

ON REMEMBERING JEREMY TAYLOR¹

A sermon preached by Associate Professor Michael Horsburgh AM in St James' Church, King Street, Sydney, at Choral Evensong on 30 September 2018, being the 19 Sunday after Pentecost and at which the Caroline Divines were remembered



Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667)

Today we celebrate the Caroline Divines. Broadly speaking, this group consists of Anglican theologians of the 17th century, particularly those in the reigns of Charles I and Charles II, hence the name “Caroline”. Membership of the group, which is not one that they themselves designated, implies a “high church” theology. That is to say, they opposed the Calvinist Puritans who were behind the Commonwealth that prevailed from the execution of Charles I in 1649 to the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660.

The term “high church” does not refer to modern Anglo-Catholicism with its “bells and smells”. Rather it was a view of Anglicanism that emphasised its continuity with its prior Catholic history. It affirmed the episcopacy and the spirituality that lay behind everything being done properly and in good order. Rome was rejected but Calvinist Presbyterianism was not espoused. This is the group that gave rise to the famous Anglican *via media*, or middle way, between the two extremes of the period. If we wished to make a crude and anachronistic comparison with today, we could say that the Caroline Divines are St James, King Street over against the Puritan Diocese of Sydney.

The group comprises some significant figures, including Lancelot Andrewes, who chaired the committee that oversaw the translation of the King James Bible and who did much of the translation of the Old Testament, as well as the overall editing. Much of the elegance of the translation’s English is due to him. I

¹ Readings: Psalm 84:1-10; Ezekiel 34: 11-16; 1 Peter 2: 4-9

mention him particularly, because we celebrated him last Wednesday, 26 September, which is why the group as a whole is remembered today.

Rather than talking about Andrewes or the group as a whole, I want this afternoon to concentrate on one of its members, Jeremy Taylor. Born in 1613 and educated at Cambridge, he came to the attention of Archbishop William Laud, was made a chaplain to Charles I and later to the Royalist army in the civil war when it broke out in 1642. After a brief period in prison, Taylor retired to Wales in 1645, where he became chaplain to Richard Vaughan, 2nd Earl of Carbery, also a Royalist in the civil war. At the Restoration, Taylor was appointed Bishop of Down and Connor in what is now Northern Ireland. He died in 1667. We celebrate him on 13 August.

Taylor's reputation lies principally in his writings, most of which he completed in the 15 years that he lived in retirement in Wales. His most famous works are entitled *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living* and *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying*. These titles may not signify works of great attraction to us but we would be unwise to underestimate their influence on later Anglicanism. They were taken up by the leaders of the 18th century evangelical revival, including John Wesley, who ranked them, along with the 15th century Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ* and his contemporary William Law's *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* as the most significant influences on his thought. Although his colleague, George Whitefield, was both Calvinist and Puritan, Wesley himself was always Arminian, Anglican and Sacramental, like all the Caroline Divines. These works were also taken up by the leaders of the Oxford Movement in the 19th century, who reprinted them.

In particular, *Holy Living* presents something quite different from what its title might convey to us. Since Taylor believed that all life should be dedicated to God, he thought that proper living in all respects was an act of religion. Thus, *Holy Living* is both social and political in its content.

Of course, Taylor lived in a patriarchal and highly stratified society and it would be anachronistic to judge him by today's standards. That said, we would not disagree with much of his approach. In Chapter III of that work, Taylor deals with Christian justice.²

Like many of his contemporaries, Taylor was concerned about due order in society. Their concern was well founded, given that they had come through a bloody civil war. They feared chaos and the order that was the remedy was seen

² <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/4/4a/Jeremytaylor.jpg/220px-Jeremytaylor.jpg>

by them to be a divine construct.³ He was, therefore, concerned to promote whatever lessened social conflict.

Taylor promotes impartiality amongst judges, a virtue often not found in his time and the lack of which is observable in many places today. He was well aware of the way in which the wealthy might use the law to their own benefit. Here is an example of his thought:

The Duty of Superiors as they are Judges.

1. Princes in judgment and their delegate judges must judge the causes of all persons uprightly and impartially, without any personal consideration of the power of the mighty, or the bribe of the rich, or the needs of the poor. For although the poor must fare no worse for his poverty, yet, in justice, he must fare no better for it : and although the rich must be no more regarded, yet he must not be less.

Taylor illustrated his point by referring to an episode in the life of the young Assyrian king, Cyrus,⁴ who was asked to adjudicate a case in which a large boy, who had a coat that was too small for him, took by force the overlarge coat of a small boy. Cyrus gave the coat to the one who was the right size for it. Quoting Cyrus's tutors, Taylor said that Cyrus was not a judge of fashion. His task was to say who it was who owned the coat. Only that could be justice. Might is not right.

Taylor might judge many of our commercial contracts, with their "small print" to be unjust. Our banking royal commission has produced evidence to exemplify his words when he said:

1. In making contracts, use not many words ; for all the business of a bargain is summed up in few sentences : and he that speaks least, means fairest, as having fewer opportunities to deceive.

Taylor viewed restitution as an essential part of justice. Here is a sample of how he viewed our responsibility towards our neighbour:

³ Stephen Sykes and John Booty (eds), *The Study of Anglicanism*, London, SPCK, 1988, "Standard Divines", pp. 163-174, "Anglican morality", pp. 325-338

⁴ <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/ancient/xenophon-cyrusboy.asp>

3. Whosoever intends a little injury to his neighbour, and acts it, and by it a greater evil accidentally comes, he is obliged to make an entire reparation of all the injury, of that which he intended, and of that which he intended not, but yet acted by his own instrument going further than he at first purposed it.^p He that set fire on a plane-tree to spite

his neighbour, and the plane-tree set fire on his neighbour's house, is bound to pay for all the loss, because it did all rise from his own ill intention. It is like murder, committed by

He ended his discussion of justice with a series of prayers, including this for merchants, tradesmen and handicraftsmen, which we might pray for ourselves:

A Prayer to be said by Merchants, Tradesmen, and Handicraftsmen.

O eternal God, thou fountain of justice, mercy, and benediction, who, by my education and other effects of thy providence hast called me to this profession, that, by my industry, I may, in my small proportion, work together for the good of myself and others; I humbly beg thy grace to guide me in my intention, and in the transaction of my affairs, that I may be diligent, just, and faithful: and give me thy favour, that this my labour may be accepted by thee as a part of my necessary duty: and give me thy blessing to assist and prosper me in my calling, to such measures as thou shalt in mercy choose for me: and be pleased to let the Holy Spirit be for ever present with me, that I may never be given to covetousness and sordid appetites, to lying and falsehood, or any other base, indirect, and beggarly arts; but give me prudence, honesty, and Christian sincerity, that my trade may be sanctified by my religion; my labour, by my intention and thy blessing; that when I have done my portion of work thou hast allotted me, and improved the talent thou hast intrusted to me, and served the commonwealth in my capacity, I may receive the mighty price of my high calling, which I expect and beg, in the portion and inheritance of the ever blessed Saviour and Redeemer, Jesus. Amen.