

# Eminent English Churchmen By the Reverend Canon Arthur Middleton

## William Jones of Nayland 1726-1800

A priest, the like of whom  
If multiplied, and in their stations set,  
Would o'er the bosom of a joyful land  
Spread true religion and her genuine fruits.

*Wordsworth*

**O**N THE FRONT cover of Jones's treatise, *The Catholic Doctrine of the Trinity*, given to a former Chaplain, Bishop G. R. Eden, Bishop Lightfoot described William Jones as "one of the faithful ones who kept alive the Truth of Christ's Church during the dark days of the eighteenth century". He also wrote on the cover, "It is comforting to us now to know that the 'vain things' imagined by unbelievers today are not worse than those which vexed the Church 100 years ago."

### Biography

Jones who was born at Lowick in Northamptonshire on the 30th of July, 1726, was of Welsh origin. His father was a descendant of Colonel Jones, Cromwell's brother-in-law, of which Jones was greatly ashamed, not of his father but of having an ancestor as a regicide. He was educated at Charterhouse and University College, Oxford where men both of his own and of more senior standing, influenced his studies and opinions. Here he met George Horne, the future bishop of Norwich who in 1792 made Jones his chaplain. Their life-long friendship has been compared to that of Basil and Gregory Nazianzen, described by Gregory as a gift of God from whom in life and thought he was given wisdom.

After graduation in 1749 he was ordained deacon and in 1751 priest by the Bishop of Peterborough to be curate of Finedon, in Northamptonshire. His rector, Sir John Dolben, "a man of great piety and devotion," possessed an excellent library to which Jones had unlimited access. He married Elizabeth Bridges in 1754 and became curate to his brother-in-law in Wadenhoe. In 1764, Archbishop Secker, who knew his work on the Trinity, appointed him successively to the livings of Bethersden in 1764 and Pluckley in 1765 in Kent, as a reward for his championing of Christian orthodoxy. In 1775 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society and after twelve years in Pluckley he accepted the

perpetual curacy of Nayland and thereafter became known as 'Jones of Nayland'. He formed a short-lived Society for the Reformation of principles by appropriate literature out of which came the publication 'The British Critic' and a number of tracts entitled 'The Scholar Armed against the Errors of the Time'. Nayland Vicarage became the center of that circle which came to be known as the 'High Church Party'. The death of his wife in 1799 hit him hard and he died in January 1800.

### Championing Christian Orthodoxy

English Arianism, in a rather novel mode, became very prevalent. These Arians claimed the support of the ante-Nicene Fathers but had been thoroughly demolished by Bishop Bull, as were also the metaphysical Arians by Sherlock and South. The controversy assumed a different phase in Dr. Clarke, who claimed that Arianism was Scriptural. Daniel Waterland had demolished this presumption in his masterly treatises against Clarke, but the heresy was not extinguished and it emerged again among less able writers. Dr. Clayton, an Irish bishop, if he did not write "Essay on Spirit", it expressed his sentiments. It also proposed the alteration or omission of several passages in the creeds and liturgy, which were known to witness against Arianism.

Jones was persuaded to reply with Home's help. Using Dolben's library, they quickly responded. Their learning, logic, and orthodoxy, was a credit to the young scholars. Clayton was unmoved by it and even attempted to move in the House of Lords for the omission of the passages in the Prayer-book which he had denounced in his essay, and only his death that prevented his being deprived of his bishopric.

In 1766, a new edition of the "Doctrine of the Trinity" was published to which Jones added a "Letter to the Common People." With appropriate arguments, it was well designed to protect them against the errors of the time. In 1770 he published an answer to "The Confessional," by Archdeacon Blackburne, son of the unworthy Archbishop of York of the same name. Blackburne's aim was, like other liberal efforts of that age, to do away with all creeds and confessions. Candidates for ordination should only declare that they were Christians and Protestants, and would teach the people out of the Scriptures whatever in their opinion was the true meaning of the sacred text. Thus all necessary belief was to be resolved into one article, that they would not be papists, and, under pretence of exalting the Scriptures, making the most essential doctrines of the New Testament a matter of uncertainty and indifference. Like all new fangledness' in any age, this book was praised in its day as "a great and masterly work." Such principles are not yet extinct among us. Jones

replied with great ability, and, by a combination of wit, learning, and solid reasoning, thoroughly exposed the dishonesty and ignorance of the writer.

Jones believed that a growing affection for heathenism would banish Christianity from Christendom. His concern was to prevent this catastrophe. He compiled some "Reflections on the Growth of Heathenism among Modern Christians," in a letter to a friend at Oxford, and which he seriously recommended to all those who were entrusted with the education of youth. Jones, was aware of the reverence of past ages for the ornaments and furniture of churches and deplored the irreverence of his own time in this respect. They demonstrated that Christianity was the religion of the country, and the sacred history of their use establishes them as being worthy to be offered for admiration, and recommended by all the efforts of human ingenuity. He contrasts this spirit with the influence of the taste for heathen learning which began to prevail about the time of the Reformation. Heathenism debases Christianity. The parish church is to stand prominently as a witness to remind people to reverence God as an antidote to the irreverence of heathenism. Jones claimed that when he saw the figure of a cock upon the top of a steeple, I am reminded of that sacred bird who was a monitor to St. Peter, and through his example is now giving a daily lesson to all believers. The globe and cross at the top of St. Paul's, reminded him to rejoice in the exaltation of Him who was humbled for our sakes, but is now the Head of all principality and power to the Church and to the world.

He denounced the British government for refusing to permit the extension of episcopacy to the American colonies because Englishmen in the present day have profited from the experience of the past, and acknowledge that episcopacy is the best conservator of loyalty and obedience in our colonies.

### As Parish Priest

His literary occupations were not allowed to interfere with pastoral duties. His small parish, gave him much leisure for useful studies strictly connected with theology. His writings illustrate his diligence in parochial duties. A Visitation sermon, published, in "A Letter to a Friend going into Holy Orders," abounds with advice on the duties of a priest, that no one without the experience could have given. He recommends Bishop Andrewes' "Manual for the Sick," as the best work extant upon its subject; and, with the zeal of one who had obviously used it and wants all the clergy to use it His sermons at Nayland demonstrate as much care and thoughtfulness as his publications.

He was zealous to instruct the young in the principles of the Gospel. and informed his friend at Oxford, "that the only way to remove the ignorance, either of young or old, is to instruct them publicly and privately in the principles of the Gospel. No science," he remarks, "can be understood properly unless we begin with its elements.' For this reason Jones was always desirous that children should be well instructed in the Catechism. A bishop had said to him that whatever he did, he must be diligent in catechizing because it is more useful than preaching.

In the preface to his well-known "Essay on the Church" he explains how he was led to the subject of the essay by an accident. As a curate in a country parish he found great pleasure in teaching the children of my people, privately in his house, and publicly in the church. He noticed that the Catechism of the Church of England, though a most excellent summary of the Christian doctrine, is deficient on the constitution of the Church of Christ; the knowledge of which is necessary to the preservation of that charity which is the end of the commandment. The lack of it is what drives so many away from the Church, who would certainly have remained had they known what it is. This excellent treatise was written to assist the curate of Nayland in the discharge of one of his most responsible duties. A few years later, he drew up the "Churchman's Catechism, or Elements of Instruction on the Nature and Constitution of the Christian Church; intended for the use of Sunday-schools, and such adult persons as are yet uninstructed in the subject." The discourse on "Confirmation" was no doubt originally intended for the use of his own catechumens.

Great care was taken with the celebration of the public services of the Church, which in one of his parishes he made an effort to solemnize daily. Music was an important ingredient in this ordering of worship, especially the sacred music of the Church. Hence, knowing how greatly psalmody is adapted to enkindle the devotion of the faithful worshipper, he was anxious to introduce it into his church. He composed several anthems, besides ten compositions for congregational use. He also procured an organ for his church at Nayland; to which, besides a sermon on the excellency of music, we are probably indebted for his "Thoughts on a Church-organ."

Of the character of his parishioners, little or nothing is known beyond the glimpses and occasional allusions of his sermons. An Easter-day (1788) sermon, tells us that his parish was not annually disgraced by the violence and bad feeling attendant upon an election of churchwardens. The previous year they had been unanimous in electing suitable persons to serve the church and the parish had been blessed. His church flourishes,

the duties of divine worship are regularly performed, the children of the poor are instructed, not a few of them are clothed, and many of them are greatly improved. He tells them “Your minister can do little without your kind encouragement and assistance, but with it he may do much; and your church, which is now a praise in your neighbourhood, may possibly become an example to a considerable part of this kingdom. It is therefore your duty, as members of the Church, to act for the good of the Church; as citizens and subjects, to act for the preservation of peace; as Christians, to act for the praise and glory of God; and as Englishmen, to act for the security of your own religious rites and liberties, without listening to, and without fearing, any persons who may feel themselves disposed to deprive you of them.”