

ANGLICAN HEROICS?

a sermon praught by the Rev'd Dr Richard Major
in the church of St Mary, Staten Island, New York,
at the Low Mass for the Feast of King Charles the martyr,
on 29th January, 2006.

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II Samuel i¹⁻¹⁷, Psalm vii, I Peter ii¹³⁻²², Matthew xxi³³⁻⁴¹.

From the Epistle:



*Even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us,
leaving us an example.*

In the Name of God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost:

AMEN.



The Epistle

SUBMIT YOUR SELVES to every ordinance of man for the Lords sake: whether it be to the King, as Supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well.

For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.

Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the King.

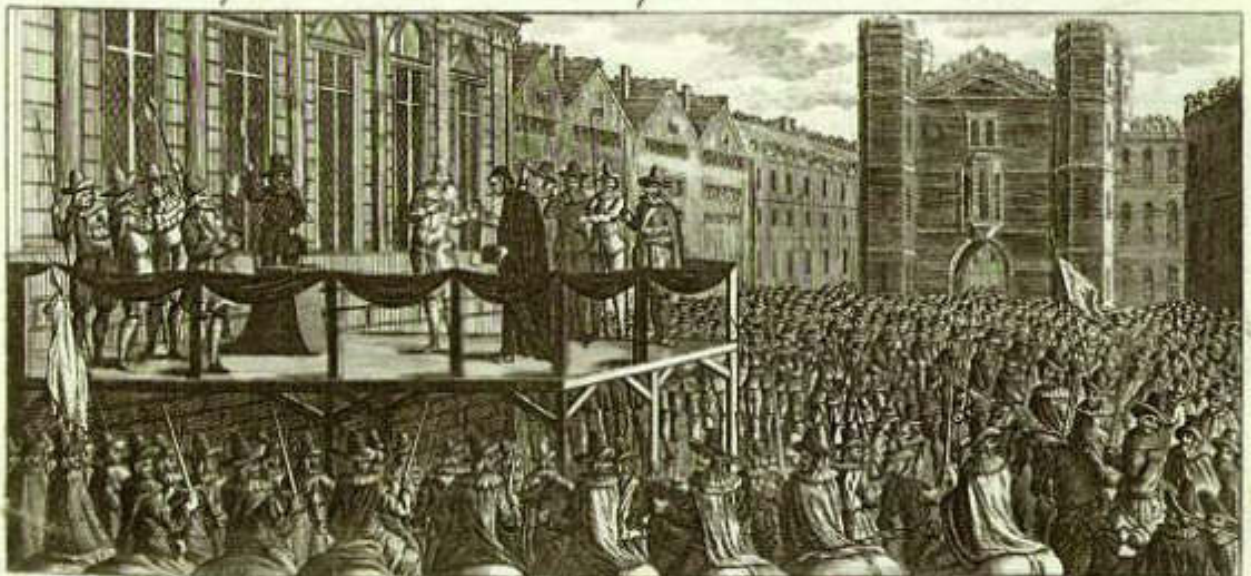
Servants be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.

For this is thank-worthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently; this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps; who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.

*The WARRANT to Colonel FRANCIS HACKER KN. for REHEARING of K. CHARLES the First
At the high Court of Justice for the Tryinge and Judginge of Charles Stuart
King of England January XXIXth Anna Dom. 1648.*

Wherunto Charles Stuart King of England is and is now convicted attainted and condemned of High Treason and other high Crimes And Sentence upon Saturday last was pronounced against him by this Court to be put to death by the severance of his head from his body Of which Sentence execution yet remaineth to be done These are therefore to will and require you to see the said Sentence executed in the open Streets before Whitehall upon the morrow being the thirtieth Day of this instant month of January between the hours of Ten in the morning and five in the afternoon of the same Day with full effect And for use hereunto this shall be your sufficient Warrant And there are to require All Officers and Souldiers and other the good People of this Nation of England to be readye unto you in the Service Comen under our Hands and Seales.

A View of the Place and Manner of K. CHARLES the First's Execution?



THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION IS THE SECOND-BIGGEST family of Christian Churches in the world; and throughout the world at this time, all over the Anglican Communion, we honour Charles Stuart, who was martyred for this Church 357 years ago.

Three hundred and fifty seven years may sound like a vast desert of time; but it's not. Charles' death is very close to us, and is even more suggestive now than then – I mean suggestive of everlasting truth. At the Sung Mass I want to talk about one of the things it suggests, the unbreakable bond between State and Church, sealed (in the English-speaking political tradition) by Charles' blood. In other words, I'll talk politics. But now, at the Low Mass, I want us to think about something else that is revealed by the martyrdom of the leader of our branch of the one Catholic Church. I want us to reflect what this feast tells us about courage – about the particular courage of an Anglican or Episcopalian.

NOW, ABOUT ANGLICANISM – what do you really feel? To be scouring honest: do you think of Episcopalianism as a soft option? Have you every suspected that it's a whimsical revision of Christianity? an ironic skit on the Faith? Catholicism lite? gentrified Protestantism? or at least a modest downsizing of the Faith, stripped of all those awkward consistencies and fanatical joys, a Faith soothed into reason and at peace with the world? In short, do you think of Anglicanism as *moderate* Christianity?

Well, it's not. There is no moderate Christianity. If we believe, we believe; and the Christian Creed is perfectly extreme in what it reveals. There is no essential Anglican moderation. Indeed we are not, essentially, Anglicans or Episcopalians at all; those lumpish words only express certain passing human divisions and distinctions in ecclesial organisation, They will mean nothing in eternity; they are not essentially important even now. What we are, in the end, is simply Christians; we are folded forever into the one and only Church, universal, deathless, apostolic, historical and eternal, hierarchal and royal: the one universal Body of Christ. There is no compromise possible: we are either in this Body or not, we are either loyal to it or not. We are all absolutely called to the cause of Christ – we 'Anglicans' just as much as any other Christian people at any other time. Our branch of Christianity

can be, should be, *is*, just as heroic and militant as any other. We are entirely serious. We are absolute Episcopalians.

And here's the proof. The English have a temperamental taste for understatement and self-deprecation, and these characteristics have passed over into the Church of England and all her daughter Churches. Such characteristics are easily misunderstood, especially by enemies. Napoleon and Hitler discovered that. And in the 1640s our Puritan enemies discovered that too. There came a time when they had the secular head of our Church and State in their hands. They demanded 'moderation' of him, and they found he was not essentially moderate. He was just as absolute a member of the one Church as the martyrs of the Coliseum. Belatedly, amazingly, almost grotesquely, those practical bustling modern rebels found they had a fiery saint on their hands – not an Anglican saint, for there is no such things: a Christian saint: a man so moved by his salvation through the blood of Christ that he dared shed his own blood, and mingle it with that primal torrent of love. *Even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example.*

That, then, is the proof. Charles Stuart is quite seriously and literally a saint. His blood proves we are not joking.

FOR CHARLES IS THE ONLY PERSON whom the Church of England since the Reformation, acting on her own, has definitively and unambiguously canonised.

To be canonised means to be put on the kalendar of church worship, to have special services said in your honour every year. The Church holds you up as an example of heroic goodness. She declares that in you can be seen a little echo of the grandeur of God. She venerates your memory, and she asks for the help of your prayers.

There are an immense number of great Christian men and women whom we treat like this: dozens men and women from the first few centuries of the Church, and many hundred since. The Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions keep adding to their kalendars of worship. In Rome there's a whole papal department that deals, very critically and cautiously, with canonisations. Sometimes Anglicans also venerate these new arrivals, these recent canonisations. But, although there have been many spectacularly holy men and women in England over the last four centuries, although there have been great martyrs and theologians, dazzlingly Godlike

laypeople and even bishops, the Church of England has modestly not declared any of them to be saints; with only one exception.

Within a dozen years of his death, Charles Stuart had been venerated by our branch of the One Church. The new Prayer Book, the Prayer Book of 1662, acknowledged him as a saint, and since then, the Church of England has rejoiced over his memory every year on the anniversary of his martyrdom, that is, 30th January. Tomorrow is the 357th anniversary of his death, and so this season is obviously a good moment for particular high-jinks and jollities. The ‘propers’ of this service praise him, and thank God for his life and death; and this therefore seems a good moment to pause and asks what it all means.

Charles Stuart, as it happens, was the King of England, and of Scotland and Ireland. He was overthrown in a rebellion which was both political and religious. His captors made all sorts of demands on him, political and religious. Some he accepted, but many he refused; particularly, he refused to agree to the destruction of the Church of England. And so they killed him. And then, even in human terms, he won, because the courage of his sacrifice, his calm and graceful manner as he was condemned and killed, and his forgiveness of his enemies, won the moral battle. As soon as they could, the people of England got rid of the brutal military dictatorship that had killed the King, restored the monarchy and restored the Church of England. We owe our Church, humanly speaking, to the fortitude of Charles, who would not abandon her even when they showed him the axe.

Charles Stuart, as it happens, was the King of England. But I want us to put that aspect of the affair out of our heads for a moment. More importantly than being the English King, Charles Stuart was and is the only Anglican saint. That doesn’t mean he was the best and most saintly of Anglicans; on the contrary, he had a full complement of faults, like the rest of us. But he was publicly martyred for his faith; and he therefore stands for all who, in that cruel age, suffered for their Anglican faith – in an age where you could go to prison for using the Prayer Book. More generally, Charles Stuart stands for all members of the Church of England who have followed what they believe is the truth despite the complexities, and occasionally the violence, which such discipleship can involve.

There haven’t, actually, been all that many Anglicans who have died for their faith in England, because English history since Charles Stuart’s time has been comparatively peaceful. (For that we have, in part, to thank Charles Stuart.) But the point is that in violent times such as his, an Anglican, like any other sort of

Christian, finds that his Church really does matter to him. It's not a hobby; it bites into the fabric of who he is.

Charles Stuart was an elegant man, who loved collecting paintings and playing with his children. His enemies thought him soft; they were sure he would do as he was told. And after all, Anglicanism seemed to many people – and still seems to shallow observers – a moderate tradition, half-way between the militant certainties of Protestantism and the discipline of Rome. It seemed a calibrated position, a half-way house. And so Charles' enemies, hard men proud of their fanaticism, assumed that Anglicanism was soft too. A soft man defending a soft creed: they were confident that he'd be malleable.

He wasn't, and baffled them all by persevering until they exclaimed, in the words of today's Gospel: *This is the heir, come, let us kill him and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him . . . and slew him.*

As a matter of fact they failed to gain Charles' spiritual inheritance. We have inherited it; it is the inheritance of Anglicanism: its dignity, sweetness, rationality, catholic order, moderation, uncorrupted and primitive doctrine, tolerance, learning, good-humour, and its pleasant vagueness. All that, and a certain understated fortitude, which is also worth reflecting on, this day of sacrifice.

There are things wrong with the Anglican tradition, and there are things wrong with our contemporary Episcopal Church. There are things wrong with this parish. But today, on this feast, our attention is drawn to what is right. We have inherited these ways of doing things, these patterns of worship, this fashion of disagreeing without hating. We did not invent any of this: it is our gift as members of the Church; and, particularly, the gift of Charles Stuart, and everyone else who endured tight spots and sharp predicaments for it: a great host of witnesses, with a crowned figure at the front, and more ranks, stretching back into the past, than we can count.

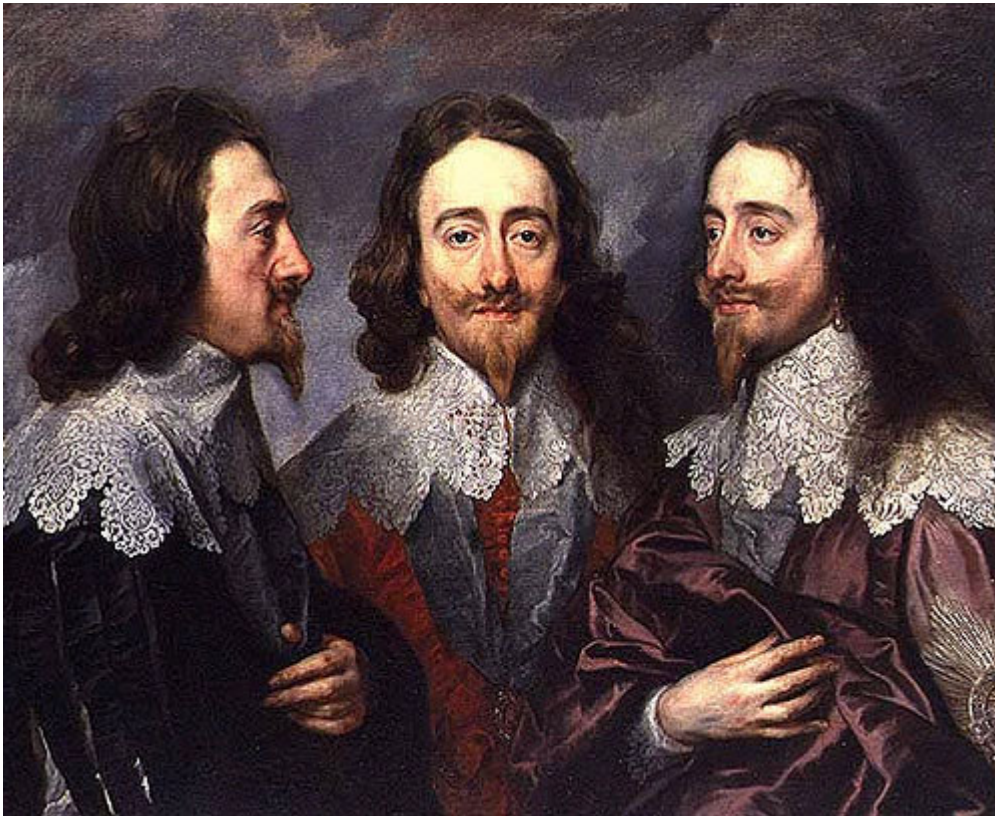
*To God the Son, therefore,
with the Father and Holy Ghost ever One,
be thanks and praise now, and in the ages of ages. Amen!*



A NOTE

I say that Charles Stuart is the *only* figure definitively canonised by the English Church since the Reformation, because the outlandish names that have begun appearing in the ‘alternative’ kalendars of ‘alternative’ liturgies I take to be a different matter.

In the first place, the 1662 book, with its lectionary and kalendar, remains the English



Church’s only universal standard of practice and belief, and these fantastic variations do not make prohibitory demands on the Church’s conscience (or sense of humour). In 1859 wicked Lord Palmerston wickedly, but invalidly, forbade the ‘State Services’, including the liturgical commemoration of 39th January; but he clearly had no right to do such a thing. When you look at something calling itself the 1662 Prayer Book it is almost certainly shorn of the ‘State Services’, but that is

simply a fraud. The real canon of our belief and worship is the book of 1662, not 1859 or 1980 or 2000; and that book gives us Charles alone.

Secondly, since all these experimental books and kalendars are issued merely with synodical approval, without any parliamentary modification of the Act of Uniformity, it is hard to see how they can have any relation to the deposit of faith.

Thirdly, since many of those ‘commemorated’ on these kalendars – or rather, *calendars* – were churchmen who held heretical views about the veneration of saints, it seems a lapse of taste and courtesy to impose on them dead what they abominated living.

Fourthly, and most shockingly of all, some of those assigned various days in the year were schismatics (the Wesleys, the Booths, Elizabeth Fry) who, at best, can be hoped to be in purgatorial torment, protected only by their invincible ignorance from the proper penalty for defying Christ’s Bride and for rending His Body.

All these unfortunates, at least the baptised among them (and not all on these modern tables are even that!), are adequately prayed for on All Souls’ Day, and it is an affront to Catholick worship to crowd them into the company of the liturgically blest.

RJCM