

Traveling the Via Media

Class 2: The Theological Principles

Why the Via Media Works: Scripture, Tradition, and Reason

Where We Were Last Week

Elizabeth faced a choice:

Destroy the other side
(like Mary and Edward did). **OR**

Find another way. A way to live together,
worship together, govern together—while
maintaining honest theological and political
differences.

**She chose the Via Media. And it worked for
500 years.**

*But WHY did it work? That's what we're
exploring today.*



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The Central Question

What makes the **Via Media** actually work theologically?

Is it just pragmatism? A political settlement that happened to last?

OR

Is there genuine theological wisdom underneath it—a way of understanding faith, Scripture, and reason that's genuinely faithful to the Gospel?

The Problem: Two Incompatible Approaches

The Reformers: *Sola Scriptura*

"Only Scripture!"

The Bible must be translated into the vernacular so anyone can read it.

No room for compromise with Catholic Traditions that don't appear in the Bible.

The Catholics: *Scripture + Tradition*

"Scripture AND the Magisterium!"

Scripture is in Latin, for clergy only. People can't be trusted to understand it.

No room for compromise with Protestant approach.

The Anglican Solution: Scripture + Tradition + REASON



Richard Hooker asked a radical question:
Why must we choose between Scripture alone and Church authority alone?

His Answer

We need Scripture, Tradition, **AND** God-given Human Reason.

Reason is not autonomous. It is reason illuminated by grace, operating within the framework of revelation and the traditions of the Church.

Why Reason Mattered: Responding to Puritan Literalism

The Puritan Argument

Only explicit biblical commands can authorize church practices.

Their Goal

Strip away everything not explicitly commanded in Scripture.

Hooker's Response

This is both impossible and unwise.

Scripture doesn't address every question.

Should we use pipe organs? Which vestments? How many candles on the altar?

The Church must use sanctified reason to apply scriptural principles to matters

Scripture doesn't explicitly address.

The Three-Legged Stool (Traditional Pedagogy)



Often taught as: All three legs are equal.
You sit on Scripture, Tradition, and Reason
as one balanced unit.

The Problem

This metaphor doesn't show hierarchy. It makes them seem equal when Scripture has **priority**.

A Better Way to Think About It

Imagine not a stool, but a tricycle...

The English Tricycle (A Better Metaphor)



The Large Front Wheel = Scripture

Steers where you're going. Determines the direction. Primary authority.

The Back Wheels = Tradition and Reason

Support and stabilize. Make movement possible. But don't set the course.

The Genius

You stay upright by moving forward. Theology isn't static—it's a living process.

Scripture's Role: Sufficient for Salvation

Article VI of the Thirty-Nine Articles:

"Scripture contains all things necessary for salvation."

Notice the careful wording

It does NOT say "All things in Scripture are necessary for salvation"

It says "Scripture contains what's necessary for salvation"

— and some things in the Bible are supplementary.

The Apocrypha – another example of Via Media

For Catholics, the Apocrypha is included as Scripture.

For Protestants, the Apocrypha is excluded as heretical.

For Anglicans, we slip them in between, not as scripture, but...

"...for an example of life and instruction; but not to establish doctrine."

The Anglican Way of Reading Scripture Together

Catholic View:

Don't translate Bible, keep it in Latin. The power move. The people were not smart enough to understand it and so, could not be trusted with it.

Protestant View:

Translate the Bible into the vernacular so everyone can read it and wish for the best.

Anglican View:

Scripture is best understood **with the help of a learned clergy**.

Translation: "Everybody read the Bible in English. But let's do Bible study TOGETHER. Bring your learning. Share your understanding. But we read it communally, not in isolation.

Why This Matters, especially in the information age...

We're all bombarded by different information sources and interpretations. How do we read Scripture faithfully? We do it together, with learned and scholarly teachers (both clergy and lay).

An Applied Example: A Christian Approach to Poverty and Justice

The Question: What's the Christian approach to poverty?

Scripture:

"Love your neighbor. Care for the poor, widow, orphan."

But Scripture doesn't prescribe specific systems.

Tradition:

The Church has grappled with poverty across centuries—with varied conclusions.

Reason:

Our conservative and progressive and moderate members are ALL using reason to reach different conclusions about what best serves the poor.

The Via Media Insight:

Almost all approaches can be faithful. All three are wrestling with Scripture, Tradition, and Reason. The disagreement is real.

But it's not a line worth breaking communion over.

BUT: The Via Media Has Boundaries

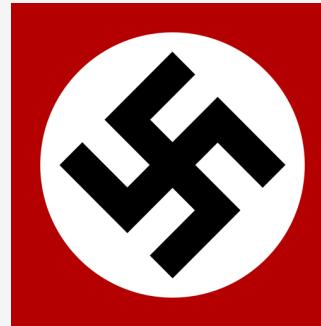
The Via Media allows disagreement in love.
But it requires agreement on fundamentals.

The Non-Negotiables:

- The essential humanity and dignity of all people (imago Dei)
- Equal worth regardless of race, gender, religion, national origin
- Commitment to democratic processes and constitutional governance
- Good faith engagement (not trying to destroy the other or their rights)

Why?

These are prerequisites for conversation itself.
They're the foundation that allows dialogue to happen.



Where the Conversation Breaks Down

If someone enters the conversation saying:

- "Black, Latino, or Asian people are 'less than.'"
- "Women should be subservient or lose the right to vote"
- "We should overthrow democracy and establish a theocracy or dictatorship"
- "Certain groups don't deserve human rights"

...that's not disagreeing about policy. That's disagreeing about whether other people deserve to exist as full human beings.

That's not a secondary matter worth debating inside the church.

The Christian Foundation



Genesis 1:27:

"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

All people are made in the image of God.

Not negotiable.

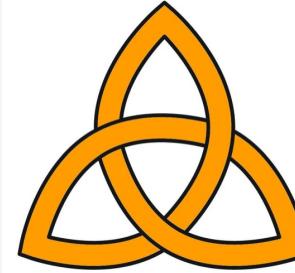
If you deny that any group bears God's image, you're not engaging in political disagreement. You're denying something fundamental to Christianity.

The Theological Heart: The Three Great Doctrines of the Church

Trinity: Unity in Diversity

God is three distinct persons in one divine community.

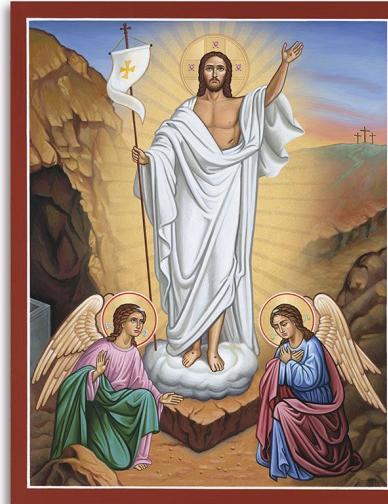
Application: Our parish holds distinct political perspectives in one body.



Incarnation: God Meets Us Where We Are

God came in the flesh, reaching toward us in love even when we were in rebellion.

Application: We meet our neighbor where they are, without demanding they think like us first.



Resurrection: Death Gives Way to New Life

Jesus died and rose. What was dead came back to life—transformed, new.

Application: Our love for those across the aisle can be reborn. Not by pretending differences aren't real, but by insisting they don't have to destroy our love.

Comprehensiveness Without Indifference

Common Misreading:

"So, you don't care about anything. You just split the difference."

Wrong.

What the Via Media Actually Says:

We can hold genuine theological diversity within a single communion because what unites us is larger than what divides us.

This doesn't mean all positions are equally valid. It means we can have real, faithful disagreement on some things while maintaining unity on what matters most.

Essentials vs. Secondaries: What Holds Us Together

The Essentials

(Held in Common)

- Love of Christ
- Scripture, Tradition, Reason
- Dignity of ALL people
- Call to justice & mercy
- Sacraments & Prayer
- Democratic commitment

The Secondaries

(Can Disagree)

- How Eucharist works
- Vestments & Ceremony
- Political Issues, for instance...
 - Immigration
 - Healthcare systems
 - Environmental policy
 - Etc.

Anglican Identity: Reformed Catholicism

Anglicanism holds all of this together:



Protestant in Justification and Scriptural Authority

We believe in justification by faith. Scripture is authoritative. Anyone can (and should) read the Bible.

Catholic in Sacraments and Creeds

We maintain apostolic succession, bishops, sacraments, liturgical worship, sacred tradition.

Distinctly Anglican in Studied Ambiguity

Where others see contradiction, we see creative tension. We hold it together.

"Catholic for all the truths of God; Reformed for all the sins of man."

Practice Over Doctrine: The Power of Shared Worship



Anglicanism emphasizes shared practice more than identical doctrine.

We unite around:

- Jesus Christ, as Word, Savior and Lord.
- The Prayer Book.
- The Sacraments.
- The rhythm of worship.
- A shared mission of love to the world.
- NOT around a confessional statement you sign off on.

Why This Matters

When you meet at the altar to share Holy Communion, you're experiencing unity in PRACTICE even while your doctrines differ. That's powerfully formative.

That's unity in diversity.
That's Anglicanism.

What the Via Media Asks of Us

Study our faith carefully

Draw on Scripture, Tradition, and Reason. Be informed in your convictions, not tribal.

Listen to those who disagree

Actually listen. Not to convert them, but to understand what they love and why.

Distinguish essentials from secondaries

Ask: Is this a line worth breaking communion over?

Practice together

Kneel at the same rail. Sing the same hymns. Love each other—even when you vote differently.

Trust the Holy Spirit

God is not panicked by our disagreements. The mission is bigger than any single vision.

Next Week: Class 3

Now we understand **WHY** we can practice unity in diversity.

But **HOW** do we actually do it?

How do we listen to those we disagree with?

How do we speak our truth without dismissing theirs?

How do we stay in relationship across real disagreement?

Introducing: Braver Faith