

***Catholicity in the Church of England***  
**THE NONJURORS: THE REPUDIATION OF ERASTIANISM  
AND THE RECOVERY OF SACRIFICE**

by Steve Cavanaugh

*This is the third article in a series examining the survival of Catholic faith and practices in the English Church after the Reformation.*

With the execution of Archbishop Laud in 1644, and the regicide of King Charles I in 1647, the heir to the English throne Charles II fled into exile in France. The Calvinist forces of the Scottish Presbyterians and Cromwellian Army in England were victorious; the Episcopate of the Church of England was banned, as was *The Book of Common Prayer*. The Long Parliament which had led the civil war against the King and royalists appointed the Westminster Assembly of divines, which published the Directory for Public Worship (more a set of rubrics for how to conduct public worship than a collection of common prayers) and the Westminster Articles were proclaimed, enforcing Calvinist theology. Any hopes for a revival of Catholic theology and principles in the Church of England seemed dashed.

Yet a mere 13 years after King Charles I's death, his son was restored to the throne, the Church of England was reestablished and its bishops reinstated. *The Book of Common Prayer*, with some minor changes was republished and reaffirmed as the standard for public worship, and the restoration of certain practices championed by Archbishop Laud resurfaced. And due to his reception in France, King Charles II and his brother and heir James, Duke of York, were far more sympathetic to Catholics than their father had been.

Charles II converted to the Catholic faith on his deathbed in 1685, following the example of his brother James, who had become a Catholic in 1672.<sup>1</sup> On the death of Charles, James assumed the throne as King James II of England and VII of Scotland, the first Catholic to sit on the throne since Mary Tudor in the mid 1550s. The newly re-established Church of England was concerned with his intentions, although he affirmed that he would protect the Established Church.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, he was mistrusted by many, and his efforts to eliminate the legal disabilities of Catholics, such as opening the

ranks of the government, military services and universities to them, increased this mistrust. When James published his *Declaration of Tolerance*, it was widely viewed as a thinly veiled ploy to re-establish Catholicism, despite his having enacted a similar declaration in his proprietary Colony of New York in 1664.<sup>3</sup>

James II required all of the bishops of the realm to proclaim his 1688 *Declaration of Tolerance*, but Archbishop of Canterbury William Sancroft, Bishop Thomas Ken of Bath and Wells, and 5 other bishops refused to do so. These seven bishops were arrested and detained in the Tower of London, but the Court returned a verdict of “Not Guilty” to the general approval of the populace.<sup>4</sup>

The birth of James’s son that year by his second, Catholic wife (his first wife having died), renewed the anxiety of Protestants, and overtures were made in secret to William of Orange, who had married Mary, the Protestant daughter of James by his first wife. In November, William invaded, and James fled the realm, without, however abdicating the throne.<sup>5</sup> This created a crisis of conscience for many, for by right, James was still king, and when pressed to take a new oath of allegiance to William and Mary, many in the Church of England refused to do so, including Archbishop Sancroft and Bishop Ken, along with 4 other bishops and nearly 400 other clergymen.<sup>6</sup> On August 1, 1689 these clergymen were suspended and 6 months later they were deprived of their sees and benefices.<sup>7</sup>

This created a further crisis of conscience for others in the Church of England, who viewed these deprivations as illegal or unwarranted. The first true schism within the Church of England neared, as these clergymen who refused to swear allegiance to William and Mary and their followers organized themselves for worship outside the official structures of the Church of England. The Nonjurors as a movement had been born.

## **The Nonjuring Schism**

Following his ejection from Lambeth Palace in June 1689, Archbishop Sancroft eventually retired to his native birthplace of Fresingfield. From that place, he delegated his authority to the similarly deprived Bishop of Norwich, William Lloyd, by a letter

notarized on February 9, 1690.<sup>8</sup> Following this, a list of clergymen who had refused the oath was forwarded to King James II in France, who appointed two to be nominated for episcopal consecration, one each by Sancroft and Lloyd. This having been done, the two, Hicke and Westgaffe, were consecrated on February 24, 1693, as suffragan of Thetford and suffragan of Ipswich. Episcopal succession had now been secured among the Nonjurors.

While many regarded the Nonjurors as schismatics, the Nonjurors held they were innocent of responsibility for a schism created by instituting men to benefices which were not canonically vacant.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the Nonjuror movement cast into doubt the validity of the Established Church, as a church, and of the idea of State supremacy in religious matters in a way that captured the attention of thoughtful Englishmen in a wholly new way from the Catholic critiques, as the Nonjurors were undeniably English and were clearly acting not acting from self-interest.

“[The departure of Sancroft, his suffragans and inferior clergy] gave occasion to a protracted literary controversy, the protagonists of which challenged the validity of the position of the established church as a true branch of Christ’s Catholic and Apostolic Church, by asserting its schismatic character against the faithful remnant of non-juring congregations who had preserved the integrity of their profession. The ensuing dispute covered the entire ground of political and ecclesiastical issues raised by the Revolution settlement, upon the determination of which depended the stability of the new *régime*.

A recent commentator has affirmed the bold opinion that:

in challenging the assumption of the lay power to control the ecclesiastical affairs and in their unflinching insistence on the spiritual autonomy of the church, the Non-Jurors were not the conservative defenders of a forsaken belief, but were pioneering in the attempt to save the church from Erastianism. Not only so, they were unwittingly, but none the less surely, asserting the rights of individuals and minorities against the

omnicompetence of the Hobbesian state, for to admit man's essential freedom in spiritual matters was to open the door for his claim to freedom in other directions also.<sup>1910</sup>

## Theological Contributions of the Nonjurors

As the Nonjuring community organized its life in separation from the Established Church, its divines began to emphasize theological ideas that were already prevalent in the minor clergy. As one writer summarized:

In the eyes of the majority of the bishops the Church of England was emphatically a Protestant Church, and the differences between the establishment and the chief Nonconformist bodies were on matters of comparatively little moment...On the other hand the great body of the clergy...strained all their energies to aggrandize their priestly powers...The Nonjuror theology represented this tendency in its extreme form, and exercised a wide influence beyond its border. The writers of this school taught that Episcopalian clergymen were as literally priests as were the Jewish priests, though they belonged not to the order of Aaron, but to the higher order of Melchisedek; that the communion was literally and not metaphorically a sacrifice; that properly constituted clergymen have the power of uttering words over the sacred elements which produced the most wonderful, though unfortunately the most imperceptible, of miracles...that the Romish practice of prayers for the dead was highly commendable."<sup>11</sup>

In this distinction of views of the higher and lower clergy we can discern part of that survival of Catholic beliefs which is the thesis of my entire series of articles; that despite the official pronouncements of some bishops and of the political class in England, many of the central Catholic doctrines that the 39 Articles attacked continued to be held by English Christians and by their pastors. Because the

1 Hawkins LH, *Allegiance in Church and State: The Problem of the Non-Jurors in the English Revolution*; London, 1928; pp. 167-8.

Nonjurors were free of state oversight, they were able to ponder these ideas and develop them more fully.

This theological development gave rise to the Usages Controversy within the Nonjuring movement. Through studying the writings of the Church Fathers, some became convinced that liturgical elements that were missing in the Prayer Book of the Established Church needed to be restored. In particular, these included “prayer of oblation, invocation of the Holy Spirit, a mixed chalice, and prayers for the dead.”<sup>12</sup> Two leading Nonjurors, Thomas Deacon and Thomas Brett authored a revised Eucharistic liturgy which they published in 1714 to reestablish these usages. This revised liturgy was not accepted by the majority of the Nonjurors, and a split ensued in 1716 between the “Usagers”, those who supported the revival of these 4 usages, and those who held they were at best optional. The split was mostly healed in 1732; but a minority of Nonjurors continued to walk apart, following Deacon’s lead.

During this same period, the closely allied Scottish Episcopalians, who had been disestablished by King William, were also looking closely at their own eucharistic liturgy. While they did not have the resources to publish the Scottish *Book of Common Prayer* that had been rejected in 1637 by the Scots, the Scottish bishops gradually produced small booklets for insertion into the English *Book of Common Prayer* that replaced the second half of the Communion Office. The earliest of these “wee bookies” reproduced the text of the 1637 Scottish Prayer Book, which had been compiled by Archbishop Laud under King Charles I; that book looked back to the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* for inspiration, as retaining a more Catholic form of worship in the eyes of the nonjuring Scottish Episcopalians.<sup>13</sup> Throughout the 18th Century these “wee bookies” evolved, until in 1764 one was published which became recognized as the standard Communion Office. This Scottish Communion Office largely used the words of Thomas Cranmer, as rearranged by Archbishop Laud in the 1637 *Book of Common Prayer*; it was also influenced by the study and practice of the Nonjuring Usagers. Chief among these were the emphasis of the Eucharist as a sacrifice and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, using the model of the Eastern Church liturgies (i.e., following the words of institution, instead of preceding them).

This renewed understanding of the Eucharist as sacrifice, and of this sacrifice involving the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity (as a participation of the sacrifice of Christ, offered to the Father via the Holy Spirit's power) was not the only area of sacramental theology renewed in the teaching of the Nonjurors. Both Thomas Deacon and Henry Dodwell numbered confirmation explicitly among the sacraments (many people taking Article 25 to mean that only Baptism and Holy Communion are Sacraments<sup>2</sup>).<sup>14</sup> Even those Anglicans in the Established Church, who could not affirm confirmation as a sacrament for fear of violating their oath to uphold the 39 Articles, spoke of confirmation in sacramental terms. Charles Wheatly (in an example of the influence of Nonjuring teaching) wrote that, "baptism conveys the Holy Ghost only as the spirit or principle of life; it is by Confirmation that he becomes to us the Spirit of strength, and enables us to stir and move ourselves."<sup>15</sup>

## The Legacy of the Nonjurors

The Nonjurors were the first post-Reformation Anglicans to free themselves from the Erastianism, or subservience to the State, that was one unfortunate consequence of the Tudor takeover of the Church at the time of the English Reformation. This Erastianism continued to be an essential aspect of Anglicanism, even in its American form

2 **ARTICLE XXV. SACRAMENTS** ordained of Christ be not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses and effectual signs of grace and God's good will towards us, by the which He doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm, our faith in Him.

There are two Sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospel, that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord.

Those five commonly called Sacraments, that is to say, Confirmation, Penance, Orders, Matrimony, and Extreme Unction, are not to be counted for Sacraments of the Gospel, being such as have grown partly of the corrupt following of the Apostles, partly are states of life allowed in the Scriptures; but yet have not the like nature of Sacraments with Baptism and the Lord's Supper, for that they have not any visible sign or ceremony ordained of God.

The Sacraments were not ordained of Christ to be gazed upon or to be carried about, but that we should duly use them. And in such only as worthily receive the same, have they a wholesome effect or operation: but they that receive them unworthily, purchase to themselves damnation, as Saint Paul saith.

*There are those who argue that the phrase "commonly called" is in no sense pejorative and is not equivalent to falsely, while other contend that that is indeed the meaning, particularly in the light of the rest of this paragraph.*

in the Episcopal Church after the American Revolution; although in the United States, this was a subservience to the culture of the ruling class rather than to the government, per se. This bondage helps explain what in many ways has been an inexplicable change in the doctrine and polity of the Anglican Churches where a close identification with the ruling class exists.

In refusing to be ruled by the leaders of the state whom they judged to be illegitimate, the Nonjurors were freed to go beyond the restrictions placed on the Established Church, and to explore more deeply the sources of Christian doctrine in the Church Fathers. This led to a revision in their worship and in the emphasis of their teaching about the sacraments and the nature of the Church that was a true recovery of Catholic doctrine. Although the Nonjurors eventually ceased to exist as a separate body of believers in England and Scotland, their teachings and worship were influential both in England, via the Oxford Movement, and in the United States, via Bishop Samuel Seabrook's importation of the Scottish Communion Office to the fledgling Episcopal Church, which helped prepare the way for the High Church growth in the United States. Their refusal to compromise conscience for the sake of living at ease with the powers of this world gave them insight into the ever-present reality that we have here no lasting city. In the words of the Nonjuror with perhaps the most long-lasting influence, William Law:

[A Christian] must lay aside the opinions and passions which he has received from the world; because the vogue and fashion of the world, by which we have been carried away as in a torrent, before we could pass right judgments of the value of things, is, in many respects, contrary to humility; so that we must unlearn what the spirit of the world has taught us, before we can be governed by the spirit of humility.

The devil is called in Scripture the prince of this world, because he has great power in it, because many of its rules and principles are invented by this evil spirit, the father of all lies and falsehoods, to separate us from God, and prevent our return to happiness.

Now, according to the spirit and vogue of this world, whose

corrupt air we have all breathed, there are many things that pass for great and honourable, and most desirable, which yet are so far from being so, that the true greatness and honour of our nature consists in the not desiring them.<sup>16</sup>

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