

“CLASSICAL ANGLICANISM”
A NECESSARY AND VALUABLE POINT OF REFERENCE

In this journal in 1995, Dr Graham Cole undertook an analysis of my use of the notion of classical Anglicanism.¹ He challenged the appropriateness of such an idea and questioned whether or not its use in my book, *A Church Without Walls*,² did not actually suggest something of a party reading of the Anglican tradition of Christianity. He criticised my use of Richard Hooker as an example of that classical Anglicanism and offers William Paley as a counter example.

William Paley, however, cannot be assimilated into this commonplace view unless disenfranchised as an Anglican divine. Thus, he stands as a counter example to any facile appeal to the threefold source position as normative Anglicanism. To do otherwise suggests that Anglican history is being read through party eyes and that Richard Hooker has been selected as the paradigm case of Anglican theological method accordingly, which simply invites the question, who says? And, for what century? (Cole p.100)

This “common place view” of classical Anglicanism, which sees Scripture reason and tradition as the threefold sources of faith in Anglican Christianity and a focus upon the Incarnation, excludes William Paley from classical Anglicanism because, according to Graham Cole’s analysis, he had a dyadic rather than a triadic form of religious authority. Scripture and reason were his authorities. Tradition was not. Paley is also,

an Anglican divine whose outlook was prospective, rather than retrospective, and therefore unlike those Anglican theologians who argue that the theological centre of gravity in Anglicanism is the Incarnation. (Cole p.109)

¹ Cole, G. Paley and the Myth of ‘Classical Anglicanism’, *The Reformed Theological Review*, 54, 1995, 97-109

² Kaye, BN. *A Church Without Walls. Being Anglican in Australia*. Melbourne: Dove, 1995.

In the course of the argument he suggests that such a conception of what he calls “normative” Anglicanism, would also exclude Thomas Cranmer and would be different from the evangelical emphasis upon the crucifixion rather than the incarnation.

Classical Anglicanism

I do not wish to dispute Graham Cole’s interpretation of William Paley. He has read more of him and I am sure understands him better than I do. However, I point out that in my book I describe William Paley as “one of the most famous of the Anglican apologists”³ I refer to William Paley as an example of a disposition towards apologetics in Anglicanism, and indeed take him as a highly typical example of that tradition. William Paley is certainly not excluded from my conception of Anglicanism, as my book makes clear. Am I therefore mistaken in including Paley because he does not conform to what I have described as classical Anglicanism? Or is there some other explanation for the difference between my description of classical Anglicanism and Graham Cole’s exposition of Paley’s theological position on authority?

The difference is not I think in our interpretation of William Paley, but rather in our understanding of the conception of “classical”. The point becomes clear in Graham Cole’s conclusions.

The so called method of “classical Anglicanism”, with its implied normativeness, and appeal to the “troika” of Scripture, tradition and reason, is not the only Anglican methodology that historical enquiry is able to uncover. It is more accurate to speak then of Anglican theological methods, rather than of an Anglican theological method. And by “Anglican” to mean, as practised by Anglican theologians, rather than to mean some theological method that only Anglicans deploy.

Graham Cole appears to me to be objecting to the use of the concept of classical Anglicanism because it implies a certain normativeness, normativeness here meaning that some are included in the category Anglican and some are excluded. In other words there is some sharp dividing line between those who are regarded as Anglican

because they conform to the so called classical Anglican model, and those who do not. It is true that kind of normativeness can be discerned in some writers and indeed in some Anglican writers. But that is not the conception with which I am concerned, nor which I have sought to expound in my book.

I approach this question on the basis that Anglicanism is a more or less identifiable tradition within Christianity. It is identifiable not because there are some things in it which are not to be found elsewhere in Christianity, some unique quality either of content, character or method. There is, I think, almost nothing by way of theological method, or even elements of doctrine, to be found in Anglicanism which cannot be found at least to some degree in other traditions. There is much in common between Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism, and between Anglicanism and Lutheranism or the Reformed tradition. Nonetheless there are clearly differences between Anglicanism and those other traditions. It might be that one could say a central role given to Thomas Aquinas or Martin Luther distinguishes Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism from other western Christian traditions. But that would not be a completely adequate way of distinguishing between these different traditions. Any comparison of Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism would need to touch on other considerations; for example the role of the magisterium or the emphasis on Justification by Faith, a clear institutionality in the ecclesiology of the one and an apparent absence of it in the other.

If we restrict our field of enquiry to Anglicanism as a religious tradition it becomes identifiable because of a variety of considerations, no one of which is determinative of the character, quality or distinctiveness of the Anglican tradition. In some sense a connection with the Archbishop of Canterbury is a consideration, though that is qualified in the Constitution of The Anglican Church of Australia.⁴ In some sense a relationship to the Reformation formularies is a consideration. In some sense a connection with the tradition of theological discourse which Anglicans have engaged in over the centuries is significant. In some sense a commitment to a liturgical form of worship is significant. In some sense a commitment to a connection

³ *A Church Without Walls*, p.152

⁴ "This Church will remain and be in communion with the Church of England in England and with churches in communion therewith so long as communion is consistent with the Fundamental Declarations contained in the Constitution." *The Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia, with alterations as at 31 July, 1995*, Sydney, 1995, clause 6.

with the pre-Reformation Anglo Celtic Church is significant. In some sense an openness to the continuing providential presence of God in the world is significant.

We are confronted here with a notoriously difficult definitional question familiar to sociologists, anthropologists and historians; how to identify with any kind of precision discrete traditions in cultures or religions. That difficulty does not mean that those traditions are not generally identifiable, or that the distinctions between them cannot be reasonably made. No sensible person suggests that Anglicanism cannot be distinguished from Roman Catholicism or Lutheranism. Though precisely how one distinguished them would be a matter of some considerable discussion. What is also true in terms of the relationships between discrete religious traditions is true in terms of the internal dynamics of those traditions.

I do not agree with Graham Cole that it can simply be a matter of those who call themselves Anglicans though that is probably a necessary marker. However, there is more that can and should be said. Precisely because the boundaries of this religious tradition are not susceptible to exact and precise definition by single or even limited numbers of criteria, the way in which the tradition is understood in its internal dynamics, must necessarily be cast in more differentiated terms. In that sense “normativeness” as a category for dealing with a religious tradition of this kind is not an appropriate nor indeed an adequate category. It is too precise a category. Because it is too precise and simple it actually means that the characterisation of the internal dynamics of a tradition is evaporated to the point where it is neither helpful nor illuminating.

This does not mean that there are not norms in the sense of necessary elements or standards. The Constitution of The Anglican Church of Australia is a good example of the presence of norms.⁵ Most Provinces of the Anglican Communion have similar norms identified in their constitutions or bases of existence. Clearly there are identifiable norms in most traditions of Christianity, and certainly in Anglicanism. This is different from describing a particular form or example of Anglicanism as normative. Nonetheless, the tradition of Christianity described as Anglican is not a flat and undifferentiated terrain. There are clearly border areas as there are central

⁵ The norms are provided in two grades, those identified in the constitution as Fundamental Declarations(Sections 1-3) and those in the Ruling Principles (Sections 4-6).

areas. There is a profile, a topography to the history of this tradition. It is precisely for this reason of making sense of the tradition historically, that some kind of category of interpretation is necessary. The notion of “classical” at this point plays an important and, I suggest, a valuable role.

The value of using the category “classical” is that it is not precisely normative in the way in which Graham Cole fears, but rather it suggests a point of reference within the tradition, in the light of which the tradition can be more helpfully and illuminatingly understood. Such a classical model of Anglicanism would be one which best expresses the continuing and central dynamics of the tradition. Such a conception of classical is much more porous and open ended than the notion of normativeness. It is a conception which can comprehend Paley for his apologetically instincts, even though he may not have had quite the focus upon a triadic conception on the sources of authority which is more central to the tradition.

The point that it is necessary to have some kind of interpretative standpoint, may be illustrated by the problem of defining, or seeking to describe, whether or not something is more characteristically Anglican than another. Any historical overview of this religious tradition will inevitably reach the conclusion that there are some expressions of the tradition which are more peripheral than others, while yet at the same time not wishing to exclude those examples from the general characterisation of Anglican. A tradition is not an undifferentiated plurality. To show that Paley is a counter example, is only to show up the non normative character of the category classical. It also shows that, in the context of the general character of the tradition, he is slightly to one side, in terms of authority sources, but in his instinct towards apologetics he is more central.

The Case of Thomas Cranmer

Graham Cole appeals to Thomas Cranmer as another counter example to my use of the notion of classical Anglicanism. He does this by claiming that “Cranmer’s appeal to Scripture, tradition and reason was heavily qualified in the favour of Scripture with the appeals to tradition and reason having had ad hominem and political importance for him in debate with papists” (Cole p.1)

He takes Cranmer's exposition of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion as a principle text from which to make that point. He claims that the two passages which he quotes from Book 1 Chapter 16, make it clear that the exposition of the meaning of the Eucharist from Scripture is what is intended for the godly and that the exposition of the teaching of the early church fathers is ad hominem in character because of his arguments with the papists. The quotation which he gives does indeed suggest that. However, the full paragraph reads as follows. Graham Cole gives the text in two sections and understandably leaves out a connecting sentence in between his two gobbets which does not affect the meaning at all. However the sentence omitted at the end does affect the meaning. I have shown the omitted material in italics.

This doctrine here recited, may suffice for all that be humble and godly and seek nothing that is superfluous, but that is necessary and profitable. And therefore unto such persons may be made here an end of this book. *But unto them that be contentious papists and idolaters, nothing is enough.* And yet because they shall not glory in their subtle inventions and deceivable doctrine, (as though no man were able to answer them,) I shall desire the readers of patience, to suffer me a little while to spend some time in vain, to confute their most vain vanities. *And yet the time shall not be altogether spent in vain, for thereby shall more clearly appear the light from the darkness, the truth from false sophisticated subtleties, and the certain word of God from men's dreams and phantastical inventions.*⁶

It is clear that the recitation of scriptural texts to which this paragraph refers, and which Cranmer has just given, forms the bedrock of the argument in his exposition. But it is quite important to notice that the exposition of the patristic evidence which occupies the greater part of the rest of Cranmer's essay serves a particular point

⁶ There is a slight problem in regard to the texts of Cranmer used here. Graham Cole has used the edition of JE Cox (Ed) *Writings and Disputations of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, Martyr, 1556, Relative to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*, Cambridge, 1844 and has identified his quotations by page number. I have not had access to this edition but have used The Courtenay Library of Reformation Classics edition, GE Duffield, Ed., *The Work of Thomas Cranmer*, Introduced by JI Packer, The Sutton Courtenay Press, Appleford, 1964 . This edition is printed from a copy of 1550, except for a few notes and references, and also the Preface which is from that of 1580. In order to facilitate identification of the quotations I have given the book and chapter numbers in the Duffield edition, as well as the pages numbers,

which is not just polemical. Furthermore the polemic which is involved here is not simply quoting the sources of his opponents, but rather quoting those sources which are commonly regarded as being testimonies to catholic teaching. At this point it is important to recall the exact title of Cranmer's essay. It is *A Defence of the True and Catholic Doctrine of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ, with a Confutation of Sundry Errors Concerning the Same, Grounded and Stablished upon God's Holy Word, and Approved by the Consent of the Most Ancient Doctors of the Church.*

The Defence is made against the errors which have been introduced by the papists, "What man of knowledge and zeal to God's honour can with dry eyes see this injury to Christ and look upon the state of religion brought in by the papists..."⁷

In Book 1 he even more precisely identifies this incursion of error as having happened "specially within these four or five hundred years".⁸ He goes on to say that this situation has led to considerable division of opinion and thus much contention.

Therefore that to the intent that this holy sacrament, or Lord's Supper, may hereafter neither of the one party be contemned or lightly esteemed, nor of the other party be abused to any other purpose than Christ himself did first appoint and ordain the same, and that so the contention of both parties may be quieted and ended; the most sure and plain way is, to cleave under holy Scripture. Wherein whatsoever is found, must be taken for a most sure ground and infallible truth; and whatsoever cannot be grounded upon the same (touching our faith) is man's device changeable and uncertain.⁹

One might perhaps conclude from this paragraph that Cranmer's appeal to Scripture is because that is the common ground between him and his opponents. Would one therefore say that his appeal to Scripture was simply ad hominem? Of course not. Cranmer makes it clear that Scripture holds a priority because it records Jesus' words of institution and the teaching of the apostles. That is indeed why in his essay

which, of course, are not the same as those in the Cox edition. The present quote is Book I chapter 17, p.76.

⁷ Cranmer, *Defence*, Preface, p.56

⁸ Cranmer, *Defence*, I,1, p.60

⁹ *ibid*

he sets that out in the first instance. It is because he is expounding the catholic teaching about the sacrament that he goes on to teach what the Catholic Church has always taught up until four or five hundred years previously. It is for that reason that he appeals to the early fathers.

This particular passage might also give a hint that Cranmer has in mind here not just papist corruption of the sacrament but also others amongst the Protestant reformers who have neglected the sacrament and “lightly esteemed” it. If that is so then it would give an extra point to Cranmer’s stated intention of defending the Catholic teaching. Whatever may be the case on this point it is clear that Cranmer’s intention is to defend not just a “biblical” view, but the catholic doctrine.

Cranmer’s essay is not simply detached polemic against the papists (if not others), but it is the essay of the Archbishop, the pastor of his flock. In the words of J.I. Packer, “its main purpose is constructive and pastoral: to lead English Christians, even ‘the simple and learned people,’ into a right understanding and valuation of the sacrament, for their souls health.”¹⁰ Packer acknowledges that the essay inevitably has a polemical slant, but its purpose, he says, goes beyond that. Cranmer does not have in mind simply the persuasion of his papist opponents, but rather the comforting and confirmation of the faith of his flock who might be led astray by these recent papist innovations about the Eucharist. It is because he wishes to present the catholic teaching for his people that he expounds what the Catholic Church has taught. It is for that pastoral reason that he appeals to the fathers.

Cranmer makes this point quite explicit at the beginning of Book I Chapter 8.

Although in this treaty of the sacrament of the body and blood of our Saviour Christ, I have already sufficiently declared the institution and meaning of the same, according to the very words of the Gospel and of St Paul, yet it shall not be in vain somewhat more at large to declare the same, according to the mind as well of holy Scriptures as of old ancient authors; and that so sincerely and plainly, without doubts, ambiguities, or vain questions, that the very simple and unlearned people may easily understand the same, and be edified thereby.

And this by God's grace is mine only intent and desire, that the flock of Christ dispersed in this realm (among whom I am appointed a special pastor) may no longer lack the commodity and fruit which springeth from this heavenly knowledge.¹¹

Cranmer then goes on to outline the seven points that he wishes to make in his essay and again states his conclusion at the end of Book 1 Chapter 15 in much the same terms as he had done in the passage quoted above. At the beginning of Book 2 where Cranmer commences his refutation of the papist errors, he states clearly what his ambition is; it is to defend the catholic truth.

Now, lest any man think that I feign anything of mine own head without any other ground of authority, you shall hear by God's grace as well the errors of the papists confuted, as the catholic truth defended. Both by God's most certain work, and also by the most old approved authors and martyrs of Christs church."¹²

Book II is directed against the doctrine of transubstantiation. Cranmer first shows that it is against Scripture. But then he goes on to say that it is also against natural reason and natural operation.

Let us now consider also, how the same is against natural reason and natural operation; which although they prevail not against God's word, yet when they be joined with God's word, they be of great moment to confirm any truth."¹³

Similarly in the next chapter he declares, "the papistical doctrine is also against all out outward senses, called our five wits."¹⁴ And then in chapter 5 he declares,

¹⁰ Cranmer, *Defence*, Introduction, p.xxix

¹¹ Cranmer, *Defence*, I,8, p.65

¹² Cranmer, *Defence*, II,1, p.81

¹³ Cranmer, *Defence*, II,3, p.85

¹⁴ Cranmer, *Defence*, II,4, p.86

this papistical opinion of transubstantiation is against the Word of God, against nature, against reason, and against all our senses, we shall show further more that it is against the faith and doctrine of the old authors of Christ's church, beginning at those authors which were nearest under Christ's time, and therefore might best know the truth herein."¹⁵

He then goes through a list of the church fathers in chronological order, developing this precise argument which he has announced at the beginning of this section. Once he comes to the end of that section of Book II, he announces his conclusion and indicates that he will now address the question as to where this strange doctrine of transubstantiation came from. The connecting seam passage in the essay is as follows:

Now forasmuch as it is proved sufficiently, by the holy Scripture, as by natural operation, by natural reason, by all our senses and by the most old and best learned authors and holy martyrs of Christ's church, that the substance of bread and wine do remain, and be received of faithful people in the blessed sacrament or Supper of the Lord; it is a thing worthy to be considered and well weighed, what moved the school authors of late years to defend the contrary opinions, not only so far from all experience of our senses, and so far from all reason, but also clean contrary to the old Church of Christ and to God's most holy word. Surely nothing moved them thereto so much, as did the vain faith which they had in the Church and see of Rome."¹⁶

The argument of the rest of the essay proceeds upon the same assumptions and according to the same logic. At the end of Book 5 where he is concluding his argument against the idea that masses are sacrificed for the remission of sins, he says,

For these monstrous things were never seen nor known of the old primitive church... Nor the holy fathers of the old Church would not have suffered such ungodly and wicked abuses of the Lord's Supper. But these private masses sprang up of late years..."¹⁷

¹⁵ Cranmer, *Defence*, II,5, p.88

¹⁶ Cranmer, *Defence*, II,6, p.101

¹⁷ Cranmer, *Defence*, V,16, p.228

I do not think that a reasonable reading of the text of Thomas Cranmer's defence of the Catholic doctrine of the eucharist, would lead one to conclude that his appeal to the early church fathers was purely ad hominem against his papist opponents. It certainly was part of an argument against the papists. His essay is quite clearly a defence of the true and catholic doctrine against sundry errors. However, it is also, in JI Packer's words, "constructive and pastoral". It is most fundamentally designed to present the catholic doctrine as taught faithfully in the early church going back to the nearest times of the apostles and of Jesus himself, for the benefit of the ordinary folk of England, for whom the Archbishop was pastor. His appeal to reason, our senses, importantly to the early church, and pre-eminently to the testimony of the Scriptures is directed more importantly to that pastoral intent than to his papist opponents.

Given such a reading, I do not believe that Thomas Cranmer constitutes any kind of exception to the model of "classical Anglicanism" in the sense in which I have sought to deploy that interpretative principle. On the contrary he appears here as a good example of it.

In the course of his essay Graham Cole also makes a number of asides which I do not think stand up to rigorous enquiry. I do not think that a focus upon the Incarnation in Anglican authors leads one to be retrospective rather than prospective in orientation. That the Christ who is the Son of God Incarnate is the Christ who returns is found in many Anglican authors. Of course not all authors in the tradition share an acute eschatological orientation of the kind displayed by Paley. Sometimes a focus upon the Incarnation is represented as an immanentist theological disposition which lacks the salvation focus of a doctrine of justification and atonement. Whoever may be thought to move in that direction, Richard Hooker most certainly cannot. In the words of Phillip Hughes,

It is Hooker who, in classical manner, concludes the line and confirms the position of the Reformed Anglicanism of the sixteenth century. There are,

indeed, echoes of Jewel in his definition of the doctrine of justification by faith alone.¹⁸

More interesting than commonalities between the English reformers about the doctrine of justification are those lineaments around the issue of Christology and the incorporation of the believer into Christ. It is a note struck more strongly in England than in Luther's Germany.

Graham Cole also makes one or two asides about theologians who construct systems and do not have a practical orientation in the faith they expound. He appears to have in mind the practical orientation of Paley's, theological work. Whoever these theoretical systemisers are, Richard Hooker is certainly not amongst them. His major book is occasioned by the political and legal aspects of the Elizabethan settlement and his experienced and lived faith emerge clearly, not least in his exposition of the sacraments.

The great value of Richard Hooker, is not that he is in any sense normative for Anglicanism, nor that he contains everything that could or should be said about the Anglican tradition of Christianity. Rather the value of Richard Hooker is that he expresses the central and best things in this religious tradition in a form which has proved to be enduring and which has the capacity still to inspire. He is no mere theoretician. His concerns are with a lived and living faith in a faithful church for whom he entertains the profound ambition that it will be faithful to God and a glory to Christ its Lord.

Perhaps I might illustrate with two quotations the way in which Hooker gathers these powerful and perennial elements of the Anglican Christian tradition. Of course they do not represent in any way the spectrum of Hooker's work, but they touch on themes that have occurred in this discussion of classical Anglicanism. The first comes from Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, and the second from a sermon on part of St Jude.

¹⁸ Hughes, PE, *Faith and Works. Cranmer and Hooker on Justification*, Morehouse-Barlow, Wilton, 1982, p41

The use of sacramentes is not only in this life, yeat so that here they concerne a farre better life then this , and are for that cause accompanyned with *grace which worketh salvation*. Sacramentes are the powerful instrumentes of God to eternall life. For as our naturall life consisteth in the union of the bodie with the soule; so our life supernaturall in the union of the soule with God. And for as much as there is no union of God with man without that meane betweene both which is both, it seemeth requisite that wee first consider how God is in Christ, then how Christ is in us, and how the sacramentes doe serve to make us pertakers of Christ. In other thinges wee may be more briefe, but the waight of these requireth largnes.¹⁹

Our faith being such, is that indeed which S *Jude* doth hear term *Faith*, namely, a thing most *holy*. The reason is this. We are *justified by Faith*. For *Abraham beleevd, and this was imputed to him for righteousnesse*. Being justified, all our iniquities are covered, God beholdeth us in the righteousnesse which is imputed, and not in the sinnes which wee hath committed. ... But *imputation* of righteousnesse hath covered the sinnes of every soule who beleeveth; God by pardoning our sinne hath taken it away: so that now although our transgressions be multiplied above the haire of our head, yet being justified wee are as free, and as cleere, as if there were no one spot, or staine of any uncleannesse in us. For it is God that justifieth; *and who shall lay anything to the charge of God's chosen?* saith the Apostle in the 8. Chapter to the Romans.²⁰

The sum of it is that I claim that Anglicanism represents a vital tradition of Christianity, and that within that Anglican tradition some notion of “classical Anglicanism” is a valuable, indeed, necessary point of reference. Furthermore I claim that Richard Hooker is a striking representative of that classical Anglicanism.

In the area of doctrine, two theologians from the reformation period have played an important role in my thinking and development. Every year for the first ten years after I was ordained I read Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Calvin is a

¹⁹ Hooker, R. *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, Eds. Edelen G and Speed Hill W. Vols. I-VI. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977-1995, Vol II, p. 208, Of The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, Book V, 50.3

towering representative of Christian theology from whom there is much to learn. He is, as Karl Barth has said, “an experience through which every Christian theologian must pass.” In the last twenty years I have moved on to a regular reading of the works of Richard Hooker. The style may be more dense and the subject matter at one level more focused, but the Christian tradition represented there is broader, deeper and richer. It is profoundly Christian and classical Anglicanism. I only regret that when I was an Anglican ordinand and a theological undergraduate, I was never introduced to him.

The Reverend Dr B.N. Kaye

²⁰ op cit Vol.V, p.50, The Second Sermon on part of S. Jude, Sections 23 and 25.