

Lucius Carey, loyalist Christian in the midst of polarized politics

He was short man with a high pitched voice and wrote B-grade poetry, but he had a great gift for friendship—and he's a saint in my private Anglican calendar. Although there's a statue of him on the left as you walk through St Stephen's Hall to the Palace of Westminster, I think I'm safe in saying that it's almost certain that none of you will have heard of him. So I've chosen this occasion to recover him from general oblivion, because, during the English Civil War, he served as Secretary of State to King Charles.

His name was Lucius Carey and he was the 2nd Viscount Falkland. He was born in 1609 or 10 at Burford Priory (which is now owned by one of Rupert Murdoch's daughters), and he was educated at St John's College Cambridge and at Trinity College Dublin. After a bruising quarrel with his father, who disapproved of his marriage, he left to fight with the Dutch against the Spanish in the Netherlands, but returned shortly afterwards to the estate at Great Tew, about 20 miles north of Oxford, which he had inherited from his maternal grandfather.

During the 1630s Falkland built up a considerable library and kept open house for literary, philosophical, and theological folk who would regularly troop up from Oxford—among them the playwright, Ben Jonson, and the political philosopher, Thomas Hobbes. And of a summer's evening, they would walk and talk in the walled garden that still stands. (The house itself was pulled down and completely rebuilt in the 19th century. But the walls of the walled garden still stand.)

The core of those whom Falkland gathered around himself shared a common set of values and attitudes. The 'Great Tew Circle' (as they later came to be called) were much disturbed at what one of them, Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, termed "the brawls which were grown from religion". In response to these 'brawls', Falkland's Circle identified itself with the Christian humanist tradition stemming from Erasmus and Richard Hooker. They championed the use of reason in matters of religion; they followed St Paul in distinguishing between fundamentals and *adiaphora* (or matters indifferent), advocating tolerance on the latter; and they looked for the reunion of Christendom.

Falkland's own mother was converted to Rome, as were all his brothers and sisters. He himself refused; but another of the Great Tew fellowship, William Chillingworth, was briefly converted, sent to Douai in northern France, and put to writing an apologia for Roman Catholicism. Some short way into this project, he decided he'd made a mistake, returned to Great Tew, and wrote *The Religion of the Protestants a Safe Way to Salvation* (copy of which may be found in Christ Church's library.)

Falkland's pacific nature, and its Christian witness, is well captured by his close friend Clarendon, who wrote of him: "in all those controversies, he had so dispassioned a consideration, such a candour in his nature, and so profound a charity in his conscience, that in those points, in which he was in his own judgment most clear, he never thought the worse, or in any degree declined the familiarity, of those who were of another mind; which without doubt is an excellent temper for the

propagation and advancement of Christianity” (John Marriott, *The Life and Times of Lucius Cary* [London: Methuen, 1907], p. 99).

And here is Falkland himself writing in his discourse, *Of the Infallibility of the Church of Rome*:

... it is plaine, that [the emperor Constantine] thought punishing for opinions to be a mark, which might serve to know false opinions by.... I am sure Christian Religions chiefest glory being, that it increaseth by being persecuted; and ... me thinks ... everything is destroyed by the contrary to what settled and composed it... I desire recrimination may not be used; for though it be true, that Calvin had done it, and the Church of England, a little (which is a little too much)..., yet she (confessing she may erre) is not so chargeable with any fault, as those which pretend they cannot, and so will be sure never to mend it; ...

I confess this opinion of damning so many, and this custome of burning so many, this breeding up those, who knew nothing else in any point of religion, yet to be in a readinesse to cry, *To the fire with him, to hell with him* ... These I say, in my opinion were chiefly the causes which made so many, so suddenly leave the Church of Rome.... If any man vouchsafe to think, either this [discourse], or the authour of it, of value enough to confute the one, and informe the other, I shall desire him to do it ... with that temper, which is fit to be used by men that are not so passionate, as to have the definition of reasonable creatures in vaine, remembering that truth in likelihood is, where her author God was, in the *still voice*, and not the *loud wind*

And here he is, again, in a remarkably gracious response to a Roman Catholic critic:

I am also to thank you ... for not mixing gall with your inke; since I have ever thought that there should bee as little bitterness in a treatise of controversie, as in a love-letter, and that the contrary way was void both of Christian charity, and humane wisdom, as serving onely ... to fright away the game, and make their adversarie unwilling to take instruction from him, from whom they have received injuries, and making themselves unabler to discover the truth (which Saint Au[gu]stine sayes is hard for him to find who is calme, but impossible for him that is angry)

Late in the 1630s Falkland, a naturally contemplative and reflective sort, got himself elected to Parliament, where he became one of the most prominent and eloquent critics of King Charles I's arbitrary government and a consistent defender of the rule of law. In one parliamentary speech he said, “the cause of all the miseries we have suffered, and the cause of all our jealousies we have had, that we should yet suffer, is, that a most excellent prince hath been infinitely abused by his [counselors], telling him that by policy he might do what he pleased”.

Nevertheless, when civil war began to loom, Falkland was reluctantly persuaded to side with the king and eventually became his Secretary of State. King Charles may have lived to regret his choice, because he was heard on several occasions to complain bitterly about how rudely Falkland sometimes spoke to him.

In the early stages of the conflict, Falkland and other members of the Great Tew Circle were involved in several, secret, politically risky initiatives to reconcile king and parliament—but all in vain. Conscious that his peace-making reputation was being mistaken for cowardice, Falkland made a point of putting himself at the very front of battle. Nevertheless, in 1642 at the end of the battle of Kineton (better known as Edgehill), about 10 miles north of Great Tew, Falkland interposed himself between his own victorious royalist comrades and a group of sorry parliamentarians, to stop the former slaughtering the latter. Through such a courageous demonstration of self-sacrificial charity, Falkland gave the lie to the cynical view that his one-time guest, Thomas Hobbes, would develop, claiming that at bottom all that motivates human beings is the fear of pain and death.

As the war dragged on, Falkland became steadily more despondent. By the summer of 1643, he would sit with his friends and, according to Clarendon, “often, after a deep silence and frequent sighs, would, with a shrill and sad accent, ingeminate the word *Peace, Peace*, and would passionately profess that the very agony of the war, and the view of the calamities and desolation the kingdom did and must endure, took his sleep from him, and would shortly break his heart”. He fell into a deep depression, and Hyde described how “his natural cheerfulness and vivacity grew clouded, and a kind of sadness and dejection of spirit stole upon him which he had never been used to”.

Come the autumn of 1643, Falkland could see no prospect of peace, and wished no longer to witness his country's agonized conflict. At the first battle of Newbury on 20 September, telling his friends that “he was weary of the times, and foresaw much misery to his own country, and did believe he should be out of it ere night” (B. Whitelock), he placed himself as a volunteer in the first rank of Lord Byron's regiment. He identified a gap in a hedge which was lined on both sides with parliamentarian musketeers, and through which their bullets were pouring. He deliberately rode straight at the gap and in an instant suffered a fatal bullet wound to the lower abdomen and died shortly thereafter. From Newbury he was brought back to Great Tew and buried in an unknown location—as recorded by the plaque inside St Michael's Church at Great Tew.

So, there's a poignant and tragic story; but is it just history? Happily, not. The Great Tew Circle was not ephemeral. As I've said, it stood self-consciously in the tradition of Christian humanism, among whose patriarchs it counted Richard Hooker, who argued in his classic apology for the Elizabethan settlement that “we must acknowledge even heretics themselves to be, though a maimed part, yet a part of the visible Church”. Yes, the Circle was scattered and, in part, consumed by the Civil War: not only was Falkland killed, but so was Chillingworth, who died as a prisoner-of-war at Chichester. Nevertheless other members of the Circle survived, not least Gilbert Sheldon, who as Archbishop of Canterbury from 1663-77 helped to make the post-Restoration Anglican church (in Hugh Trevor-Roper's words) “rational in method, ecumenical in its ultimate aims, ... conciliatory, not authoritarian ...”. Moreover, Chillingworth's work, especially *The Religion of the Protestants* (1638),

“saw a renaissance following the Restoration, became dominant following the Glorious Revolution, and marked a shift in English theology from dogmatic system to a greater emphasis on the role of reason.”

Evidence that Falkland’s influence survived his too-early death includes the witness of two eminent late Victorian. In 1874 the Scottish theologian John Tulloch wrote: the principles with which [the Great Tew Circle] was identified, and the succession of illustrious men who belong to it, made a far more powerful impression on the national mind than has been commonly supposed. The clear evidence of this is the virtual triumph of these principles, rather than those of either of the extreme parties [Puritan and Laudian], at the Revolution of 1688 The same principles, both in Church and State, have never since ceased to influence our national thought and life. Their development constitutes one of the strongest, and—as it appears to me—one of the soundest and best strands, in the great thread of our national history.

Six years later the famous English literary critic, Matthew Arnold wrote of Falkland himself:

Shall we blame him for his lucidity of mind and largeness of temper? Shall we even pity him? By no means. They are his great title to veneration. They are what make him ours; what link him with the nineteenth century. He and his friends, by their heroic and hopeless stand against the inadequate ideals dominant in their time, kept open their communications with the future, lived with the future. Their battle is ours too; and that we pursue it with fairer hopes of success than they did, we owe to their having waged it, and fallen.

Falkland’s lasting influence is also evident in the building of a memorial at the site of the battle of Newbury in 1878, which stands there to this day.

Why do I find Falkland so appealing and so admirable? Partly, because I identify with his reflective nature, which could see right and wrong on both sides of political conflict, and consequently could not buy entirely into either of them. Nevertheless, he did not flee from the inevitable ambiguities of political life and the strains they impose on a sensitive conscience. He had the courage to enter fully into them, and when he had to compromise and choose one flawed side rather than another, he did not flinch from doing so. For that I admire him deeply.

But I also admire him for not losing himself in the conflict. The Christian magnanimity and charity that he had learned to display in theological and religious controversies, he took with him into his politics—risking his reputation by striving for reconciliation, and risking his life to protect his enemies from his friends.

In our own time, we too are witnessing a rise in the political temperature. The anonymity of social media encourages the dropping of inhibitions and the easy venting of abuse. The Hard Left, even among the cultural elite, commonly regards the Tories as ‘scum’. On Brexit Remainers tend to regard Leavers with contempt as ignorant xenophobes, probably racists. Our political discourse too often drips with hatred.

In such a time, Lucius Carey's political generosity shines as a salutary Christian example, and calls us to follow it. That's why he's a saint in my private Anglican calendar. And that's why I thought it fit, on this Feast of Charles, King and Martyr, to rescue him from oblivion.

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Feast of Charles, King and Martyr

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