

Vatican newspaper says Shakespeare was secret Catholic

VATICAN CITY – There is “little doubt” that William Shakespeare was a Catholic who was forced to hide his faith in Protestant England while leaving hints about his faith throughout his vast body of work, said an opinion piece in the Vatican newspaper.

Taking a cue from renewed speculation about Shakespeare’s true identity sparked by the film “Anonymous,” L’Osservatore Romano wrote, “There may be questions regarding his identity, but not his religious faith.”

The Nov. 18 op-ed piece said that this view was at least partly shared by the leader of the worldwide Anglican Communion, Archbishop Rowan Williams of Canterbury, who said in a debate at a literary festival last May that Shakespeare “probably had a Catholic background and had Catholic friends.”

It also pointed out that shortly after the Bard of Avon’s recorded death in 1616, Anglican Archdeacon Richard Davies wrote, “He died a papist,” a pejorative term Protestants used to refer to Catholics.

The editorial said that while there is legitimate debate about who was truly behind the Shakespeare name, “there is little doubt about another question regarding the life of Shakespeare: his convinced adherence to the Catholic faith.”

Shakespeare’s work, it said, “is full of open references to the Catholic religion.” These references are especially evident in the play “Hamlet,” it said.

The editorial also said the argument that Shakespeare lived a life “fleeing and denouncing the bloody persecution that Elizabethan England inflicted on its subjects that were following the beliefs of their fathers” was worthy of further serious study.