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GREAT ANGLICAN DIVINES - JOHN JEWEL (1522-1572)

By Derek Scales

The sixteenth century love of puns makes it unsurprising that Jewel's epitaph referred to him as 'a jewel of jewels' and Archbishop Edmund Grindal called him 'the jewel and singular ornament of the Church': but these were no empty ascriptions, for Jewel was one of the outstanding servants of Christ and his Gospel in England in the sixteenth century.

Life

John Jewel was born in Bude in 1522. He showed great diligence in study while a boy, and went up to Oxford in 1535, where his tutor was John Parkhurst (later the Elizabethan bishop of Norwich). A young man of exceptional ability and labour, and of blameless life, he worked so hard that he injured his health.

With the accession of Queen Mary, Jewel was unmolested for some time. Suddenly, however, in 1554 he was required to subscribe some compromising Romanising articles, and with the threat of possible death, he capitulated. Jewel fled abroad to Frankfurt, where he publicly acknowledged his fault: 'I have confessed it openly, and unrequired. in the midst of the congregation'. He arrived in Zurich in 1556, where the English exiles spent their time together very profitably and happily.

On his return to England in 1559, it was clear that Jewel was destined for high office: he disputed at Westminster, he preached at Paul's Cross (where he issued his famous challenge to the Romanists that none of their disputed points had either the authority of Scripture or the support of any reputable Church Father of the first six centuries), and he was elected bishop of Salisbury. He spent the rest of his life in that office, engaged chiefly in preaching, writing and study, and died. Burned out at an early age, in 1572.

The 'Apology'

His classic, *An Apology, or answer, in Defence of the Church of England*, was published in 1562. In the first of the six main sections, Jewel records the slanders and persecutions which Protestants had to undergo, and challenges his opponents to submit to Scripture. He then expounds the doctrine taught by the Church of England, both the beliefs set forth in the Creeds, and the teachings in the light of subsequent controversies. Jewel thirdly asserts that it is the Reformed Church of England which is in true apostolic succession: 'We have learned these things of Christ, of the apostles, of the devout fathers'. In the fourth section Jewel points out the moral and doctrinal corruption of Rome, and that error has been found within the institutional church since Old Testament times. Jewel then examines the Roman claim that they had the support of the Church Fathers: this area of learning was Jewel's speciality, and he showed conclusively that the early church testified against the practices of Rome.

Finally, Jewel dealt with the Roman contention that the Protestants should submit to the decisions of the General Council at Trent. 'Neither do we eschew concord and peace, but to have peace with man we will not be at war with God.'

This article will have done great good if it induces the reader to seek out a copy of Jewel's *Apology* and study it.

Lessons for Today

Jewel presents some important lessons to the twentieth-century Church of England. Jewel makes it plain that the difference between the Church of England and the Church of Rome are *theological differences*. There may have been some change in Rome's posturing and public relations, but we are not concerned with this superficial realm: in theology Rome has not changed (except for the worse) since Jewel's time. New 'common ground' is an ambiguous and false synthesis: the Church of England was reformed for valid reasons, and those reasons remain. The Reformation was not a mistake, and the Reformed Church which sprung from it was not an unfortunate anomaly. It does not therefore exist to lose itself in another church (*pace* the Archbishop of Canterbury), but to bear testimony to the Scriptural and Apostolic Faith in this land. Jewel emphasises *our duty to maintain it*.

The second point is related to the first. For the last one hundred and fifty years, some people have canvassed the *via media* concept, that the Church of England is a sort of halfway house between Rome and Reformation. This concept is foolish (for on the points of dispute there is no halfway position – the two opposing systems are the logical outworking of their presuppositions) and false: Jewel demonstrates that the Church of England is Reformed according to Scripture.

A third lesson from Jewel relates to leadership. Jewel's grievous denial of the faith (like Cranmer's) reminds us of the fallibility of all human leaders. As Protestants we deny the infallibility of the pope; yet too easily within the evangelical movement people are followers of names rather than Biblical principles. We must exercise that right judgement which measures all things by Scripture, and not put leaders in a false position.

There is also a lesson for leaders. If leaders realise they have taken the wrong path, let them publicly say so. Otherwise some become disillusioned with them, and others are confused and misled. During the evangelical downgrade of the last twenty years, many evangelical leaders have done amazing things; claims that they have not changed and that all their actions are consistent have only increased dismay. Bishop Jewel demonstrated the right course. He lived for 18 years after he 'confessed his fault': on only one occasion in that period was he taunted with his weakness – by his bitterest Roman opponent. Our respect for leaders who acknowledge their mistakes is increased.

Finally, Jewel reminds us of true characteristics of ministry generally and episcopacy in particular. When Jewel went to Salisbury in 1560 he was faced with an immense task and had few competent helpers. We find him *an assiduous preacher*: the lack of ministerial help only increased his efforts. He was a *vigorous Reformer*: he went about his diocese endeavouring to correct what was amiss. He was a *faithful student*: he set aside time for the study each morning when he was in Salisbury, preparing for the pulpit and his writings. Here are vital and practicable priorities for today.

Jewel reminds us of the true character of our Church, and challenges us to pray and work to reform what is amiss in it today.

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