

LAUD, WENTWORTH AND THE BRIDGEMAN CASE

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One of the more intriguing, but most elusive, aspects of the protracted 'troubling' of bishop Bridgeman of Chester by the king's commissioners during 1633 is the part played in the affair by the most prominent churchman of the day, William Laud.¹ Although at the start of the investigation by Sir Thomas Canon and his associates into Bridgeman's handling of his courts' revenues, Laud was still bishop of London, and thus without formal jurisdiction over the diocese of Chester, he had for some years been Charles I's most trusted adviser on Church matters.² Yet his attitude to Bridgeman's prosecution has proved hard to establish, in marked contrast to that of his political ally, Thomas Viscount Wentworth, who had on the face of it less reason to interfere in the business of the Church. Wentworth's bold commitment to Bridgeman's defence, flying in the face of the king's intentions, is apparent from the outset. It is true that Laud, as archbishop, was very probably instrumental in reconciling the king with the bishop during the autumn of 1633; but his attitude to earlier proceedings has left little trace.³ A volume of Laud's miscellaneous papers, now in Lambeth Palace Library, does however help to lift that obscurity. It contains a 'Memoriall' of July 1633, mostly devoted to Bridgeman's case, which not only clarifies Laud's own position but also reveals the sharp difference between his approach and that of Wentworth.⁴ In so doing it provides a caution against assuming too readily an invariable identity of interest between the two ministers whose names are most often linked together during Charles's personal rule.

In the summer of 1633, with Bridgeman's prosecution

still far from complete, Laud accompanied the king on his journey to Scotland for his long-delayed coronation. While they were away, Wentworth stepped up his efforts to secure Bridgeman's release from further proceedings. He was himself due shortly, and reluctantly, to leave England for his new responsibilities in Ireland; and it is probable that he tried to force a resolution by the roughness of his tactics. He soon prevailed over whatever contrary opinion there may have been in the rump of the Privy Council left at Westminster, and set about undermining the king's officers, in particular Canon and Sir Henry Marten. Their protests began to reach the king in Scotland; and Charles reacted sharply, angrily condemning the Council's presumptuous involvement in the case.⁵ Laud's memorial was compiled on the eve of the king's return journey, doubtless in anticipation of royal questioning. It shows that his own reaction was, if more restrained, almost as tart as that of his royal master. In the Bridgeman case, Laud and Wentworth were in rival camps. Wentworth failed to consult him, and, as Laud sadly concludes, much of what the new lord deputy did was 'don without my knowledge.'

The way in which Wentworth had set about rallying support for Bridgeman had clearly disconcerted Laud. Not only had Wentworth unhesitatingly prejudged the issue in Bridgeman's favour, despite the king's obvious interest, but he conducted his campaign with what Laud twice refers to as violence. The memorial reveals more plainly than any other source the extent to which Wentworth set out to shake the senior investigator, Canon, both at the Council table and in Council committee. Quite improperly, Wentworth had attached himself to the four-man committee of lord keeper Coventry, lord privy seal Manchester, chancellor of the Exchequer Cottington and secretary Windebank, appointed by Charles shortly before he left for Scotland to consider Canon's recent petition against Bridgeman's counter-offensive. The memorial also implies that it was Wentworth who was behind the revival of an old Star Chamber suit against Canon at this time, and who employed Cottington, an influential friend at Court, and one of the Maynwarings in further harassment of Sir Thomas.⁶ The Maynwaring involved was very probably Wentworth's secretary Philip, whom Laud had come to view with disfavour; Cottington he never quite got the measure of. Although worsted over the succession to the lord treasurership in 1636, the quick-witted Cottington never lost

his ability to embarrass his ponderous rival at Court and in Council.⁷

Laud's distaste for Bridgeman's tactics is no less apparent in his blunt references to bribes. At a time when others at Charles's Court continued to regard *douceurs* as unexceptional, and not necessarily guaranteeing undue favour, Laud had set his face against them. While the earl of Carlisle had taken Bridgeman's offering with an ease born of a lifetime's practice, Windebank, who owed his recent elevation to the secretaryship in part to Laud, had prudently refused. Yet, stubbornly or naively, Bridgeman had the temerity to send one of his servants on a similar mission to Laud himself, suggesting, as the memorial notes, 'the probability of much more to others.' Laud, moreover, clearly associated Wentworth with this line of approach, and seems to imply that some of his 'violence' was provoked by its lack of effect. Even so, either he assumed soon afterwards that such failure had had a salutary effect on the lord deputy; or distance was to lend enchantment to his view of him. Only two years later, in the course of the copious correspondence which had developed between the two ministers, each with his reasons for feeling isolated in Charles's government, Laud confided in what he evidently now supposed to be Wentworth's sympathetic ear that, in courtly manoeuvrings, he was 'alone in these things which draw not private profit after them'.⁸

The sum of Laud's deliberations in July 1633 seems to have been that Wentworth had so confused the king's case that it would be difficult to press the issue further. Although the details of the stages by which Bridgeman was brought to composition with the king remain obscure, Laud was an active intermediary. But Charles, and perhaps his new archbishop of Canterbury, continued to resent Wentworth's brash interference in a Church enquiry, in which the king was closely concerned. Some of that resentment is apparent in Charles's evident satisfaction at Bridgeman's eventual 'confession', which formed part of the final settlement. It seemed to confirm the lack of judgement which Wentworth was deemed to have displayed throughout the affair.⁹

One further cautionary note might be added. Laud lacked Wentworth's independent spirit, and commonly geared his attitudes closely to those of the king, insofar as he was able to discern them. Even in Church business, to which he sometimes felt Charles unduly confined him, he was not necessarily a free agent. The king's supposed preference for

compartmentalised administration was never a barrier to his own involvement in whatever took his interest. In this case Laud clearly regarded Sir Henry Marten, who was taking part in Bridgeman's prosecution on the king's behalf, as an injured party. He was, however, no friend of Marten; and as Charles's attention turned from prosecuting Bridgeman to the impending financial settlement with him, Laud felt more able to act for himself. One of his first actions after succeeding Abbot as primate was to dismiss Marten from his deanship of the court of Arches, a post important for setting the administrative tone within the southern province. Marten was the foremost civilian of his generation, and held the office for life. But Laud found a technical defect in his patent, and was able to remove him.¹⁰ Marten had been Abbot's man, and his face no longer fitted. We know too, that Laud gradually changed his attitude towards Bridgeman, finding him a helpful influence in the North and his son Orlando a promising assistant at Lambeth.

William Laud's 'Memoriall', 11 July 1633

The Bishop of Chester¹¹

If there be matter enough against him *and whether it wilbe proved now men are so frighted*,¹² whether his Majesty¹³ may safely putt it upon the hazard of a triall, considering how far the Lords [of the Privy Council] have allredy declared themselves in favor of him, and the foile it hath allredy received at the Counsell table and by the censure in the Star Chamber and by Lord Cottington and Mannerings censure. [In margin, beside this paragraph:] Retrenching the addicionalls.¹⁴

Under color of that and his Majesty's pleasure signified thereupon, petition the Counsel table. The Lord Deputy's violence and prejudging of the busines against the King: his interposing at the committee for the examination of Sir Thomas Canon's charges against the Bishop, of which committee he was not, but did it only to frighten and discountenance Canon. [In margin:] Bringing the poore man into the Star Chamber for a busines of 2 yeere old and for which submission made before.

Discountenance of Sir Henry Marten, the king's counsell, by which others affrighted.

The Bribe offered to me and the probability of much more to others: els Lord Deputy wold not be so violent. The Bishop's servant that brought me the bribe to be therupon questioned.

The Lord Keeper's protestation that he had read the oath of a Counsellor lately as he did often in busines of great consequence, and therefor by vertue of that oath he was bound in conscience to subscribe the letter.¹⁵

The whole proceeding from the beginning in favor of the Bishop from good friday, when he presented his petition, till after his Majesty's departure, which time was taken to petition the boord when his Majesty declined the Counsell boord before and putt it into the high commission. The Lord Deputy the inditer of the Commissioners, and the whole manager of that parte of the busines: don without my knowledge.¹⁶

NOTES

- 1 For a detailed discussion of Charles I's enquiry into Bridgeman's affairs in 1633 see my 'Lancashire ills, the king's will and the troubling of bishop Bridgeman' in *Seventeenth Century Lancashire* ed. J.I. Kermodé and C.B. Phillips, *Ante* 132 (1983), pp. 67-102. I was not then aware of Laud's 'Memoriall', printed below.
- 2 Laud was elevated to Canterbury on 6 August, 1633, shortly after Abbot's death.
- 3 'Lancashire ills', pp. 92-3.
- 4 Lambeth Palace Library, Lambeth MS 943, pp. 183-4. I am grateful to the Librarian of Lambeth Palace, Mr E.G.W. Bill, for permission to publish this extract.
- 5 'Lancashire ills', pp. 86-90.
- 6 The Star Chamber suit mentioned here may be the one which resulted in a £20 fine on Canon later in the year: *ibid*, p. 102 note 104.
- 7 M.J. Havran, *Caroline Courtier: the Life of Lord Cottington* (London, 1973), pp. 125-33.
- 8 W. Scott and J. Bliss ed., *The Works of William Laud* (7v., Oxford, 1847-60), VII, p. 173 (4 Oct 1635).
- 9 'Lancashire ills', p. 92.
- 10 Laud, *Works*, IV, pp. 225-6.
- 11 This is the second subject raised by the memorial. The first concerned dealings over sugar with the Spanish agent in England, Juan de Nocolalde.
- 12 The passage italicized here was interlined by Laud.
- 13 'Majesty' is given in contracted form throughout the MS. This and a number of other standard contractions have been silently extended in this transcription.
- 14 Laud is here referring to the additional articles admitted into high commission by Marten in an attempt to pin the bishop down, but which Bridgeman and his friends continued to block with some success.
- 15 For the oath for Privy Councillors, see *Acts of the Privy Council of England, 1630-1631*, p. 2. It stresses each councillor's duty to 'faithfully and truly declare' his opinion 'according to . . . hart and conscience.' Lord keeper Coventry had been the leading signatory to the Council's letter to Charles of 30 June 1633, defending Bridgeman: 'Lancashire ills', pp. 88-9. He was at this time more

prepared to take a line of his own than Clarendon's well-known pen picture might suggest: W.D. Macray ed., *Clarendon's History of the Rebellion* (6v., Oxford, 1888), I, pp. 57-8.

- 16 The commissioners referred to here are Canon and Nicholas Hunt, first sent to the diocese of Chester, on the king's instructions, in January 1633.