf. 55-59.

²⁴ Bede, *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. R.E. Latham, trans. Leo Sherley-Price, rev. ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 94.

administration of justice the bishop and the earl sat side by side in the shire-court and dealt with all causes spiritual as well as lay.²⁵

This is not to claim that England was the only place in which the boundary between sacred and secular was ever blurry. However, it is an important background to later English monarchs claiming the title of Supreme Governor, instead of obeying papal orders.

Given the blurring of Church and State, the complex relationship between England and Rome affected bishops as well as kings. Augustine faced the question of how to interact with British bishops when he arrived in Kent in 597. Gregory gave him authority over the existing bishops, “who had kept the flame burning during the years when the rest of England had reverted to heathenism.”²⁶ Understandably, “the British bishops bitterly resented the complete disregard of their position and refused to co-operate with the Roman mission or to attempt to reach agreement on such matters as the date of Easter, baptismal customs, and so forth.”²⁷ This conflict, between the native British and the Church of Rome, simmered for centuries.

This brings us to the transition which took place during the Norman Conquest (1066-1109). As Moorman summarizes it: “for five hundred years [the Church of England] had gone its own way, very much cut off from the general flow of Church life in the rest of Europe. For the next five hundred years it was to be brought more and more under the influence of Rome and thus to lose some of its independence and distinctive character.”²⁸

When William took the throne in 1066, there had recently been an increase in papal power. Although “both Alexander II and Gregory VII liked to think that William would govern his realm with due deference to their wishes,” they were “much mistaken.”²⁹ Under William, the

²⁵ Moorman, *A History of the Church in England*, 47.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 14–15.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

English Church was “to be brought into the main stream of continental church life, but it was to remain under the leadership of the king.”³⁰ The eleventh-century conflict between king and pope affected the life and ministry of Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1093-1109. Although he is better known for his theological contributions – the *Monologion*, *Proslogion*, and *Cur Deus Homo* – he also left a mark on Anglican polity by supporting papal supremacy. This led to bitter conflicts with King Rufus and King Henry I.³¹

In the twelfth century, conflicts also flared between Church and State, and between king and pope. For an example of the former conflict, Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1162-70, refused to allow clergy to be tried under secular rather than ecclesiastical jurisdiction. This was one of the reasons he was murdered in his own cathedral by King Henry II’s henchmen.³² For an example of the latter conflict, King John quarreled bitterly with Pope Innocent III over the papal appointment of Stephen Langton as the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1205, refusing to allow Langton to enter England. Innocent responded to this insubordination by issuing a papal interdict in 1208, excommunicating the king in 1209, and threatening a deposition in 1212. In 1213, John was finally forced to submit to Innocent’s will, surrendering his rule to the pope.

Although Innocent returned John his authority and ended the interdict in 1214, the entire episode contributed to a strong English “anti-royal feeling which, to some extent, was also anti-papal.”³³ The Magna Carta was issued in 1215, the first clause reading “the English Church shall be free.”³⁴ That is, free to elect its own rulers according to its own Canon Law, and not according

³⁰ Ibid., 60.

³¹ Ibid., 66–68.

³² Ibid., 76–81.

³³ Ibid., 84.

³⁴ Ibid.

to the whims of either king or pope! However, as Moorman notes, “this may have been a blow to the royal prestige, but in fact it did little to promote the independence of the English Church since, in every disputed election, the papacy now had the power to intervene.”³⁵

Again, conflicts between England and Rome affected bishops as well as kings. For example, in the thirteenth century, both Bishop Robert Grosseteste and King Edward I opposed papal authority, reflecting a growing sense of nationalism and patriotism against the perceived papal meddling in English affairs.³⁶ In the fourteenth century, English anti-Roman sentiments increased due to the horrors of the papal Inquisition against the Templars and the burdens of increased ecclesiastical taxation.³⁷ Although in 1302 Pope Boniface VIII issued the bull *Unam Sanctam*, claiming both spiritual and earthly authority for the papacy, the English throne responded with the *Statutes of Provisors* (1351, 1390) and *Statutes of Praemunire* (1353, 1393), which attempted to stem the flow of money and appeals for legal recourse to Rome.³⁸

However, there was also growing distaste for the Church hierarchy in general during the thirteenth century, as exemplified in the life and work of John Wyclif. Although he is best remembered for a translation of the Bible into English produced at the end of his life (d. 1384), Wyclif vehemently argued against all earthly hierarchies, claiming that all dominion properly comes from God alone. As Moorman notes, Wyclif argued that, “since each man is responsible to God alone, there can be no need for a hierarchy and no distinction between priest and layman. All are equal in the sight of God.”³⁹ Although Wyclif and his movement, the Poor Preachers,

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 93–94, 112–14.

³⁷ Ibid., 115.

³⁸ Ibid., 116.

³⁹ Ibid., 120.

failed to abolish the historic and catholic hierarchy within the Church of England, their sentiments reflect the broad range of Anglican attitudes toward Church polity.

In the fifteenth century, papal authority in England was diminished – due to the identification of the papacy with the enemies of English (the “Babylonish Captivity,” from 1309-78), and due to the papal schism between Rome and Avignon (1378-1417).⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the followers of Wyclif, known as the Lollards (“mumblers”), continued to attack the Church hierarchy. For their efforts, they were viciously persecuted and largely silenced by 1430.⁴¹

All of these events from the sixth to fifteenth centuries – although I have mentioned only a few of the more significant developments – contributed to the uniquely Anglican approach to polity and authority which intensified in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For all its novelty, Henry VIII’s break with Rome did not emerge in a political and ecclesiastical vacuum. Rather, he built upon the longstanding English tradition of viewing the monarch as a rightful ruler of the Church of England, and of viewing the papacy with a fair amount of suspicion.

Furthermore, although Wyclif and the Lollards’ attacks against the hierarchy of the Church prefigured the continuing protests of the Presbyterians and Puritans against episcopal polity (among many other things) in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Church’s response to such attacks was a consistent insistence on the historic threefold office of bishops, priests, and deacons. Therefore, John Jewell’s (1522-71) and Richard Hooker’s (1554-1600) defenses of classical Anglican polity against both Rome (Jewell’s 1562 *Apology of the Church of England*) and Puritanism (Hooker’s 1594-97 *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*) did not emerge in a vacuum, either. Instead, their work – as well as the work of their successors, the

⁴⁰ Ibid., 138–39.

⁴¹ Ibid., 140.

Caroline Divines, in the seventeenth century – built upon and intensified the old English tradition of navigating a middle way between Church and State, between England and Rome, and between king and pope. This tradition within Anglican polity was so old and strong that not even Civil War (1642-45) and the effective dissolution of the episcopal Church of England before (1644) and during (1649-60) the Commonwealth period were enough to abolish the threefold office for good. Nevertheless, despite the Restoration of episcopal polity in the Church of England under Charles II in 1660, the “Clarendon Code” of Acts of Parliament from 1661-66 divided the country of England into conformist and nonconformists. As Moorman summarizes it, “a clear line was drawn between those who accepted the teaching and discipline of the established Church and those who were determined to preserve their independence.”⁴² Even among the conformists, there was a divide between High Church and Low Church parties that continues, in various forms, throughout the Anglican Communion to this very day.

Finally, for this section, I would argue that the work of John Wesley (1738-91) illustrates a blurring of the boundaries between conformists and nonconformists in Anglican polity. After all, Wesley, despite his loyalty to the Church of England, founded the Methodist movement, which began to depart from the Church of England after Wesley’s illicit ordination of Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury in 1784.⁴³

As Avis notes, “Anglicanism is committed historically to a distinctive approach to the question of authority. Its sources of authority, dispersed as they are through many channels, are both mutually restricting and mutually illuminating.”⁴⁴ I have not been able to describe every facet and contour of this uniquely Anglican approach to authority and polity, but I trust that I

⁴² Ibid., 253.

⁴³ Ibid., 301.

⁴⁴ Avis, “What Is ‘Anglicanism’?,” 474.

have demonstrated that the distinctives of Anglican polity emerged far earlier than the sixteenth century.

Distinctives of Anglican Spirituality

At the intersection of Anglicanism's distinct approaches to both polity and spirituality is the unique combination of monastic traditions in England which began in the early seventh century, after the arrival of Augustine in 597. Although Celtic spirituality and monasticism had existed on the British Isles for centuries, the newly-arrived Roman spirituality, which involved a Benedictine monasticism, brought with it differences both practical and spiritual. For example, the Celtic and Roman Churches differed on the date of Easter, the cut of the monastic tonsure, the wearing of crowns by bishops, the introduction of foot-washing at baptism, the penitential system, and the consecration of the Eucharist by more than one priest.⁴⁵ These differences, especially the date of Easter, led to the Synod of Whitby in 663, called by the King of Northumbria. He decided in favor of the Roman date, which, although it was a "bitter blow to the Celts," was arguably a wise decision in order to keep the Church of England "in touch with the blood-stream of the Catholic Church."⁴⁶

After the devastating Viking invasions in the eighth and ninth centuries, monasticism in England experienced a revival under St. Dunstan (b. 909), after he was appointed the Abbot of Glastonbury in 943 by King Edmund.⁴⁷ Although English monasteries were in line with European ones, thanks to the common Rule of St. Benedict, "in order to settle the various problems of local usage a meeting was held about 970 at which a 'custumal' was drawn up,

⁴⁵ Moorman, *A History of the Church in England*, 19.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

known as the *Regularis Concordia* and intended to govern the lives of all English monks.”⁴⁸

Although the *Regularis Concordia* relied upon the Rule of St. Benedict, it reflected the close relationship between monasteries and the national life of England, by including prayers for the king to be said at each service. Furthermore, England developed the unusual custom of “cathedral priories,” where “the cathedral of a diocese was manned not by secular clerks but by professed monks.”⁴⁹ Until the monasteries were dissolved in the sixteenth century, about half of English cathedrals were monastic.⁵⁰

There was further growth in English monasticism in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, especially of the Cistercian order, a particularly austere form of Benedictine spirituality.⁵¹ The most famous Cistercian house in England was at Rievaulx in Yorkshire, which produced Ailred of Rievaulx in the twelfth century, known as the “Bernard [of Clairvaux] of the North.”⁵² In England, “by the year 1200 there were about seventy-six houses which followed the Benedictine Rule, twenty-eight Cistercians, two Cluniacs, nine Augustinian, and two Premonstratensian,” not to mention the Gilbertine houses and “similar double monasteries which took their origin from Fontevrault.”⁵³ This growth of monasticism reflected the widespread sentiment that “the monastic life was the highest form of Christian endeavor to which a man could dedicate his life.”⁵⁴

In the thirteenth century, Dominican and Franciscan friars arrived from the continent. These were known and admired as excellent preachers, causing some consternation among the

⁴⁸ Ibid., 44.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 70.

⁵² Ibid., 71.

⁵³ Ibid., 72.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 73.

local clergy, who tended to preach rather poorly. This was more than a mere popularity contest, however, because the friars also began to hear confessions and bury the dead – occasions which, in addition to preaching, could and were used to raise funds. Partly to address these issues, the papal bull *Super Cathedram* in 1300 forced friars to obtain licenses to preach and hear confessions. It also mandated that a portion of funds collected at funerals be given to the local parish priest. After this, the friars' influence in England began to decline.⁵⁵

The fourteenth century produced four great mystical writers in England: Richard Rolle (c. 1300-49), the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Walter Hilton (d. 1396), and Lady Julian of Norwich (c. 1343-c. 1413).⁵⁶ Of these, Julian of Norwich has proven the most influential. Her *Revelations of Divine Love* (1395), the first book in English to be written by a woman, described a series of divine revelations (“shewings”) she had received some twenty years earlier while on what appeared to be her deathbed.⁵⁷ In the midst of intense suffering, she was able to experience and express joyful reflection upon the passion of Christ, demonstrating a robust belief in the triumph of love through Christ.⁵⁸ Furthermore, she believed that, because God loves all of life, Christian joy is not only to be experienced in moments of ecstasy, but of peace and harmony in everyday life.⁵⁹

As much as Julian of Norwich may rightly seem like an outlier in her day, it is important to realize that late medieval piety was more robust than traditional modern narratives have often stated or implied. According to Eamon Duffy, the English liturgy in the late Middle Ages was

⁵⁵ See *Ibid.*, 102–6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 127–28.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Gerald R. McDermott, “Anglican History and Doctrine Class Notes” (Unpublished, Fall 2016).

centered on Christ and enjoyed widespread popular support.⁶⁰ Furthermore, many laypeople used missals and books of devotion in England in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁶¹

For this reason, the most distinctive element of Anglican spirituality, the use of a Book of Common Prayer [BCP], did not emerge from a vacuum when Archbishop Thomas Cranmer produced the first BCP in 1549. Rather, Cranmer's distillation of the monastic hours of prayer into the Daily Office of Morning and Evening Prayer for popular consumption built upon the old English tradition of monastic spirituality playing a significant role in the life of the nation.⁶² And yet, the production and use of the BCP were an important development in Anglican spirituality, given Henry VIII's dissolution of the nearly two thousand English monasteries, for largely financial reasons, from 1535 to 1539.⁶³ The fall of "specialized" monasticism may have motivated Cranmer to ensure that a "popular" form of monasticism could continue through the use of the Daily Office in the BCP. Together with the use of the English Bible (which could be accessed lawfully from 1538 onwards, thanks in part to the prior work of Wyclif, William Tyndale, and Miles Coverdale), the Daily Office was meant to support Anglican spirituality throughout the nation.⁶⁴

Much more could and has been said about Anglican spirituality and the BCP.⁶⁵ I will say more about the latter below, but the last thing I will mention about Anglican spirituality is its breadth, as shown by the Wesley brothers and the development of the Wesleyan tradition.

⁶⁰ See Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1589* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); McDermott, "Anglican History and Doctrine Class Notes."

⁶¹ McDermott, "Anglican History and Doctrine Class Notes."

⁶² Marion J. Hatchett, "Prayer Books," in *The Study of Anglicanism*, ed. Stephen Sykes, John Booty, and Jonathan Knight, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 132.

⁶³ Moorman, *A History of the Church in England*, 173-76.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 172-73.

⁶⁵ For a much more thorough overview of Anglican spirituality, see Geoffrey Rowell, Kenneth Stevenson, and Rowan Williams, eds., *Love's Redeeming Work: The Anglican Quest for Holiness* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Although the Methodist movement started by John Wesley led to a departure from the Church of England, it began in radical devotion to the distinct *via media* of the Anglican Church. As the editors of *Love's Redeeming Work* note, John Wesley was “a man who blended Protestant and Catholic traditions. He combined a firm belief in justification by faith with a strong sacramentalism and passionate devotion to the pursuit of perfection inherited from Catholic spirituality.”⁶⁶ And he was able to achieve this combination, as Moorman notes, by being “a churchman through and through,” imploring his followers to the end of his life not to depart from the Church [of England].⁶⁷ Following Wesley's initial intentions, if not his followers' later example, we ought to remember that a “high” of the Church need not be opposed to an “Evangelical” emphasis on personal conversion and holiness. Instead, the best of the distinct tradition of Anglican spirituality suggests that these emphases can and should support each other.

Distinctives of Anglican Liturgy

Perhaps the best explicit example of a liturgical *via media* is found in the opening words of the Preface to the 1662 BCP: “It hath been the wisdom of the Church of *England*, ever since the first compiling of her Publick Liturgy, to keep the mean between the two extremes, of too much stiffness in refusing, and of too much easiness in admitting any variation from it.”⁶⁸ This is an excellent example of a middle way, not just between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, but between a crass formalism and a runaway individualism. The Anglican *via media* is more than just a list of positions. It is also a thoroughgoing ethos.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁶⁷ Moorman, *A History of the Church in England*, 300.

⁶⁸ *The Book of Common Prayer of 1662*, Standard Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004),

However, this *via media* approach to liturgy far predates the composition of the first BCP in 1549. Indeed, Augustine had to navigate liturgical differences when he arrived in Kent in 597. Gregory the Great instructed him to “make his own rite, choosing what he found to be most ‘pious, religious and correct’ in the customs of other churches and adapting them to the needs of the English.”⁶⁹ The main criterion for Gregory was not the geographical provenance of a particular liturgy, but rather what was most acceptable to God.⁷⁰ Furthermore, consider the previously mentioned example of liturgical decisions made at the Synod of Whitby in 663.⁷¹

It is not often discussed, but the relationship between the English and Roman liturgies has exerted influence in both directions. As Moorman observes, in the days of Alcuin of Northumbria (d. 796),

the many liturgical uses had been gradually reduced to two – the Roman and the Gallican. Both were known in England, for the Roman missionaries had introduced the Roman rite while the Irish used the Gallican. In the north of England, where Roman and Irish traditions existed side by side, both rites must have been in use, and Alcuin would thus be familiar with each.⁷²

At the request of Emperor Charlemagne to secure liturgical uniformity, Alcuin supplemented the extant Roman liturgy at the time, and his work “gradually ousted the old [Roman] *Gregorianum* all over Western Christendom. Alcuin has thus left his mark on Christian worship to this day and has been called ‘the final begetter of the Western rite.’”⁷³

A distinctly Anglican approach to liturgy began, therefore, much earlier than Cranmer’s development of the first BCP in 1549. Cranmer was not the first Anglican to make changes to extant liturgies in order to preserve the best elements therein, to the glory of God. However, it

⁶⁹ Moorman, *A History of the Church in England*, 14.

⁷⁰ Bede, *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 79.

⁷¹ See page 15 above.

⁷² Moorman, *A History of the Church in England*, 32.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

would be foolish to deny that the distinctly Anglican approach to liturgy intensified in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This can be seen, specifically, in the relationship between liturgy and doctrine in the Anglican Church. As Hatchett notes,

In other branches of Christianity the decisions of certain councils (for example, Trent) or the writings of particular leaders (for example, Luther, Calvin or Wesley) or certain confessional statements (for example, the Book of Concord or the Westminster Confession) have possessed authority beyond that ever granted in Anglicanism to any council, individual, or confessional statement. A distinguishing mark of the Church of England at the Reformation was the establishment of one uniform liturgy.⁷⁴

Now, this is not to discount the importance of the *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*, first published in 1563 and revised in 1571. But, as Peter Toon makes clear, the Church of England made clear in the Articles “upon what theological principles it had already produced its Book of Common Prayer.”⁷⁵ Therefore, “the Articles and the Prayer Book belong together both in the Settlement of Elizabeth (1559) and the later one of Charles II (1660-62).”⁷⁶

As Louis Weil notes, the liturgy and doctrine of the Anglican Church – much like the Articles and the Prayer Book – are to be mutually informing. The Anglican liturgy both celebrates and nourishes the received Christian faith.⁷⁷ This mutual relationship has often been expressed with the phrase *lex orandi, lex credendi* (“the law of praying [is] the law of believing”). What Anglicans do when they worship is both reflective and formative of what Anglicans believe.⁷⁸ Granted, if the *lex orandi, lex credendi* principle is correct as such, this

⁷⁴ Hatchett, “Prayer Books,” 131.

⁷⁵ Peter Toon, “The Articles and Homilies,” in *The Study of Anglicanism*, ed. Stephen Sykes, John Booty, and Jonathan Knight, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 144.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Louis Weil, “The Gospel in Anglicanism,” in *The Study of Anglicanism*, ed. Stephen Sykes, John Booty, and Jonathan Knight, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 59–60.

⁷⁸ W. Taylor Stevenson, “Lex Orandi - Lex Credendi,” in *The Study of Anglicanism*, ed. Stephen Sykes, John Booty, and Jonathan Knight, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 187–202.

relationship is arguably present in all Christian worship. Nevertheless, the central emphasis on the relationship between liturgy and doctrine is a distinctly Anglican approach to liturgy.

Distinctives of Anglican Sacraments

By far the most important liturgies within the Anglican Prayer Book tradition are the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. And because of the unique nature of the Reformation debates regarding the sacraments, there is less continuity between pre-Reformation and post-Reformation Anglican distinctives on the sacraments than there was in the areas of polity, spirituality, and liturgy. That is, if there *were* one area in which Anglicanism's distinctiveness did, in fact, emerge during the sixteenth century, it would seem to be the sacraments.

However, despite the sixteenth-century necessities of defining Anglican sacramental positions over against both Roman Catholicism and certain elements of European Protestantism, an "Anglican" approach to the sacraments began much earlier, to the extent that Christians in England desired throughout their history to carry forward the patristic Church's traditions and beliefs regarding both Baptism and the Eucharist. Nevertheless, I admit that the evidence is scant that Anglican Christians often had to explicitly state and justify this impulse before the English Reformation.

Regarding baptism, according to David Holeton, the initiation rites that the Reformers received from the Middle Ages "were a pale shadow of their former [patristic] selves. Rites which had once taken place over an extended period of time, often a number of years, had come to be compressed into a single event."⁷⁹ Nevertheless, to produce his 1549 baptismal liturgy,

⁷⁹ David R. Holeton, "Initiation," in *The Study of Anglicanism*, ed. Stephen Sykes, John Booty, and Jonathan Knight, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 294.

Cranmer relied heavily upon the rite contained in the Sarum Manual (*Rituale*), a rite “typical of late medieval baptismal liturgies.”⁸⁰ After revising the Sarum rite, he added components “borrowed from Luther, the *Consultation* of Herman von Wied of Cologne and the Hispanic *Missale Mixtum*.”⁸¹

Although the resulting liturgy bore a great resemblance to the medieval rite, it is significant that the first rubric explicitly references Cranmer’s knowledge of patristic baptismal practices regarding the frequency of administration.⁸² Furthermore, in place of the “second post-baptismal anointing of the Roman rite found in the Sarum Manual,” the 1549 BCP includes a rite of Confirmation, based in “a catechetical rite which emerged from the left wing of the Bohemian Reformation of the previous century.”⁸³ Here, then, we see Cranmer’s impulse to draw upon the best elements of extant liturgies in order to honor the patristic tradition. Although the specifics and the context were different, Cranmer’s approach to the baptismal liturgy bears an unmistakable resemblance to Augustine’s approach to English liturgical variations in the early seventh century.

Regarding Holy Communion, according to Crockett, the rite had similarly suffered throughout the Middle Ages:

...there developed a gradual separation between the act of consecration and the act of communion, so that the goal of the Eucharist became the production of the real presence rather than the communion of the people. This resulted in a Eucharistic piety which focused on the adoration of the host, rather than on the reception of communion. In medieval theology it led to a preoccupation which the question of the manner of Christ’s presence in the elements.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Brian Cummings, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 46; Holeton, “Initiation,” 295.

⁸³ Holeton, “Initiation,” 295.

⁸⁴ William R. Crockett, “Holy Communion,” in *The Study of Anglicanism*, ed. Stephen Sykes, John Booty, and Jonathan Knight, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 312.

To address this deficiency and return to the patristic and biblical emphasis on the act of communion and the mystery of the reception of Christ's body and blood,

Anglican theologians from Cranmer onwards were engaged in a project of reorienting Eucharistic theology away from its medieval centre and reuniting the act of consecration and the act of communion. For these theologians, the goal of the Eucharist is not the production of the real presence, but the nourishment of Christian believers. The real presence is the presupposition rather than the focus of their thought.⁸⁵

This is an important clarification of an Anglican approach to the Eucharist. The Anglican answer to medieval errors was not to abandon the consistently presupposed real presence of Christ's body and blood in Holy Communion. It was, rather, to return to the patristic and biblical emphasis on the mysterious – yet real – communion with Christ, given through the sacramental elements of bread and wine.

Cranmer's specific position on Holy Communion (and the relationship of Nominalism to his arrival at a position) is hard to nail down with specificity.⁸⁶ While his 1549 Eucharistic rite closely resembled the Roman rite, the 1552 revision included some drastic changes. Consider the words of administration. In the 1549 BCP, they are: "The body [bloud] of our Lourde Jesus Christe whiche was geven for thee, preserve thy bodye and soule unto everlasting lyfe."⁸⁷ In the 1552 BCP, however, they read: "Take and eat this, in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thy heart by faith, with thanksgiving" and "Drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for thee and be thankful."⁸⁸ Although the exact reason for this specific change is unknown, the movement seems to be away from emphasizing real presence, and

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ See, for example, the exchange between Eugene MckGee and William Courtenay in the *Harvard Theological Review*. Eugene K. McGee, "Cranmer and Nominalism," *Harvard Theological Review* 57, no. 3 (July 1964): 189–216; William J. Courtenay, "Cranmer as a Nominalist," *Harvard Theological Review* 57, no. 4 (October 1964): 367–80; Eugene K. McGee, "Cranmer's Nominalism Reaffirmed," *Harvard Theological Review* 59, no. 2 (April 1966): 192–96.

⁸⁷ Cummings, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 34.

⁸⁸ Crockett, "Holy Communion," 308. Crockett, of course, uses modern spelling in this quotation.

toward a form of memorialism – at least in this one portion of the Eucharistic rite. In the 1559 and 1662 BCP, both versions of the words of administration are juxtaposed together.

Thankfully, given Cranmer’s ambiguity and despite his influence, it is important to remember that “Anglicanism never developed a doctrine of the Eucharist bearing the distinctive stamp either of a single great Reformer or of common confessional agreement. Rather, within the broad framework of the Anglican Settlement there grew up a spectrum of doctrinal opinion which represented a *via media* between Rome and the continental Reformed Churches.”⁸⁹ This middle way was also distinctly embodied by Richard Hooker – who, perhaps much like Cranmer, held to a “doctrine of the real partaking of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, rather than a doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.”⁹⁰

Yet, even the phrase “rather than” in the quotation above may imply less nuance than we actually find in Hooker’s writings. Without denying the actual presence of Christ in and through the sacrament, Hooker nevertheless emphasizes a certain form of receptionism, claiming that “the real presence of Christ’s most blessed body and blood is not therefore to be sought for in the sacrament, but in the worthy receiver of the sacrament.”⁹¹ Hooker’s final “exposition” of Jesus’s words, “this is my body,” is:

...this hallowed food, through concurrence of divine power, is in verity and truth, unto faithful receivers, instrumentally a cause of that mystical participation, whereby as I make myself wholly theirs, so I give them in hand an actual possession of all such saving grace as my sacrificed body can yield, and as their souls do presently need, this is *to them and in them* my body.⁹²

⁸⁹ Ibid., 309.

⁹⁰ Ibid.; Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, ed. John Keble and Michael Russell (CreateSpace, 2010), V.lxvii.2.

⁹¹ Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, V.lxvii.6.

⁹² Ibid., V.lxvii.12. Italics original.

Therefore, although the specific position of Hooker is not necessarily *the* distinct position of Anglicanism on the Eucharist, it is an example of the distinct Anglican approach to the Eucharist – one which acknowledges both the real presence of Christ and the mystery of communion with Christ.

Another example of the distinct Anglican approach to the Eucharist can be found in Articles 28 and 29 of the *Articles of Religion*. Article 28 rejects the hyper-Protestant view that Holy Communion is “only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another.” Instead, it is “a Sacrament of our Redemption by Christs [sic] death.” And yet, to avoid the danger of an overly mechanistic account of the Eucharist, Article 28 continues: “...Insomuch that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith receive the same, the Bread which we break, is a partaking of the Body of Christ: and likewise the Cup of blessing, is a partaking of the Blood of Christ” (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16).⁹³ The opposite of this faithful reception is addressed in Article 29, which insists that, although “the wicked and such as be void of a lively faith” do “carnally and visibly press with their teeth (as St. *Augustine* saith) the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ” (note the insistence on real presence), “yet in no wise are they partakers of Christ, but rather to their condemnation do eat and drink the Sign or Sacrament of so great a thing” (note the presence of a certain form of receptionism; cf. 1 Cor 11:28-32).⁹⁴ An Anglican approach to Holy Communion, therefore, avoids both transubstantiation and memorialism – insisting on the real presence of and communion with Christ, but refusing to specify the exact manner in which Christ is present, other than sacramentally and mysteriously.

⁹³ Cummings, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 681.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 682.

Finally, as mentioned above, the Wesley brothers are an example of how a “high” Anglican view of the Church and sacraments need not be opposed to an Evangelical emphasis on personal conversion, holiness, and piety.⁹⁵ After all, as Crockett notes, “it is not commonly known today that the Wesleyan Revival was as much a Eucharistic revival as it was an Evangelical revival.”⁹⁶ The Wesleys saw a unity “between a sacramental and an Evangelical vision of Christianity,” as expressed “in a collection of 166 eucharistic hymns, composed by Charles and John, which combine a rich sacramentalism with a joyful Evangelical experience.”⁹⁷ Hopefully, Anglicans will continue to retrieve and exemplify this Wesleyan combination in the years to come.

Conclusions: A Distinct Member of the One Church

I have attempted to defend the emergence of a distinctly Anglican *via media* from at least the sixth century, as opposed to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While Anglicanism’s unique identity undoubtedly intensified during and after the Reformation, it originated far earlier – as shown by my brief survey of Anglican distinctives in polity, spirituality, liturgy, and the sacraments.

However, in making this argument, I do not want to leave the reader with the impression that Anglicanism is only valuable to the extent that it is different from the other branches of Christ’s Church. Far from it! Anglicanism is more than a confused mixture of Roman Catholic and Protestant elements, but it does endeavor to share in the catholic Christian faith with both Roman Catholics and Protestants. I cannot put it better than Weil has:

⁹⁵ See page 19 above.

⁹⁶ Crockett, “Holy Communion,” 313; see Paul S. Saunders, “Wesley’s Eucharistic Faith and Practice,” *Anglican Theological Review* 48 (1966): 157–74.

⁹⁷ Crockett, “Holy Communion,” 313; see J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley* (London: Epworth, 1948).

In Anglicanism, then, what is distinctive is not necessarily divisive. What is distinctive in Anglican faith and practice is seen rather in terms of gift, particular gifts of God which are part of a treasured heritage, and which Anglicans are called to bring to the shared vision of the Church which is truly one and which will encompass all the diverse gifts which the Holy Spirit has given Christians at all times and in all places.⁹⁸

If Anglicans believe that Christ's prayer for Christian unity (John 17:20-23) will be answered, they should endeavor to share the riches of their distinct tradition with other Christians. Our prayer should not be that the Church will become more Roman Catholic, Anglican, or Protestant. Rather, it should be that the Church will increasingly reflect its true identity as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

⁹⁸ Weil, "The Gospel in Anglicanism," 56.