Ecclesia Anglicana

A Brief History of the English Church

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1. What did St Augustine really do?

It is often claimed that history is written by the victors. This is not true—at least, it has not been true for the last 150 years or so. Histories are usually written by historians, and this is, most decidedly, a mixed blessing. The problem is that, more often than not, historians have an axe to grind: a particular *Weltanschauung* or social theory to propound. This, naturally, tends to distort the picture they present to the world. History, far from being a dispassionate appraisal of past events, is frequently heavily tinged with partisanship, polemic, and propaganda.

This, lamentably, is especially true in the sphere of Church history. Nor should it be surprising. The competing claims of various denominations to be the sole repositories of the Christian Truth inevitably foster bitter partisanship. Rarely has partisanship more gravely distorted the historical truth than in history of the Church of England. Students of Anglican history today are sandbagged not only by Roman, Orthodox, and Protestant propagandists and apologists, but also by fellow Anglicans of different liturgical and theological persuasions.

As a consequence, at this point in the 20th Century, there seems to be a general acceptance of the notion that the English Church, as we know it, came into being as the result of St. Augustine's mission to Kent in the year A.D. 597. Indeed, The Most Rev. Robert Runcie, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, made obeisance to the theory during his visit to the Vatican not so long ago.

Actually, Augustine did not establish the English Church. Far from it, in fact. When he arrived in Kent—an obscure Saxon kingdom in South England—it was virtually the only part of the British Isles that remained almost entirely heathen. I say almost entirely because there was a Christian presence in Kent: priests and monks from Gaul (now France) who ministered to Queen Bertha, a Christian princess from Gaul, who was consort of the Kentish king. The West and North of the British Isles were, to all intents and purposes, wholly Christian. And there was an extensive network of Christian missions throughout the rest of Britain.

Far from converting Britain to Christianity, Augustine found that the task had largely been accomplished by a Church one rarely hears about these days. It was the indigenous British Church—commonly called the Celtic Church; the Church that we, today, call the Church of England.

Claims that Augustine was Primate of Britain are, thus, quite empty. Britain already had its own Primate— the Archbishop of Carleon, the successor to St. David, the patron saint of Wales, who had died some 20 years before Augustine's arrival. The British Isles also boasted 120 bishops and thousands of priests, not to mention many thousands of monks and nuns.

It is difficult to know what Augustine would have made of the claims made on his behalf by modern historians. Certainly, he tried to assert Pope Gregory the Great's authority, but his efforts were not in any great degree successful.

This might well be because the Romans had not yet declared the pope "Christ's Vicar on Earth." Indeed, it is not until more that 100 years later we encounter a pope who felt secure enough assert (albeit somewhat tentatively) that he was "St. Peter's Vicar upon Earth." That pope was Gregory II and the assertion is to be found in the oath that St. Boniface took upon being consecrated bishop in A.D. 722. Demands for fealty based on this claim were rejected by the English, in word and deed, from that time onward until the Reformation.

The best argument that a pope could put forward for his claim to authority over the British Church was that he had traditionally occupied a position of *primus inter pares* (first among equals) among Christian Bishops. Such a claim—which would certainly be challenged in the world of Eastern Orthodoxy—would give him no more authority than a right to the courtesy of presiding at ecumenical gatherings.

The manner in which Pope Gregory the Great sent Augustine to England illustrates this: Gregory, for example, didn't assert the right to consecrate Augustine a British bishop. Rather he asked one the bishops of Gaul—whose see was closest to Britain—to consecrate Augustine as a personal favor.

The Gallic bishop appears to have been reluctant to do so. He must surely have had contacts with the British Church. This means he must have been well aware that he had no authority to perform such a consecration. In any event, he kept Augustine kicking his heels for a very long time before finally—and apparently with considerable reluctance—acceding to Gregory's importuning.

Moreover, it wasn't until Augustine managed to establish himself at the Kentish Court that Gregory actually sent him the pallium, designating him "Rome's man" and, by implication, Kent (not England; for Kent was, at that time, a sovereign state) "Rome's territory." Gregory, however, must have been fully aware that his claims in this regard were decidedly shaky.

The English Church's relationship to Rome is—and has always been—the same of that of the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Indeed, Rome has, *de facto*, acknowledged this for best part of 800 years.

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2. Joseph of Arimathea and the metals trade

Since its earliest recorded history, the English Church has asserted that it was founded by St. Joseph of Arimathea, Our Lord's uncle, "immediately after the passion of Christ"—(*"statim post passionem Christi"*).

This had never been disputed until it was challenged for political purposes by France and Spain in 1409. The antiquity of the English Church, however, was unequivocally affirmed by five Papal Councils—the Council of Pisa (1409), the Council of Constance (1417), the Council of Sens (1418), the Council of Sienna (1424), and the Council of Basle (1434).

The five councils ruled that the English Church is the oldest Church in the gentile world—despite the fact it would have been politically advantageous for the Pope to have obliged two such powerful and influential nations as France and Spain Thus, it seems fair to assume that the documentary evidence in favor of the English claim must have been overwhelming.

Sadly, much of that evidence is now lost to us, destroyed during Henry VIII's dissolution of the religious houses, as well as during the English Civil War in the 17th Century, when ancient documents were used to make cartridges. Even so, a strong body of evidence remains: Ancient Welsh annals, writings of the Early Church Fathers, early British historians, archaeological discoveries, and oral history. All lend credence to legends that the British Church was established by St. Joseph sometime between A.D. 36 and A.D. 39, shortly after the Resurrection

The earliest surviving historical records of the British Church were compiled long after the events that they describe took place. Gildas wrote in the 6th Century, as did Maelgwyn of Llandaff, also known as Melchinus, uncle of St. David.

It is, however, quite clear from the works of these early scholars that they were writing genuine history, and that they relied heavily upon very much older documentary sources. Some scholars, for example, believe Maelgwyn was merely quoting an earlier Maelgwyn, known as Maelgwyn of Avalon (or Glastonbury), who lived and worked in the First Century.

To a considerable extent it is possible to reconstruct much of the early history of the English Church through what is known as "oral history." This is the historical record painstakingly sifted from the myths and legends that, in the early years at least, were passed on by word of mouth by illiterate people. It is well-established that societies in which reading and writing are unknown are, nonetheless, able to transmit history with remarkable accuracy though many generations. As a consequence, oral history has proved a valuable academic tool—most notably in the realm of social history.

Treated with appropriate caution, it can provide scholars with an accurate picture of historical events for which no first hand documentary records exist.

Oral history offers strong support for the assertion that the British Church was established by St. Joseph of Arimathea—who begged Christ's body from Pontius Pilate—shortly before the Romans invaded Britain. The legends of St Joseph's presence in Britain are exceedingly ancient in origin.

At this point it is worth asking: Why would St. Joseph have come to Britain? A number of the early fathers of the Church record that St. Joseph suffered persecution, along with other leading Christians, and was compelled to flee the Holy Land. Legend—or oral history—says that he fled to Britain, because he was a metals trader who had frequently visited the British Isles and knew them well. Fleeing to Britain made sense. At the time of his supposed arrival—about A.D. 37—Britain was not part of the Roman Empire. The Roman armies did not invade until A.D. 45. And the Celtic population was not subdued until A.D. 52, when their military leader Caradoc (or Caratacus, as Tacitus calls him), Crown Prince of the Silurian Clan, was betrayed and captured.

Welsh scholars contend that the rapid spread of Christianity throughout the Britain is explained by the fact that the indigenous druidic religion worshipped a trinitarian god, one person of which was known as "Yesu." Moreover, the druidic teachings echoed those of The Bible—among them that man's responsibility to God superseded his duty to the civil authority. Claims that druidism was Christianity awaiting the coming of Christ might be somewhat fanciful. But it's interesting to note that the Romans were generally tolerant of foreign religious cults and that during the period of the empire only two religious cults were officially suppressed: druidism and Christianity.

How much of this can be scientifically attested? Not a great deal. However, the remains of a small wattle and daub church has been excavated at Glastonbury, where St. Joseph is said to have settled. It is claimed archaeological evidence dates it to a time shortly before the Roman invasion of A.D. 42. Christian symbols, moreover, have been also discovered on artifacts recovered from a Roman fort at Carleon, in Wales, thought to have been destroyed towards the end of the First Century.

What can be documented is that numerous early Fathers of the Church have left writings confirming the early arrival of Christianity to Britain. They include: Clement, 3rd Bishop of Rome, in A.D. 96; Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, A.D. 180; Tertullian of Carthage, A.D. 192; Origen of Antioch, A.D. 240; Dorotheus, Bishop of Tyre, A.D. 300; and Eusebius of Caesarea, A.D. 320.

Heretics seem to be regarded as more trustworthy that the orthodox these days, so here's what the heretic Sabellius—excommunicated by Pope Callixtus in A.D. 220—had to say on the subject: "The first nation that proclaimed [Christianity] as its religion, and called itself Christian, after the name of Christ, was Britain.

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3. British Christian beauty catches Roman captor

What is known of the earliest converts of the Jewish exiles who are believed to have founded the British Church? The 19th Century Welsh scholar, The Rev. R. W. Morgan, among others, makes a persuasive case that among them were close relatives of Caradoc, the British prince, who, for seven years, fought a bitter guerrilla war against the Roman invaders.

Caradoc was the crown prince of the Silurian clan, and, according to Welsh annals, the first Christian converts included: his daughters, Gladys (known as Claudia) and Eurgain; his son, Linus; and his sister, also Gladys.

Morgan and his fellow scholars cite Welsh annals that state that Caradoc and his father, Bran (venerated in Wales as St. Bran the Blessed) were converted in Rome, following their capture by the Romans in A.D. 52. They also assert that Gladys married Rufus Pudens—a member of the Roman Senate and a senior commander in the Army that conquered England—and converted him to Christianity.

We know a great deal about Caradoc's daughter Gladys from contemporary Roman sources. She was something of a celebrity—an exotic, noble beauty from a mysterious island kingdom. Documentary records show that following her marriage, her name was Latinized to Claudia Pudentia. She became a leading figure in Rome's fashionable society. The poet Martial wrote odes extolling her beauty.

A "Rufus" is mentioned in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, Chapter 16, verse 13: "Salute Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine ..." And Morgan argues that this "Rufus" was actually Rufus Pudens. (Some scholars have suggested that Rufus was St. Paul's half brother. Paul also greets another of his kinsmen, Herodian, in verse 11 of the same chapter.)

Morgan contends St. Paul lived, or was closely associated, with Rufus Pudens and members of the British royal family during his period of house arrest prior to his martyrdom. In support of this, he cites the fact that Paul includes them in his greeting to Timothy in what was probably his final letter to his young protege (II Timothy 4:21): "Do thy diligence to come before winter. Eubulus greeteth thee, and Pudens, and Linus, and Claudia, and all the brethren."

It is somewhat ironical, perhaps, but, if Morgan *et al.* are right, Caradoc's son, Linus was the Linus who became the first Bishop of Rome. Could the first Pope really have been an Episcopalian?

Circumstantial evidence for a close relationship between St. Paul and the Pudens family is found in events following his execution. He is said to have been originally buried in the family's private cemetery on the Via Ostiensis. Rufus' and Claudia's children, all of whom were martyred, were interred alongside him.

Added to this is the strange history of Caradoc's house: During their captivity in Rome, Caradoc and his relatives lived in the residence that his family had owned in Rome for almost a century. It had been acquired as an embassy shortly after the defeat of Julius Caesar's invasion of Britain. This residence, located on the *Mons Sacer*, was known as the *Palatium Britannicum*. Later, its name was changed to the

Titulus, then to *Hospitum Apostolorum*. Today it is the Church of St. Pudentiana—the church dedicated to a martyred daughter of Claudia and Rufus Pudens. Can this be pure coincidence?

What of St. Eurgain, Caradoc's other daughter? Legends—oral history, if you will—tells us that she is the mother of Morning and Evening Prayer. She is said to have eventually returned to Britain, where she established many churches and monasteries, primarily in Wales. Each of them operated to a staggered timetable so that the Offices were continually sung throughout the 24 hours of every day, in order that "earth's praise of God should never cease." (Compare traditional Welsh choral music with Greek and Slavonic choral liturgies. The similarity is striking.)

Returning to less speculative realms, two British Bishops are recorded as attending the Council of Arles in A.D. 314, and it is believed that the British Church was also represented at Nicaea in A.D. 325, though documentary proof is lacking. It is also significant, perhaps, that, in the 4th Century, a British–born Emperor, Constantine, recognized Christianity as an official religion and paved the way for its establishment as the religion of the Roman Empire. (Constantine's mother, St. Helena, is believed to have been British. A devout Christian, she is remembered for discovering the True Cross.)

In the 5th Century, the British Church was a major center of intellectual and theological debate. Indeed, a British monk named Pelagius gave his name to a major heresy. Pelagianism is the notion that man can save himself through his own efforts. And this, of course, brings us to within spitting distance—a century or so—of St. Augustine's arrival in a supposedly wholly pagan island.

Scholars have a clear idea of the manner in which the British Church operated. *The Confessions of St. Patrick*, for example, indicate services were conducted in the vernacular. In old age, Patrick grumbled that his native Latin had been ruined by years of speaking the barbarous Irish tongue. His *Confessions*— perhaps better described as his autobiography—show he wasn't exaggerating. His Latin is, indeed, execrable.

The practice of saying the liturgy at least partially in the vernacular seems to have been continued into the Middle Ages when the Epistle and Gospel were often read in the vernacular during parochial Masses. Cranmer, by the way, re-instituted this ancient practice as a temporary measure before the Prayer Book of 1549 was authorized.

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4. Abbots, abbesses, and coed monasteries

With the decline of the Roman Empire of the East, the Church retreated in the face of Anglo–Saxon invasions, consolidating in the South West, West, and North West of England, and in Ireland. From there it maintained contacts not so much with Rome—which had been sacked, pillaged, and largely destroyed in a series of barbarian invasions—but rather with the Churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, and Constantinople.

Archaeological excavations indicate that during this period, the British conducted a flourishing trade with those parts of the world. British Primates—such as St. David, *Dewi Sant*—were traditionally consecrated not by the Pope, but by the Patriarchs of Jerusalem.

From its strongholds in the West, the British Church moved out to convert not only the Anglo–Saxon invaders, but the population of the continent of Europe as well. It was the Celtic Church—not Rome—that evangelized Europe from the Alps to the Scandinavian border. When, for instance, St. Boniface—the Saxon monk known as the Apostle of Germany—arrived there in the 7th Century, he found a large and flourishing Celtic Church whose sway extended from Burgundy, through Germany, Switzerland, and Austria to the Italian border.

Boniface, I might add, earned his title "apostle" not so much by converting the heathen as by cutting political deals on the Pope's behalf with the secular authorities to suppress the Celtic Church—which had actually done the converting. It is tempting to argue that the Celtic Church left a lasting impression on the peoples that it converted to Christ. Can it be, for example, entirely coincidental that the Reformation sprang up and took root in the regions converted to Christianity by the Celtic Church? There are definite parallels between doctrines enunciated by English theologians of the 7th and 8th Centuries and doctrines expounded by the more moderate English reformers of the 16th Century.

This would seem to offer a rich field for scholarly research, and it would be interesting to learn if any recent doctoral dissertations have been produced on the topic.

We know a good deal about the manner in which the British Church operated. It was a loosely-structured organization, centered around a number of great abbeys. These abbeys sent out the missionaries and parochial clergy. The most powerful ecclesiastics in the British Church were not bishops, but abbots and, on occasion, abbesses, such as the redoubtable Hilda, who hosted the Synod of Whitby at her abbey in A.D. 664.

Rarely was an abbot also a bishop. Columba, the Apostle of Scotland, for example, was an abbot, but never a bishop. Aidan, the Apostle of Britain (Lindisfarne, A.D. 635) was for long a bishop, but not an abbot. Bishops lived in abbeys under the authority of the abbot. Like Aidan, they were often sent out as missionaries.

British religious houses differed greatly from their Roman and Greek counterparts. It was by no means unusual for abbeys to be populated by both male and female religious. There is also persuasive evidence that married couples also formed an integral part of some religious communities. St. Hilda's great abbey of Whitby, for instance, had two huge dormitories—one for monks and another for nuns—while married couples appear to have been accommodated in individual houses or huts.

Like the orthodox churches, the secular clergy seem almost invariably to have been married. This practice continued well into the 13th Century in England, while in Wales it was never abandoned. It is recorded that many Welsh Parish priests were shocked when the English reformers informed them that they might now marry: They had never given up the practice.

The British Church's coeducational abbeys and its policy with regard to clerical marriage have been cited by both by Romanist partisans and anti–monastic Protestants as evidence that the British Church was corrupt and its clergy debauched and depraved. Perplexingly, many modern historians seem to take these claims at face value. Such notions are hard to reconcile with the fruits of the British Church's labors. How could a corrupt Church and a depraved clergy have been so zealous in its efforts to convert the heathen? And how could they have been so remarkably successful in this endeavor?

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5. Anselm of Canterbury hailed as English Pope

In any event, from Augustine's arrival to the Reformation, the English never ceased to assert the independence of their Church from the See of Rome. They generally treated the Pope with respect and occasionally followed his counsel … when they'd requested it. Otherwise, he was—sometimes politely, and sometimes not so politely—told to keep his nose out of their affairs.

At the end of the 7th Century, for instance, Wilfred, the Bishop of York, asked the Pope to intervene in his quarrel with Theodore, the Archbishop of Canterbury. When the matter came up before the Witanagemot— a Saxon cross between a Synod and Parliament—the Church's Clergy and Laity rejected the Pope's adjudication. The Witan said, in effect, "Who is this Pope and what are his decrees? What have they to do

with us, or we with them?" By way of an answer, they burned the Papal parchment and clapped Wilfred in prison for having the temerity to try to insinuate an outsider into a domestic dispute.

In A.D. 747, the principle was reasserted again—and just as pointedly. It was proposed at the Witan to refer difficult questions to the Bishop of Rome—as *primus inter pares*. The Witan, however, refused to entertain any such suggestion and at once declared it would submit only to the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

In 1066, the Pope supported William the Conqueror's attempt to seize the English crown in the hope that William would bring the British Church under papal control. With this in mind, the Pope blessed William's efforts almost as a crusade. Once England had been conquered, however, William was quickly apprised of the Anglican Church's independent status—not only by the Saxon Bishops, but by Normans, like William's own brother, Odo, Bishop of Bayeux.

"Thy legate Hubert, Holy Father, hath called upon me in thy name to take the oath of fealty to thee and thy successors …" William wrote to the Pope. "Homage to thee I have not chosen, nor do I choose, to do. I never made a promise to that effect, neither do I find that it was performed by my predecessors to thine."

This cannot be dismissed as a form of personal self aggrandizement. It was clearly the assertion of what William believed to be an ancient right. While he never swerved in his refusal to pay homage to the Pope in his position as King of England, he apparently did so quite willingly as Duke of Normandy.

The popes, themselves, seem to have been well aware of the validity of the English Church's claims to independence. When Anselm, the Archbishop of Canterbury, arrived at the Council of Bari in 1098, Pope Urban II cried out: "Anselm, father and master, where art thou?" As Anselm was ushered to a seat beside the Pope, Urban explained the reason for the English Primate's special honor, saying: "We include him indeed in our *œcumene*, but as Pope of another *œcumene*."

The word *œcumene*—the root of our modern word "economy"—translates as "jurisdiction" in both the imperial and the ecclesiastical sense. Thus, Urban was saying that Anselm, while in communion with Rome, was, in fact, patriarch of a wholly independent jurisdiction.

Despite Urban II's candor, the English Church was constantly obliged to reassert its independence. In the 12th Century, Warelwast, Bishop of Exeter, was dispatched to Rome with an official protest against papal meddling in English affairs. The letter explained that the Pontiff was well aware that "the Church and realm of England occupied a different position from the continental kingdoms and Churches, and had always been independent of Papal jurisdiction."

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6. The Magna Carta states Church's independence

Actually, it was not until the decidedly unpopular King John ceded England as a secular feudal fiefdom to the Pope, that Rome had the slightest claim to authority in Britain—a claim swiftly and unequivocally disavowed in A.D. 1215 by the English Church and the English nobility in concert. They asserted independence of both England and the English Church in the document that forms the foundation of the English and American Constitutions. The very first provision of the *Magna Carta*—the Great Charter— reads: "The Church of England shall be free and hold her rights entire and her liberties inviolate …"

The independence of the Anglican Church, moreover, was considered so important that the Charter concludes with a reassertion of that right. The final clause states: "that the Church of England shall be free, and that all men have and hold the aforesaid liberties truly and peaceably, freely and quietly, and wholly in all things and in all places forever."

Some modern historians claim these statements in the *Magna Carta* are not an assertion of independence from Rome, but, rather, an assertion of independence from royal authority. If this is so, the Pope certainly didn't see it that way at the time. He excommunicated everybody who signed the document—prelates and nobles—for disavowing papal authority.

Roman church lawyers have contended King John's decision to cede the realm of England to the Pope as a fiefdom—whether or not from ignoble motives—is legally binding in that John was the legitimate King of England. The question of John's legitimacy has been challenged—he was, after all, not the direct heir to the throne. However, from a constitutional perspective, it is not unreasonable to argue that the legitimacy of John's claim to the English has little bearing on the matter.

The throne of England, from its inception, has been, effectively, an elective office. This is in line with its Celtic and Anglo–Saxon origins. And, indeed, the assembled representatives of the English people have asserted this on numerous occasions. All of the Anglo–Saxon kings were elected and a number of the Normans were accepted by assent of the ruling Council of State. In more recent history, Parliament exercised its prerogative in this regard in A.D. 1688 with the accession of William and Mary and with the accession of the Hanoverians in the 18th Century.

In the 13th and 14th Centuries, the English reasserted their their independence from Rome by enacting the laws of *mortmain* and *præmunire*—ordinances that made it a criminal offense to abet papal efforts to encroach upon English ecclesiastical and temporal prerogatives. The laws reiterated that all appointees to English benefices be made in the name of the King and the Anglican Church—*Ecclesia Anglicana*—not in the name of the Pope. And they declared that anyone who sued for redress in papal courts put himself outside the protection of the laws of England and forfeit his goods to the State. In A.D. 1420—a hundred years before the Reformation—the Pope tried to reassert his claims over England by excommunicating all of the English clergy. But his bulls of excommunication were confiscated at the borders by the English government and burned. Indeed, the Pope's efforts to deny the English faithful the Sacraments were wholly ignored.

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7. The Reformation was by no means a revolution

A fair–minded review of past events would seem to warrant two conclusions. Firstly, the history of the English Church is an unbroken continuum running back to its founding in the Apostolic Age, or least shortly thereafter. Secondly, its legitimacy is in no way dependent on Rome.

The fact that it stayed in communion with Rome long after the Eastern Orthodox Churches severed their relationship with the Roman Pontiff is to its credit—for the relationship was maintained despite uncanonical and illegal Roman meddling in the English Church's affairs. One might add—with sincere regret—it was Rome, not the English Church, that severed that communion in the wake of the Reformation.

The English Reformation was exactly that: a reformation, not an ecclesiastical revolution. The Anglican Church reclaimed what had always been her's: Her right as a free, independent jurisdiction to return to the pure Apostolic Faith—a faith untrammeled by theological novelties and foreign tradition.

This is not mere rhetoric. It is easily documentable that the Reformation genuinely did restore to the English Church its original theological truths. Take, for example, the doctrine of the Eucharist expounded by Archbishop Ælfric, who was translated from the See of Wilton to Canterbury in 1005. In a long and learned letter to Bishop Wulsin, shortly after the latter's consecration, Aelfric explains the mystery of the Eucharist in precisely the same way it is explained in Article XXVIII of the Articles of Religion.

That Ælfric—and the whole Church at the time—espoused the Anglican understanding of the real presence is clear from the fact that he repeats his explanation (in more succinct form) in another pastoral

letter. "This sacrifice of the Eucharist," he writes, "is not Our Savior's Body in which He suffered for us; nor His Blood which He shed on our account: it is made His Body and Blood spiritually, as the manna was, which fell from the sky, and the water, which flowed from the rock in the wilderness."

That's not the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation. It is the true voice of the English Reformation a full 500 years before it took place. The Pope, I might add, did not have the temerity to call Ælfric a heretic. And nor did anybody else. For Ælfric was simply enunciating the official doctrine of the Holy Catholic Church.

As to the domestic polity of *Ecclesia Anglicana*, one certainly cannot maintain that no Englishman—layman or prelate in a position of authority—acknowledged Rome as the English Church's spiritual and temporal overlord. Clearly, plenty did.

Monastics did so in their struggle to usurp the prerogatives of the secular clergy. So did nobles in battles with the monarch, the Church, and their peers. So did bishops in their wrangling with kings. And kings genuflected to the Pope in exchange his support shoring up shaky claims to the throne. But then, of course, a particularly painful flaw in the human character is our ability to rationalize away any betrayal and falsehood, our willingness to grasp at any straw, in order to further personal ambitions. But those who bent the knee to Rome did so in breach of both English Canon Law and English Common Law, and in direct contradiction of the continuum of the Church's history and tradition.

History, you see, does not uphold the assertions of Romanist or Protestant. The Church of England was never the creature of Rome. Neither was it cut out of whole cloth during the Reformation. The English Church is what it has always claimed to be: An independent and autonomous branch of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. And to deny that is to deny history—admittedly something that historians are very good at doing.

But does any of this matter? I believe it does. We are, after all, members of a Church that has lost its way. The best means of regaining our sense of direction is to trace our steps along the path we have travelled. In doing so, we will discover sign posts to put ourselves back on track. And those sign posts point neither to Rome, nor to Germany, and certainly not to Geneva. Our path will lead us back directly to the uniquely English Reformation Prayer Book tradition and, thence, to Canterbury, York, Winchester, Salisbury, Whitby and, yes, to Glastonbury.

It is a journey back in time we would be wise to take—for only by understanding where we came from can we learn the way to where we should be going.
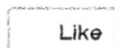
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