

The Case of the Curious Blind Spot: John Jewel – Model Reformer?

On the 17th November 1558, a battered barque, its yards hanging forlorn from its three-masted spars, its rigging torn to shreds and flapping in the (thank God!) now-easing wind, creaked its way slowly free of the storm clouds into what the young master – actually, the young mistress – hoped would prove to be calmer waters and fairer weather. It seemed so. A watery sun was peering through the cloud. For the moment. But that ship's mistress, though young, was not going to let herself be lulled into premature relaxation. She knew, by years of bitter, personal experience that appearances can be deceiving, very deceiving. The gale had eased, and the waves subsided – at least for a time – yes, but these waters were notoriously treacherous; uncharted, hidden shoals lurked ahead; pirates – Spanish raiders in particular – could attack at any moment. The broken vessel had not yet reached safety; there seemed no end to the threats which could take it beneath the waves before it could, at last, wearily drop anchor in the shelter of a safe haven.

I am, of course, talking about the creaking barque called England, the death of Mary – the Mary of Bloody infamy – and the accession of Elizabeth I.

Elizabeth was the undoubted Queen of England. Over that, there was no real dispute – except, of course, there was always her cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots, dangerously waiting in the wings. For the moment, however, she was relatively safe. But Elizabeth's first twenty-five years had been an anxious existence fraught with danger on every hand; the life of the daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn had hung on a thread ever since she had first seen the light of day in 1533. Her father had had her mother beheaded when she was only a two-year-old toddler, and England, during her short lifetime, had been hurtled through a time of unparalleled political-religious upheaval. The

State Church – and in those days, that meant the State itself, for the two formed one Commonwealth – had been on a roller-coaster. It had been switched from centuries of Roman popery into the short-lived, self-appointed popery of her father, Henry VIII. There followed a brief lurch Geneva-ward under the reforming reign of her half-brother, the teenage consumptive, Edward VI. Then it plunged into near-civil-war, brought about by the hare-brained scheme to avert a swing back to Rome by capturing the throne for the young Lady Jane Grey, installing – using – her in their dangerous game as an unwilling (to start with) pawn (a pawn who would lose her head within a few months). Then came a violent – literally, burning – hard-nosed return to a rabid, fully-Romanised popery under Elizabeth’s older half-sister, Mary, who, by her marriage to the Spanish king, Philip II, had potentially brought England under the domination of the most powerful papist kingdom in the world.¹ Phew! Listing it takes one’s breath away. What it must have been for the vulnerable Elizabeth living her precarious youthful years through such sweeping changes defies description.

One thing had remained a constant throughout all these turbulent years, however. The State Church might have had its

¹ Catherine of Aragon, the discarded wife of Henry VIII, had wreaked her revenge by rearing her daughter Mary as a bitter, rabid Roman Catholic, one who, in time, she hoped, might reinstate Romanism in England. Because of Henry’s carnal shenanigans, coupled with the all-consuming necessity to produce a male heir to avoid the catastrophe of the Wars of the Roses, Elizabeth’s mother, Anne, had, as already noted, been beheaded when Elizabeth was only two, and the child declared illegitimate. During the years of Mary’s savage, brutal, repression of Protestants, Elizabeth had been imprisoned for nearly a year on suspicion of support for Protestants. In the eyes of Mary, Elizabeth could easily have become the natural focus of rebellion, even revolution, to depose Mary and produce a Protestant State. Elizabeth’s death was the only sure insurance against it. Fortunately for Elizabeth, she was never led to the block. (This was played out in reverse when Elizabeth had Mary Queen of Scots in her power. Faced with a possible invasion by Philip II, William Cecil baited a trap into which Mary naively fell, and she was executed in 1587 at Fotheringay Castle).

beliefs and practices abruptly and violently changed for it by the will of the Monarch – whether Henry, Edward or Mary – or by the various political and religious schemers pulling the strings behind the throne, but every English man, woman and child, whether high-born or low, rich or poor, had had to recognise and attend that State Church, whatever its official beliefs and practices, owning the Sovereign as Supreme Governor (whatever views that Sovereign held) in all matters of religion. Conformity was essential; conformity at all costs. Deviants – heretics in the eyes of the State – had been given short shrift. Fines, prison, the gallows, the block or the stake awaited, and they were not idle measures. The axe was sharp. Keep your head down – or you might lose it! Add politics to the mix, the politics of royal succession, international politics, the politics of alliances and war, the politics of those lurking in the shadows just behind the throne... oh yes, the times had been dangerous, dangerous in the extreme. And for none more so than that young Princess – or was she merely the Lady? – now come to the throne – Elizabeth I. Thus, on the 17th November 1558, Elizabeth emerged from her years of anxious existence under constant threat from all sides to become the (virtually) undisputed Queen of England. All danger had not passed, however. In addition to the above, the Pope would soon (in 1570) declare her a heretic and excommunicate her. At a stroke, Elizabeth's life (as well as her eternity – in the eyes of Rome) was at stake, with every Romanist turned into a potential traitor, licensed to kill the Queen.

Although she was not herself deeply religiously-committed, Elizabeth was sympathetic to Roman Catholicism. Nevertheless, her overriding religious policy as Monarch and Supreme Governor of the Church of England would be simple and clear-cut, and to that she would be resolutely committed throughout her long reign: uniformity in all her realm, uniformity at all costs, one religion, and that religion to be moderate, stemming neither from Rome or Geneva, though heavily tinged with the former.

But this inevitably meant opposition, opposition from two wings – Papists, on the one wing, who hoped for a return to Rome, and, on the other wing, opposition from those who would become known as Puritans, men and women who grudgingly accepted the present state of things while hoping for a more thorough-going Geneva-ward reform. Some Romanists – recusants – would not conform, and paid the price. But, in the main, the Papists would outwardly conform. For all of them, their papistry was maintained – and advanced – by a secret, hidden, underground priesthood, especially and increasingly of a Jesuit order, illegally trained in English seminaries on the Continent, and smuggled back into England. The Puritans would give a niggardly conformity, but, for a while, become more and more vocal and practical in their demands for reform. A relatively small number of them had spent time on the Continent during Mary’s reign, and when they returned to England under Elizabeth, many of them were hoping to put into practice what they had learnt of Reformed Churches in Zurich, Strasbourg, Geneva, and such places, looking in short for further Geneva-ward reformation of the English State Church. As for the general population and the lower clergy, it is probably fair to say that although the majority had a liking for the old, familiar, showy Catholicism, the vicar of Bray had fathered many sons and daughters.² Outward conformity was all that would be asked; consequently, outwardly the people would conform. But as for what was going through their minds and hearts – if anything – was another question. Elizabeth wisely said she would not make a window into men’s souls (an impossibility, in any case!); as long as the people were willing to conform outwardly to the State Church, to attend its services for at least

2 Thomas Fuller: ‘The vivacious vicar [of Bray] living under King Henry VIII, King Edward VI, Queen Mary, and Queen Elizabeth, was first a Papist, then a Protestant, then a Papist, then a Protestant again. He had seen some martyrs burnt... and found this fire too hot for his tender temper. This vicar, being taxed [attacked] by one for being a turncoat and an inconstant changeling, said: “Not so, for I always kept my principle, which is this – to live and die the vicar of Bray” (Thomas Fuller: *Worthies of England*, 1662).

the minimum number of times demanded each year, be married and have their children christened under its rites, and kept their noses clean – holding their ideas and beliefs to themselves, avoiding open criticism of the Elizabethan Settlement – they could believe what they liked. Or nothing.³

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Enter John Jewel (24th May 1522 – 23rd September 1571). Jewel had been among those who fled to the Continent during the reign of Mary, even though he was far from being one with most of the other Marian exiles. Upon Elizabeth's succession, he returned to England, became heavily committed to supporting the Elizabethan Settlement, being installed as Bishop of Salisbury in 1560. Although in his youth he had compromised with Rome, he had publicly repented to become staunchly anti-Roman. He adopted an even stronger stance against the Puritans. Indeed, in his final sermon, Jewel strongly argued against the Puritan faction, describing them as worse than the Roman Catholics. It is recorded that under his reign as bishop, Wiltshire was 'singularly free of trouble-makers, Romanist and Puritan alike'. Archbishop Richard Bancroft, the arch-enemy of the Puritans, had Jewel's works published in one volume in 1609, ordering a copy of the work to be placed in all the churches.⁴ The significance of this can be measured by Edward Hyde's comment: 'If Bancroft had lived, he would

³ Some of the Romanists who did conform surreptitiously (or not) read papist books during the service. Protestants could be no better. Indeed, C.H.Spurgeon, three hundred years later, could speak of 'Hodge, the hedger and ditcher, who remarked to a Christian man with whom he was talking: "I loikes Sunday, I does; I loikes Sunday". "And what makes you like Sunday?" "Cause, you see, it's a day of rest; I goes down to the old church, I gets into a pew, and puts my legs up, and I thinks o' nothin". It is to be feared that in town as well as in country this thinking of nothing is a very usual thing' (C.H.Spurgeon: 'The Uses of Anecdotes and Illustrations', *Lectures to my Students*, Vol.2).

⁴ John and Angela Magee: 'Bishop John Jewel', p3, website of Emmanuel Church, Salisbury.

quickly have extinguished all that fire in England which had been kindled at Geneva'.⁵

In summary, Jewel, by preaching and print, devoted himself to defending the Elizabethan Settlement, primarily against Roman Catholics, though with even less sympathy for Puritans. In a sermon on 26th November 1559, he had challenged all comers to prove the Roman Catholic case out of the Scriptures, or the Councils or Fathers of the first six hundred years after Christ. He repeated his challenge in 1560, and a priest, Dr Henry Cole, responded. The 'Great Controversy' that followed produced over sixty polemical works, and set the tone and content of much of the subsequent debate between the Anglican Church and Roman Catholics. Jewel's main work was his *Apologia ecclesiae Anglicanae* (the Apology of the Anglican Church), published in 1562. This statement of the position of the Church of England against the Roman Catholic Church has proved fundamental to all subsequent controversy in this area. Lady Anne Bacon's 1564 translation of Jewel's book into English meant that Jewel's work reached a much wider audience, and enabled it to find its dominant role in the argument.

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Why am I saying all this? I am no supporter of the Elizabethan Settlement, nor of the even weaker 1660-1662 Anglian Settlement under the restored Charles II, and certainly not of the present day Church of England. Far, far from it! I tell those who are interested that I quit the Church of England in 1580.⁶

No! Anglicanism in itself doesn't interest me. Rather, I am concerned with Jewel's openness about the basis, the authority, the justification, for the Church of England, his stance against the Puritans, and the surprising way some Reformed people view him today.

⁵ Wikipedia.

⁶ See my *Battle for the Church: 1517-1644*, and my article 'Robert Browne: Thinking the Unthinkable' on my sermonaudio.com page.

Early in his *The Apology of the Church of England*, John Jewel made his position – and the Church’s position – crystal clear when he stated:

To the intent all men may see what is our judgment of every part of [the] Christian religion, and may resolve with themselves, whether the faith which they shall see confirmed by the words of Christ, by the writings of the apostles, by the testimonies of the Catholic fathers...⁷

Let me clear up a couple of possible misunderstandings. Jewel was not writing an ‘apology’ in the sense of apologising, saying he was sorry. Quite the opposite! He was setting out an explanation, a justification; he was justifying the stance of the Church of England. And, although he was, in the main, justifying the Church of England against Romanism, in this extract by ‘Catholic’ he did not mean *Roman* Catholic. He was saying the Church of England’s stance was in accord with Scripture and the writings of the Fathers; Scripture and the Fathers constituted the authority of the Church of England; its beliefs and practices were warranted by Scripture and the Fathers. That is what he was saying, and saying loud and clear.

Without any suggestion of patronisation, I commend Jewel for his honesty.

The devil, however, as always is in the detail. That ‘and’ ruins all. When men preach Christ ‘and’ for justification, the ‘and’ ruins all. Christ is all (Col. 3:11). When Jewel says Scripture ‘and’ the Fathers is the authority for the Church of England, the game is up.

What is my purpose in writing this article? Twofold.

First, this question of authority. Jewel’s (and, consequently, the Church of England’s) basis for doctrine and practice was (and remains) Scripture as understood by the Fathers. In reality, this meant – and still means – the Fathers. The Anglicans are not

⁷ John Jewel: *The Apology of the Church of England*, Cassell, London, 1888, first published in 1562 in Latin, first translated into English by Lady Anne Bacon in 1564.

alone. Something similar can be said for the Reformed. Though they claim that Scripture is their authority, as they show by their preaching, their books and their articles, it is Scripture ‘and’ the favoured Confession. In fact, it is in reality Scripture as understood in light of the Confession. And, of course, the Confession – the Westminster or the 1689 Particular Baptist – depends heavily on Calvin who himself was highly influenced by the Fathers and the medieval Church.

Secondly, it is what I call ‘The Case of the Curious Blindspot’. As I have noted, Emmanuel Church, Salisbury publishes the highly-laudatory article ‘Bishop John Jewel’, and the writers of this article, in their application of Jewel’s life and work, make the point:

As we remember the life and controversies of Jewel, let us consider the advance which Roman doctrine is presently making within the Protestant churches. Our zeal for pure doctrine in the church of Christ ought to be like that of Jewel and other Protestant Reformers. We are debtors to these men who have left us the foundations of Reformed principles.

‘Our zeal for pure doctrine in the church of Christ ought to be like that of Jewel and other Protestant Reformers. We are debtors to these men who have left us the foundations of Reformed principles’. Really? What a remarkable statement to be found on the website of such a church as Emmanuel, which is absolutely committed to the 1689 Particular Baptist Confession of Faith, and devoted to the Puritans! Indeed, immediately under the heading ‘Beliefs’, the website has a copy of the famous painting of the Westminster Divines in their Assembly by John Rogers Herbert (1810-1890). If that doesn’t show its stance, nothing will.

Well... Jewel was anti-Rome, true, but he was also far from Reformed; he was even more anti-Puritan than he was anti-Rome; he was vehemently anti-Geneva, absolutely committed to uniformity to the State Episcopal Church, under the Monarch as Supreme Governor. If he had lived until 1580, there is no doubt that he would have been anti-Separatist. If he had lived until 1633, 1644 or 1689, he would have been anti-Particular Baptist,

and disagreed with both the First and Second Particular Baptist Confessions of Faith. His basis for doctrine and practice was Scripture as understood by the Fathers.

As a matter of history, by the end of Elizabeth's reign, most Puritans had thrown in the towel over reforming the Church, conformed,⁸ and concentrated on preaching the law to try to turn Church conformists into regenerate men and women who lived by the Spirit. A task, though much praised by some today, was doomed to failure.⁹ These conforming Puritans left it to the Separatists – men and women who are often unknown, ignored or despised today – to carry on the struggle.¹⁰

Was Jewel a Reformer? It would be closer to the mark to describe him as a staunch supporter, a pillar, a buttress, of the Established, corrupt (Protestant-Roman-Pagan) State Church – one hardly fitted to be a role model for a Calvinistic, Separatist Church today, one would think.

⁸ William Perkins was in the van. William Haller: 'By careful avoidance of controverted questions in his public discourses, [he was able] to keep his pulpit until his death at forty-four in 1602' (William Haller: *The Rise of Puritanism... 1570-1643*, New York, 1947, p64, quoted by Patrick McGrath: *Papists and Puritans Under Elizabeth I*, Blandford Press, London, 1967, p327).

⁹ M.M.Knappen: 'Though the moderates writhed and protested, though they continued to grasp at legal straws and fill books with theological arguments, they bowed their necks to the yoke'. (M.M.Knappen: *Tudor Puritanism*, Chicago 1939, reprinted 1963, p329, quoted by McGrath p363). 'They tried as best they could to swallow the Prayer Book, the Thirty-Nine Articles, and the Canons of 1604. Such were "the reluctant Puritans who were swept back into official fold of the disciplinary measures of 1605-6" and who "constituted a powerful Low Church wing of the Establishment... Through such agencies Puritan theological ideas, piety and moral attitudes could [,it was hoped, – DG] be communicated to the masses"' (McGrath p363, quoting Knappen p336. The fact is, 'the spread of popery and its influence at Court [under James 1] often gave the impression to Puritans and committed Protestants that it was they and not the Papists who were being encircled' (McGrath p373).

¹⁰ See my *Battle*.

But because of his anti-Roman stance, all else is quietly forgotten, suppressed, ignored by Emmanuel. This is what I mean by 'The Case of the Curious Blind Spot'.