

Simply Catholic

Understanding the Anglican Way

Session One: “Is the Pope catholic?”

I. Dealing with Assumptions

II. Defining Terms

a. *Catholic*

- i. Greek: *kata* + *holos*, meaning “in accordance with the whole”
- ii. Vincent of Lerins (d. 445): *Quod ubique, semper, et ab omnibus*, “that which [has been believed] everywhere, always, and by all”

b. *Orthodox*

- i. Greek: *ortho* + *doxa*, meaning “right opinion”
- ii. “Those opinions declared ‘right’ by Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church”

c. *Protestant*

- i. Latin: *per* + *testari*, meaning “to testify before”
- ii. First used in a letter of German princes following Rome’s condemnation of Luther; their “protest” was Rome’s positions were novel and, thus, no longer *catholic*

d. *Anglican*

- i. Latin: *anglicanus*, meaning “English”
- ii. From the pre-Reformation designation *Ecclesia Anglicana*, “the Church in England”

III. Distinguishing the Three “Ds”

a. *Dogma*

- i. Greek: *dokein*, meaning “to think (well)”
- ii. “That which must be believed.”
- iii. Essential for salvation
- iv. Creeds

b. *Doctrine*

- i. Latin: *docere*, meaning “to teach”
- ii. “That which must be taught.”
- iii. Essential for identification
- iv. Confessions and catechism

c. *Discipline*

- i. Latin: *discere*, meaning “to learn”
- ii. “That which must be learned.”
- iii. Essential for membership
- iv. Canons and common prayer

IV. Determining Distinctives

a. *A Guiding Quote*

“We have no doctrine of our own. We only possess the catholic doctrine of the catholic Church enshrined in the catholic creeds, and those creeds we hold without addition or diminution. We stand firm on that rock.”

Abp. Geoffrey Fischer (1887-1952)

b. *Governing Proposition: Anglicans are simply catholic.*

- i. We are *catholic* but not Roman.
 - ii. We are *protestant* because we are catholic. (We didn’t leave Rome; Rome left us.)
 - iii. We are *orthodox* because we see ourselves as part of a whole. (Just as Eastern Orthodoxy holds that there are various *churches* within the one *Church*, so we hold that Anglicanism is simply one stream within a greater river system.)
 - iv. We are *credal* rather than confessional. (We refuse to demand any beliefs beyond what the Undivided Church held.)
 - v. We are bound together by *dogma* and *discipline*, allowing latitude in *doctrine*. (“In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity.”)
- c. *General Principle: Because Anglicans refuse to have “no doctrine of our own,” our common tradition is better thought of as the Anglican way instead of the Anglican Faith. (Our “Faith” is merely Christian – simply catholic.*

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Session Two: “Henry VIII was not the first Anglican!”

I. **Common Misconception:** Henry VIII founded Anglicanism.

II. Calendar of Events

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| ~180 | Tertullian describes Britain as a place “not reached by the Romans but subject to Christ.” |
| 314 | Three British bishops were sent to the Council of Arles. |
| 595 | St. Augustine of Canterbury was sent by Pope Gregory to lead a mission to England. He found both dioceses and monasteries already there. |
| 664 | A synod was held in Whitby to determine whether the churches in the British Isles should follow the Roman usages or the earlier Celtic traditions – traditions that suggest that Celtic Christianity more closely followed Eastern Orthodox practice rather than Western Catholic. |
| 1208 | King John refused to abide by the Concordat of London which gave power for naming English bishops to the Pope. |
| 1215 | The Magna Carta includes a provision declaring, “The English Church (i.e. <i>Ecclesia Anglicana</i>) shall be free, and shall have its rights undiminished, and its liberties unimpaired.” Pope Innocent III summarily condemned Magna Carta for asserting rights against both the Crown and the Bishop of Rome. |
| ~1378 | English priest and Oxford University professor John Wycliffe publishes works questioning the legitimacy of the papacy. A sect within the English Church known as the Lollards continued Wycliffe’s reforming agenda until the English Reformation. |

- 1392 Parliament passed the Statute of Praemunire to make it illegal for any Englishman to appeal an English court case to the pope or to claim papal authority over that of the King.
- 1529 Henry VIII summoned Parliament to consider a number of key grievances against the papacy and its claim of both civil and ecclesial rights over the English people.
- 1533 Henry VIII divorces Catherine of Aragon.
- 1534 Parliament passed the Act of Supremacy that made the king the Supreme Head of the Church of England. King Henry the VIII remained adamantly opposed to the Continental, anti-catholic theology.

III. Conclusions to be Drawn

- a. The English Church predates the Roman mission to Britain.
- b. There were British bishops before Constantine legalized Christianity.
- c. British Christianity had an ethos of its own prior to Roman control.
- d. The English Church bucked papal authority long before Henry VIII.
- e. Reform was alive and well in England prior to Luther.
- f. Henry VIII was not opposed to Catholicism *itself* but to papal supremacy.

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Session Three: “Open-minded without brains falling out”

I. Frequent Assertion: “No matter what you believe, there’s bound to be at least one other Episcopalian who agrees with you.” *Robin Williams*

II. Fundamental Statement:

“What Scripture doth plainly deliver, to that the first place both of credit and obedience are due; the next whereunto, is what any man can necessarily conclude by force of Reason; after this, the voice of the church succeedeth. That which the Church by her ecclesiastical authority shall probably think and define to be true or good, must in congruity of reason overrule all other inferior judgements whatsoever.” *Richard Hooker*

III. Foolish Interpretations:

- a. The “Three-legged Stool” – All legs are of the same length.*
- b. The Tricycle – “Scripture” trumps both tradition and reason”*
- c. The Trike – Scripture and Tradition are doing all the steering.*

IV. Faithful Reading:

- a. Where Scripture is clear, we must obey.*
- b. Where Scripture is unclear, we must reason.*
- c. Where Reason is not unanimous, Tradition breaks the tie.*

V. Final Conclusions:

- a. The Bible is the source of theology.*
- b. The Bible isn’t always clear.*
- c. We read the Bible using our minds.*
- d. We read the Bible through our own lenses.*
- e. Our minds aren’t always clear.*
- f. Some minds are better than others.*
- g. Tradition isn’t always right.*
- h. Tradition is usually “righter” than you.*
- i. Tradition can change, but Scripture can’t.*

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Session Four: “Why vicars shouldn’t ‘teach to the test’”

I. Helpful Quote:

“Christian ethics is not a matter of discovering what’s going on in the world and getting in tune with it. It isn’t a matter of doing things to earn God’s favor. It is not about trying to obey dusty rulebooks from long ago and far away. It is about practicing, in the present, the tunes we shall sing in God’s new world.”

Bishop N. T. Wright

II. Historical Survey:

a. Introduction:

Throughout church history there have been various approaches to the question of “How should Christians *as Christians* make moral decisions?”

b. Examples:

i. Virtue Ethics:

1. Focuses on developing moral character by cultivating virtues that reflect the sort of person God wants a Christian to be.
2. “You *do* better by *becoming* better.”

ii. Deontological Ethics:

1. Focuses on whether an action is right or wrong based on the “rules” set out in Scripture and handed down by the Church.
2. “You *do* better by *knowing* better.”

iii. Consequential Ethics:

1. Focuses on determining whether the consequences of an action would bring about more good than bad.
2. “You *do* better by *desiring* better.”

iv. Situational Ethics:

1. Focuses on determining what would be the more “loving” choice in a given situation.
2. You *do* better by *loving* better

III. Holistic Approach:

“The Anglican approach to ethics tends to recognize the relative value of all these approaches and so builds moral decision-making on a multi-faceted *test*.

- a. *Does this decision comport with the teachings of the Bible as interpreted by the Church?*
- b. *Does this decision make me a better person?*
- c. *Does this decision result in more good than bad?*
- d. *Does the decision bear witness to the love of God in Christ Jesus?*

IV. Hot Topic: Abortion

V. Humane Holiness:

Again, Anglicans don't claim to have an ethical “doctrine of our own”; instead, we have a characteristic *way* of approaching moral questions.

- a. Anglican ethics is not primarily about *providing the right answers*.
- b. Anglican ethics is primarily about *asking the right questions*.
- c. Anglican ethics takes into consideration that the virtuous, right, good, or loving responses may not always be clear-cut, in alignment with one another, or even possible.
- d. Anglican ethics understand that much of our moral decision-making is not about determining absolutely what is virtuous or vicious, right or wrong, good or bad, loving or unloving; it is choosing the lesser of evils.
- e. Anglican ethics is based on the principle of justification by faith – that means, the focus of morality is not getting into God's good grace but rather behaving as one who is the recipient of God's amazing grace.

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Session Five: “Position Available: Part-time Monk”

I. Relevant Question:

“What does it mean to be ‘religious’?”

II. Roman Answer: To be a monk or nun.

- a. *Living in a cloistered community*
- b. *Working for the sake of that community*
- c. *Praying the Divine Offices*
 - i. Matins (After midnight)
 - ii. Lauds (Before dawn)
 - iii. Prime (~6 a.m.)
 - iv. Terce (~9 a.m.)
 - v. Sext (~12 p.m.)
 - vi. Nones (~3 p.m.)
 - vii. Vespers (Sunset)
 - viii. Compline (Bedtime)
- d. *Communing daily*
- e. *Practicing private devotional exercises*
- f. *Vowing to keep the “Evangelical counsels”*
 - i. Poverty
 - ii. Chastity
 - iii. Obedience

III. Reformed Anglican (BCP) Answer: To be a “part-time” monastic

- a. *Living in a community*
- b. *Working for the benefit of that community*

- c. *Praying seven times a day*
 - i. Morning Prayer
 - ii. Evening Prayer
- d. *Communing frequently (weekly)*
- e. *Practicing private devotional exercises*
- f. *Living "a quiet, consecrated life"*
 - i. Avoiding materialism
 - ii. Remaining faithful in marriage or singleness
 - iii. Giving due obedience to the Church and State

IV. Reality Check:

The *BCP* approach "life and liturgy" is the closest thing to a characteristic "Anglican" doctrine we have. It perfectly synthesizes the Roman and Reformed ideas of what it means to be "religious."

- a. Liturgy is "the work of the people," the *opus Dei*.
- b. It is not merely a guide to *worship* but to *life*.
- c. It is based on the premise "what we pray is what we believe" – *lex orandi, lex credenda*.
- d. The *Book of Common Prayer* represents a "monastic rule" for ordinary people, members of "the priesthood of all believers."
- e. It includes...
 - i. Guides for Community (i.e., creeds and confessions)
 - ii. Vows (i.e., the baptismal covenant)
 - iii. Divine Offices (i.e., morning and evening prayer)
 - iv. Eucharist
 - v. Devotional Exercises (i.e., lectionary and catechism)
 - vi. Moral Guidance (i.e., reconciliation)