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THE ANGLICAN "VIA MEDIA" AND THE CAROLINE DIVINES.

THE SCRIPTURES AND THE RULE OF FAITH.

BY THE REV. C. SYDNEY CARTER, M.A., Principal B.C.M. College, Clifton.

“WHEN Elizabeth came to the throne, although the 1552 Prayer Book was replaced, it was with alterations of such far-reaching significance that nothing vital to Catholic tradition could be said to be authoritatively abandoned” (Eeles, *P. B. Revision*, 108). This definitely dogmatic statement by a modern writer implies that such important changes were made at the Revision of the Prayer Book in 1559 that Anglican religion then recovered a Catholicity which had been sacrificed by the Second Prayer Book of Edward VI. It is on a par with similar assumptions by such authorities as Bishops Frere, Gibson and Dr. Kidd. We have carefully examined such statements and found that they are entirely devoid of any historical foundation, since the three small changes made in 1559 in no way affected the doctrinal character of the English Church and certainly cannot be interpreted as in any way affecting its catholicity.

A further contention would, however, if correct, seriously challenge Anglican agreement with “Catholic tradition.” For the same writer tells us that there are “Three views of the Church held by four principal sections of Christians. There is first the Papal view held by those of the Roman obedience, according to which ultimately all authority rests with the papacy. There is secondly the old Protestant view, according to which the ultimate authority is Scripture. There is thirdly the view held by Anglicans in the West and by the Orthodox in the East that the ultimate authority is the Church herself, the whole body of Christ speaking through a General Council ratified by subsequent general acceptance” (p. 17). Now this contention that the “Anglican view” places the ultimate authority of the Church as superior to that of Scripture, is not only subversive of primitive Catholic tradition, but it absolutely contradicts the whole Reformation position and appeal, in which there was absolute unanimity between the Anglican and foreign Reformers. The Roman Church had decreed in the Council of Trent that “the truth is contained in the written books and in the unwritten traditions which having been received by the Apostles were handed down even to us” and it declared that the Council “receives and venerates with an equal feeling of piety and reverence all the books of the Old and New Testaments as well as the traditions relating both to faith and morals dictated either orally by Christ or by the Holy Spirit, and preserved in continuous succession in the Catholic Church” (Sess. IV, Canon 1, Conc. XIV, 746). Cardinal Bellarmine aptly summarized the distinction

between the Romish and Reformed views on the subject when he said, "The controversy between us and heretics consists in this, that we assert that all necessary doctrine concerning faith and morals is not necessarily contained in Scripture, and consequently beside the Written Word is needed an unwritten one, whereas they teach that in the Scriptures all such necessary doctrine is contained, and consequently there is no need of an unwritten word" (*De Verb. Dei*, lib. IV, c. 3.).

Now if our Anglican Confession of Faith emphasizes one point more than another it is that the Scriptures are to be regarded as the sole rule of Faith and as the final standard of appeal and authority. The ordinances of General Councils are, it affirms, "of no strength or authority" unless they are in accordance with the teaching of Scripture (Article XXI), while even the Catholic Creeds are declared to be dependent on the same supreme authority for their acceptance (Art. VIII). It is well to expose thoroughly the absolute baselessness of this definite contention, for it does not stand alone. Dr. Kidd in his Introduction to the *Thirty-Nine Articles* similarly declares that in common with all the Anglican formularies the Articles make their "new appeal" "not to the authority of the Bible and the Bible only, but to that of Scripture and the undivided Church" (p. 12). In proof of this remarkable assertion Dr. Kidd appeals to the statement made in the *Ten Articles* of 1536 and *The Bishops' Book* of 1537 and *The King's Book* of 1543, "The Elizabethan Act of Supremacy and the Canons of 1571." We can at once dismiss the first three of these formularies, as they only had temporary authority in Henry VIII's reign, and were entirely superseded by the authorized Anglican Confession of Faith drawn up in 1552, which was revised in 1562. It is therefore the doctrine "set forth" in these "Thirty Nine Articles," which is the only binding standard of authority in the Anglican Church to-day. And we should remember that these Articles make no reference whatever to the previous tentative formularies of Henry VIII's reign. We are not surprised that Dr. Kidd makes no effort to justify his contention, concerning the appeal of the Anglican formularies, by references to the teaching of the Articles, but instead relies on a statement concerning the "judgment for heresy" made in the Act of Supremacy 1559. Let us examine the force and authority of this alleged support. A clause in this Act set up a High Commission Court and empowered it to adjudge heresy only, "by the authority of the Canonical Scriptures, or by the first four General Councils, or any of them, or by any other General Council wherein the same was declared heresy by the express and plain words of the said canonical Scriptures, or such as hereafter shall be ordered, judged or determined to be heresy by the High Court of Parliament, with the assent of the clergy in their Convocation" (Prothero, *Statutes and Documents*, p. 12). It is immediately apparent that in this statement the main test of heresy is to be sought from the teaching based on "the express and plain words of the Canonical Scriptures." The judgment of the "First Four General

Councils " is certainly admitted, but as the dogmatic canons of these Councils only relate to the Holy Trinity it was evidently thought sufficient to appeal to them to condemn any Arian or Socinian heresy. But this appeal to the dogmatic teaching of the First Four General Councils can by no stretch be construed as committing the Anglican formularies to the standard of " the undivided Church," which would necessarily include the first ten centuries up to the division of East and West. Certainly also Dr. Kidd can find no support for an Anglican standard of " the Scriptures and the undivided Church " in the permission given here to the " High Court of Parliament " to " determine heresy," since no standards other than the preceding ones are set forth for its guidance. Moreover, Dr. Kidd forgets that these tests are found not in an Anglican *formulary* but in an Act of Parliament, and also that this whole section of the Act was repealed with the abolition of the High Commission Court in 1641. Therefore even from 1559 to 1641 it could only be quoted as a standard which the State thought fit to impose on the Church, but since then it does not possess even this value. It cannot therefore, like the Articles, be included in the appeal of the " Anglican formularies."

The only other support which Dr. Kidd alleges for his dogmatic contention is a statement contained in some Canons passed by the Upper Houses of Convocation only, in 1571, which never received royal authorization. One of these warns preachers never to preach anything which they wish people to hold and believe " nisi quod consentaneum sit doctrinæ Veteris aut Novi Testamenti *quodque ex illa ipsa doctrina catholici patres et veteres episcopi collegerint* " (Cardwell, *Synodalia*, I, 126). But even if we may regard these Canons in a subordinate sense as an Anglican formulary, this vague and indefinite standard to which they appeal ultimately rests on " the doctrine of the Old and New Testaments," so that it certainly cannot be claimed as exalting " the teaching of the undivided Church " to be a co-ordinate authority with Holy Scripture. On the other hand we get confirmatory evidence that the Anglican standard of authority is ultimately Scripture alone, from the statutory Canons of 1604 which superseded these unauthorized Canons of 1571. For Canon LI of that year, in a similar attempt to prevent erroneous teaching, orders every preacher to be reported to the bishop, who publishes any doctrine " disagreeing with the Word of God or the Articles of Religion and the Book of Common Prayer ") Cardwell, u. s. I, 275). It makes no mention of " General Councils or Catholic Fathers and old Bishops." Since both the Prayer Book and the Articles make their final appeal to Scripture, we may safely say that the Anglican Reformation in its formularies accepted what Mr. Eeles styles, " the old Protestant view " as its cardinal principle—the subordination to Scripture as its final standard of faith and authority.¹

¹ The unauthorized " *Reformatio Legum Ecclesiasticarum* " of Edward VI's reign cannot be regarded in any strict sense as an Anglican " formulary," and in any case its statement that " we reverently accept the first four Councils " must be modified by the definite language of Article XXI, which declares *all* Councils fallible.

But not only have we conclusive proof that as regards the standard of authority the Anglican Church takes no "middle position," but as we have seen, there is abundant evidence that its whole doctrinal basis as set forth in the Elizabethan Settlement is in complete harmony with that of the foreign Reformed Churches. In spite of this evidence we are to-day constantly being told by scholars that the Anglican Church occupies a *via media* position. "The Church of England," writes Bishop Headlam, "has in the West the strength, but also the weakness of its position as a *via media*. It seems to many a very unreal compromise. It claims to be something different from the Protestant Churches, yet it is not Roman" (*History, Christianity and Theology*, p. 283). Even though it is impossible to substantiate such a statement as this from the Anglican formularies or from the writings of the sixteenth-century Reformers, it is not unimportant, if only from an historical point of view, to examine carefully if there is any foundation for it in the theological and ecclesiastical position of the prominent Caroline divines of the seventeenth century. In other words, did these celebrated exponents of Anglicanism depart seriously from the principles and position of their Edwardian and Elizabethan forerunners? Did they, for instance, regard the Church of England "as something different from the Protestant Churches"?

Owing to the modern attempt to change the connotation of historical ecclesiastical terminology it is necessary in considering this point to be clear in our definitions. It is evident, for instance, that the Caroline divines would not have endorsed Bishop Headlam's limitation of the designation "Protestant Churches." Bishop Sanderson, one of their most prominent representatives, declares "By the Protestant Churches we understand those visible Churches which, having by an external separation freed themselves from the tyranny and idolatry of Popery, have more or less reformed their doctrine and worship from popish corruptions and restored them more or less to the ancient primitive purity." And he enumerates such Churches as "The Church of England, the Church of Denmark, The Church of Saxony, etc." (*Two Treatises on the Church*, 183). But if by the term "Protestant Churches" is intended the existing English non-episcopal communions, then it must be admitted that the Caroline divines did regard the Church of England as occupying a middle position between their forerunners the English "sectaries," as they were then described, and Rome. But even so such *via media* position was concerned rather with discipline and polity than with doctrine. Thus Bishop Ferne (of Chester) in writing against sectaries and papists says "The English Protestant, or obedient son of the Church of England, as he is well set between a Papist and a sectary, as between two extremes, so he only is able to stand against the opposition or pretensions of both; for if we examine the false grounds and deceiving principles of both as to this point of the constitution, government and communion of the Church, we shall see clearly the truth lies in the midst between both, and the Church of England holds and maintains it (*A Compendious Discourse*,

etc., Sect. 2). It is significant that there is no mention here of doctrine. We should remember also that the Caroline divines not only followed the Elizabethan Reformers in adopting the practically universal belief of the lawfulness of only one form of religion for a particular nation, but they also held, perhaps even more strongly than their predecessors, that to separate from a purely Reformed and apostolically organized National Church was a grievous act of schism. If, however, this ambiguous term "Protestant Churches" is designed to cover the foreign Reformed Churches, then it is certainly historically incorrect to say that the Caroline divines regarded the Church of England as taking a *via media* position between them and Rome. For they regarded the Anglican Church as a real and probably the chief partner with the other Reformed Churches in the defence of the Protestant Faith against Roman corruptions. Seventeen bishops in 1641 joined in a solemn protestation to "maintain and defend the true Reformed Protestant religion expressed in the doctrine of the Church of England," while in reply to a question in the House of Lords in 1673, several bishops explained that the Protestant Religion is comprehended in the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Liturgy, the Homilies, the Catechism, and the Canons of the Church of England" (Campbell's *Lives of Chancellors*, IV, 187, 1857). They rejoiced in the real unity of doctrine which existed between all the Reformed Protestant Churches as evidenced in the *Harmony of Protestant Confessions of Faith* which was issued in 1583 and to which Canon 30 of 1604 refers as approving the Anglican adoption of the ceremony of the Sign of the Cross in Baptism.

Bishop Joseph Hall clearly emphasizes this Protestant unity and solidarity when he declares "Blessed be God, there is no essential difference between the Church of England and her sisters of the Reformation. We accord in every point of Christian doctrine without the least variation" (*Works*, V, 56, 1811). "We do love and honour these our sister Churches as the dear spouse of Christ" (*Defence of Humble Remonstrance*, 14. IX, 690, *Works*). Bishop Cosin similarly emphasizes this Protestant solidarity in urging English refugees while in France to join in communion with the French Reformed Churches, since they thereby "declare their unity in professing the same religion which they and you do." And he concludes with the pertinent query that if they renounce the foreign Reformed Churches "what will become of the Protestant party?" (*Works*, IV, 401). This recognition of the English Church as the ally and champion of other Reformed Churches was very marked amongst the Caroline divines. It is conspicuously evidenced in the address which Convocation made to William III in 1689 when it thanked him "for his pious zeal and care for the honour of the Church of England whereby we doubt not the interest of the Protestant Religion in all other Protestant Churches, which is dear to us, will be better secured" (Cardwell, *Synodalia*, 2, 698). Convocation evidently regarded the safeguarding of the Anglican Church as the best means of securing the Reformed Religion everywhere. The

same sentiment was voiced by Archbishop Sancroft in the previous year when, under the stress of the Romish attack on the English Church, he even includes the English Dissenters in his concern for the common Protestant cause, since he exhorts his clergy "to join in daily fervent prayer to the God of peace for the universal blessed union of all Reformed Churches both at home and abroad against our common enemies." (D'Oyley's *Life of Sancroft*, I, 325.)

There is certainly, therefore, ample evidence to show that the Caroline divines, instead of teaching that the Anglican Church held a *via media* position between Rome and "The Protestant Churches," were most anxious to prove its claim to be "something very different from Rome" and at the same time its essential identity with "the Protestant Churches." But apart from this general attitude let us examine carefully if there is any evidence that the Caroline divines took a *via media* position concerning the authority of the Church and the Scriptures. Did they in any way modify the principle of Scripture alone as the final standard of authority which the Reformers laid down for the Church of England? Would they have accepted Dr. Kidd's standard of the "Scriptures and the Undivided Church" or even a more recent Rule of Faith to be determined by the "Scriptures, Creeds, Conciliar decisions, and the common teaching of representative divines"? (*The Faith of an English Catholic*, Darwell Stone, 22). Archbishop Cranmer stated the Reformed position most clearly when he said: "If thou be desirous to know whether thou be in the right Faith or no, seek it not at man's mouth, seek it not at a proud, glorious and wavering sort of bishops and priests, but at God's own mouth, which is His Holy Word Written which can neither lie, deceive nor be deceived." Cranmer goes on to say that while godly learned men may be consulted for instruction in the Scriptures, they are not to be believed "further than they can show their doctrine and exhortation to be agreeable to the true Word of God Written. For that is the very touchstone which must, yea and will also, try all doctrine and learning whether it be good or evil, true or false" (*Works*, 2, 13-14). "The authority of the orthodox Fathers," he declared on another occasion, "is by no means to be despised . . . but that the Holy Scriptures ought to be interpreted by their decisions we do not allow, for the Holy Scripture ought to be to us both the rules and judges of all Christian doctrines" (*Reformatio Legum*, Tit. I. C. XV, 1850, Cardwell's Edition). Similarly Bishop Jewel in his *Apology* declared Scripture to be "the very sure and infallible rule whereunto all ecclesiastical doctrine ought to be called to account" (Part 2, Ch. IX, 28. 1852). Is there any evidence showing that the prominent Anglican divines of the next century departed in any way from this very definite position?

Certainly no better representative of the earlier Caroline divines can be found than Dr. Field, Dean of Gloucester, the friend of Hooker. He was a member of the Hampton Court Conference and a most learned and profound theologian. He died in 1616 at the age of

55. In his celebrated treatises "Of the Church" Field examines the witness of the early and medieval Church to the "sufficiency of the Scriptures." He quotes with approval St. Augustine, who declares that "whatsoever a man shall learn without and beside the Scripture, if it be hurtful, it is there condemned, if profitable, it is there found." He also refers to Scotus who affirms "whatsoever pertaineth to the heavenly and supernatural knowledge and is necessary to be known of man in this life is sufficiently delivered in the sacred Scriptures." He cites Ockham that "there is one opinion that only those varieties are to be esteemed catholic, and such as are necessarily to be believed for the attaining of salvation, which either expressly are delivered in Scripture, or by necessary consequence may be inferred from things so expressed." Field then sums up the patristic and medieval writers by saying: "By this which hath been said it appeareth that the Church wherein our fathers lived and died was in this point touching the sufficiency of Scripture, an orthodox and true Protestant Church" (*Of the Church*, Vol. 2, 127-40). Again in refuting the error that the authority of the Church was superior to that of Scripture, Field argues that although "the Church of all the faithful" may be "free from any error" "yet we dare not make it equal to the Scriptures for that Scripture is infallibly true as inspired immediately from the Spirit of truth, securing the writers of it from error." "The whole Church," he concludes (i.e., "all the faithful that have been since and beside the Apostles), is subject to the Scripture in all her parts, and hath her infallibility from it, and, therefore, in her manner of having the truth is inferior unto it, neither are we bound to receive her doctrines as the sacred Scriptures" (Vol. 2, 433, 1849).

In treating of the special authority of the Church to judge matters of faith, Field prefaces his remarks by declaring that the "judgment or determination of the Word of God is that wherein we rest as the rule of our faith and the light of divine understanding as that whereby we judge of all things" (2, 439). But in dealing with the Church's judgment in "particular things," Field lays down certain rules or guides, such as the Apostles' Creed, the Scriptures, the "unanimous consent of all the saints in their writings, and what the most famous have constantly and uniformly delivered, without any contradiction, as a matter of faith, so that those gainsaying them were charged with heresy." The last two rules Field declares are not to be admitted as equal with the former two. Moreover "the decrees of Councils, and the determinations of Popes," he affirms, "are not to be numbered as rules of faith" because "we have no proof of their infallibility." He concludes by saying, "We do not therefore so make the Scripture the rule of our faith as to neglect the other rules, nor so admit the other as to detract anything from the plenitude of Scripture in which all things are contained that must be believed" (2, 444). Such statements are surely very far from accepting the standard of "the Scriptures and the undivided Church" or of "the Scriptures, Creeds and the common teaching of representative divines." In fact, it would

not seem that Field's position differs materially from Cranmer's dictum concerning the authority of the Fathers or from the rules laid down by the Reformers in the Articles—that although "the Church hath authority in controversies of Faith" yet it may not "so expound one place of Scripture that it be repugnant to another" nor "enforce anything" beside Scripture "to be believed for necessity of salvation" (Article XXX).

Archbishop Laud speaks in, if anything, more definite language, when, arguing against the Jesuit Fisher, he declares, "I admit no ordinary rule left in the Church of divine and infallible verity, and so of *faith*, but the Scripture. . . . Christ hath left an infallible rule the Scripture, what need is there of another since this is most infallible, and the same which the antient Church of Christ admitted?" (*Works*, 2, 218, 1849).

If we turn to a later Caroline divine renowned for his learning, piety and orthodoxy, we shall also find abundant evidence that Scripture alone is regarded as the sole rule of faith, although the Creeds, the first four General Councils and unanimous Catholic traditional teaching are accepted as guides in judging heresy. For Bishop Jeremy Taylor makes it quite clear that "the Scripture is a full and sufficient rule to Christians in faith and manners, a full and perfect declaration of the will of God, and is therefore certain because we have no other" . . . "we have no reason to rely upon tradition for any part of our faith" (*Works*, Dissuasive from Popery, X, 419-20). When we find him definitely declaring that "the fulness and sufficiency of Scripture in all matters of faith and manners is the principle that I and all Protestants rely upon" (*Works*, X, 268-70), there is no possibility of claiming him as a supporter of any *via media* view that Church teaching and authority should be based on the rule of "the Scriptures and the undivided Church." Taylor makes his position quite clear when he says in his "Dissuasive from Popery" that "nothing else than the Scriptures can be the foundation of our faith," although "to these we also add, not as authors or finishers, but as helpers of our faith and heirs of the doctrine Apostolical, the sentiments and Catholic doctrine of the Church of God in all ages next after the Apostles." But Taylor is careful to make it clear that although "the Fathers are admirable helps for the understanding of the Scriptures," yet no certain and decisive appeal can be made to their teaching, so that he concludes "we do wholly rely upon the Scriptures as the foundation and final resort of all our persuasions and from thence can never be confuted" (Part I, Book I).

It is well perhaps also to record the testimony of a celebrated Anglican Calvinist divine of this period. The learned and "heavenly" Dr. Richard Sibbes (1578-1635) was Master of Catharine Hall, Cambridge, when Jeremy Taylor was an undergraduate. He was not only a man of ripe scholarship, but also a profound theologian of deep piety of whom Isaac Walton declared:

"Of this just man let this just praise be given,
Heaven was in him, before he was in heaven."

Speaking of the unique and final authority of Scripture, Sibbes says, "It hath a supreme authority from itself." "What," he asks, "is the judge of all controversies?" and answers, "The Word, the Spirit of God in the Scriptures." Refuting the theory that the authority of the Scripture depends on the Church, he says, "A carrier sheweth us these be letters from such a man, but when we open the letter and see the hand and seal we know them to be his. The Church knows the Word and explaineth it, and when we see and feel the efficacy of the Word in itself, then we believe it to be the Word, for there is the Word that sheweth it, to be the Word" (*Works*, 2, 493-4, 1862).

Dr. Thomas Jackson, Dean of Peterborough, another early Caroline divine, whom the late Dr. Pusey described as "one of the best and greatest divines Our Church hath nurtured," thus defines the difference between the Church of England and the Church of Rome over the Rule of Faith. "The making of ecclesiastical tradition to be an integral part of the Canon of Faith (which the Roman Church hath done) doth not only pollute but undermine the whole fabric of the holy, primitive and Catholic Faith." "We affirm," he continues, "with antiquity and in particular with Vincentius Lirinensis that the Canon of Scripture is a rule of faith, perfect for quantity, and sufficient for quality; that is, it contains all things in it, that are necessary to salvation . . . without relying on any other rule or authority equivalent to them in certainty. . . . The modern Roman Church adds tradition as another part of the same rule homogeneal and equivalent to it for quality." And he adds that to supply the insufficiency of both the Scriptures and tradition the Roman Church superadds "the infallible authority of the present visible Church" which "utterly pulls down the structure of faith." Although Dr. Jackson is careful to explain, "When we reject ecclesiastical tradition from being any part of the rule of faith, we do not altogether deny the authority or use of it" (on the Creed, *Two Treatises on the Church*, 155-6).

Again, if we consult the writings of one of the most prominent and representative of the later Caroline divines, Archbishop Bramhall, we shall find no mention of, or support for, a *via media* position of the "Scriptures and the Undivided Church," or the "Scriptures and the common teaching of representative divines" as the standard of Anglican authority. Bramhall certainly accepts the Apostles' Creed as a rule of faith, but only because it is a concise summary of Scriptural teaching. "The Scriptures and Creed," he says, "are not two different rules of faith, but one and the same dilated in Scripture and contracted in the Creed" (*Works*, V, 597). Similarly Bishop Pearson in urging his parishioners "to embrace the first faith to which they cannot have a more probable guide than the Creed," declares that he refers them to this "as *it leads you to the Scriptures*." And he adds that he has "laid the foundation of the whole work (i.e., his "Exposition of the Creed") upon the written Word of God" (*Ibid.*, pp. 2-5, 1880). Bishop Stillingfleet speaks even more definitely when he says, "The Scripture

being our sole and entire rule of faith, all matters necessary to salvation must be supposed to be contained therein" (*Discourse and Grounds of Certainty of Faith*, 51-80).

We might continue our investigation through the writings of all the leading Caroline divines, and we should find that while they give due deference and weight to "Conciliar decisions" and to the accumulated traditional teaching and wisdom of the Universal Church, they never exalt these secondary guides or authorities to be on a level with the supreme rule of Faith in the Scriptures, while they frequently affirm that the teaching of the whole undivided Catholic Church through its œcumenical Councils is not to be lightly rejected, that is, where it can be clearly ascertained, as in the case of the great Catholic Creeds or in the writings of the Early Fathers. But they make it clear that all these standards or appeals must be subordinate to the sole divine rule of Faith in Holy Scripture. On this point they occupy no *via media* position between Rome and the other Reformed Churches. They never seriously challenge what Mr. Eeles terms "the old Protestant view" that the "ultimate authority is Scripture."

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H. D.