

THOMAS CRANMER AND THE *BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER*: THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION, LITURGY, AND THE EMBODIMENT OF PROSPER'S DICTUM

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There are very few people throughout the history of the Church of whom it can be said that they have influenced not only generations of individual Christians, but indeed the very structuring of Christianity itself. In part, the communal nature of the Christian faith tends against the dominance of individuals. In part, too, the very subject matter of Christian doctrine points us away from ourselves and towards the One about whom our doctrines speak. Karl Barth famously eschewed the idea of there being “great theologians,” precisely because the task of theology is inherently humble and self-effacing, pointing—like Grunewald’s depiction of John the Baptist—only ever towards Christ. In other words, the inner essence of Christianity itself militates against the singling out of individuals.

Nonetheless, in this article I do indeed wish to single someone out. Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1533 to 1556, deserves recognition as one who materially changed both the structure of the Christian faith, as well as the way in which that faith is transmitted. Cranmer’s very particular legacy, the *Book of Common Prayer* (1549, 1552), birthed an entirely new way of Christian worship. Since it was first published, around 460 years ago, it has structured liturgy throughout the world and, as Gerald Bonner has argued, has even influenced secular literary use.<sup>1</sup> Just as important as its liturgical utility, though, Cranmer’s *Book of Common Prayer* has served the Church as an *educative* tool. I will argue here that Cranmer’s liturgical reforms were, in their essence and function, educative as well as ritually performative. Insofar as they were so, Cranmer embodied—perhaps unwittingly—the Prosperian dictum that to pray is to believe, and that therefore to change the one will require re-education for the other. In other words, I wish to claim for Cranmer a singular place not only within Reformation history but indeed within (Protestant) Christian theological education more broadly.

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1 Gerald Bonner, “Liturgical Language and Devotion,” in *Thomas Cranmer: Essays in Commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of his Birth*, ed. Margot Johnson (Durham: Turnstone Ventures, 1990), 43.

It should be noted at the outset that I am defining theological education here in its widest possible terms. Theological education encompasses very much more than the ministerial training that takes place in seminaries and theological colleges, and critically also includes the week-by-week education of Christian faith communities through the inductive catechesis that happens in Sunday services. Thus, I will make my claim about Cranmer's place as an educator precisely because of the way in which his *Book of Common Prayer* has been ingredient to Christian formation through worship, throughout the centuries since it was first authored. Not only at the time, but also in the centuries since, the *BCP* shows the extent to which one can change the faith of a people simply (or not so simply!) by changing its liturgy.<sup>2</sup> Anglican thought has routinely adhered, quite self-consciously, to Prosper of Aquitaine's oft-misquoted aphorism, *lex orandi, lex credendi*.<sup>3</sup> The structuring of faith and the practice of prayer inform one another in a liturgical dance of mutual evolution. In this article, I will argue that this interplay is inherently a process of teaching and learning, and that it is nowhere better exemplified than in Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer* of 1549 and 1552.

#### CRANMER: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Thomas Cranmer is an ambiguous and contestable figure. While few scholars would argue against Cranmer's centrality to the English Reformation, far fewer would argue that he had a pivotal role in the development of Reformation theology more broadly.<sup>4</sup> In fact, many scholars offer something of a subdued assessment. Cranmer was not, at least according to those latter readings, one of the Reformation's more gifted or original thinkers. George Tavard sums up this view well when he says that "Cranmer was no historian ... [and] as a theologian he had no brilliant mind." Indeed, his doctrinal thinking was nothing more than "a very trite product

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2 Michael Davies, *Cranmer's Godly Order*, Liturgical Revolution, vol. 1 (Fort Collins: Roman Catholic Books, 1995), xv–xvi.

3 Prosper of Aquitaine, 390–455 CE. What Prosper actually said was *legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*, but the idea is the same, that the Church believes as it prays (and conversely, prays as it believes). Prosper of Aquitaine, *Capitula Coelestini* 8, in P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, 51, 209–10.

4 See, for example, Kevin Ward, "Thomas Cranmer," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Ian A. McFarland, David A. S. Fergusson, Karen Kilby, and Iain R. Torrance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 120.

of decadent scholasticism.”<sup>5</sup> Owen Chadwick, too, is scathing. In his view, Cranmer was a “reluctant prelate,” who was “not a force in politics.” Under his primacy, the Church in England was ruled “more with his assent than at his direction.”<sup>6</sup> Chadwick’s appraisal hardly inspires great confidence. For someone who has frequently been regarded as more of a bureaucrat than a theologian, the Cranmer in Chadwick’s portrait comes across as uneasy, even in the administrative realm. Jonathan Dean has been even more critical. Cranmer did not, Dean argues, “unleash the energies of a whole generation in a monumental movement of religious change,” as did Luther. Nor did he, like Calvin, with whom he was broadly contemporaneous, provide a massive systematic exposition of Reformed theology. Neither was he as innovative as a Huldrych Zwingli, whose remarkable account of sacramental theology was as alien to the other Reformers as it was to Roman Catholicism.<sup>7</sup>

These historiographical contestations aside, the major details of Cranmer’s life are well known (though not without their own contested readings). Born into relative obscurity in 1489, he found his way through schooling to Jesus College, Cambridge, where (presumably—we know little of his life there) he spent much of his time reading and teaching. We do know that he married, a decision that apparently required him to relinquish his College fellowship. Within a year or so of the wedding, however, his wife Joan had died in childbirth and his fellowship had been restored.<sup>8</sup>

By the 1520s, Cranmer had been scouted by Cardinal Wolsey as a promising scholar and someone who could, therefore, prove useful in the diplomatic corps of Henrician England. Before long, Cranmer was centrally engaged in seeking a resolution to the King’s “Great Matter”—Henry VIII’s urgent desire to have his marriage to Catherine of Aragon annulled. In the process of doing so, he spent time on the Continent with leading figures of the European Reformation, not least of all Andreas Osiander, whose niece Cranmer was eventually to marry. So successfully engaged in the King’s

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5 George H. Tavard, *The Quest for Catholicity: A Study in Anglicanism* (London: Burns and Oates, 1963), 20–21.

6 Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation* (London: Penguin Books, 1964, repr. 1990), 114–15.

7 Jonathan Dean (ed.), *God Truly Worshipped: Thomas Cranmer and His Writings* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2012), 1.

8 This, at least, is the traditional account. It is worth noting that Jesus College itself has published a dissenting view that casts doubt on the precise nature of Cranmer’s association with the College, including the revocation and restoration of his fellowship. See “Thomas Cranmer: A Questioning Note,” Jesus College, Cambridge, <http://www.jesus.cam.ac.uk/about-jesus-college/history/pen-portraits/thomas-cranmer/> (accessed December 9, 2014).

matter was he, that, on the death of Archbishop Warham in 1532, Henry nominated Cranmer for the See of Canterbury, despite the fact that Cranmer's only ecclesial appointment to that time had been a paltry two years in the rectory of Bredon, Worcestershire.<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless, he was soon the Archbishop, and less than a year into his archepiscopacy, Cranmer had secured what Henry had so long desired. On 23 May 1533, the new Archbishop ruled the marriage to Catherine invalid. Five days later, he stamped his approval on Henry's marriage to Anne Boleyn.

Cranmer's efforts on behalf of Henry VIII were founded, in the first instance, upon his growing and (what was to become) persistent belief in the Royal Supremacy—the rather Erastian doctrine that it was the English sovereign, and not the Pope, who enjoyed ultimate temporal authority over the English Church. To put it otherwise, in the person of the King, the interests of both Church and State coinhered. In 1534, through the Act of Supremacy, England broke ties with Rome, and Cranmer began to consecrate English bishops for an English Church. Without this article of Church-political faith, the English Reformation, at least in the form in which it was to emerge, would have been inconceivable.

Yet this political resolution was hardly the culmination of Cranmer's reforming zeal. From early on in the King's service, he demonstrated that his passion and purpose were decidedly evangelical, if by that we mean a commitment to Scripture and, in particular, the New Testament.<sup>10</sup> By the late 1540s, Cranmer had repudiated utterly the doctrine of transubstantiation (at least insofar as it denoted a *method* of real presence), and by 1552 had adopted a Calvinistic predestinarian understanding of the efficacy of the Eucharist. That is to say, the effectiveness of the sacrament was not tied

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9 It is true, though, that Bredon was an unusually wealthy parish, with the St Giles' Church boasting one of tallest spires in the shire. Curiously, the plaque in St Giles which lists the rectors, all the way back to 1236, omits Cranmer's name entirely! Diarmaid MacCulloch argues that, while Cranmer is certainly the most illustrious of all Bredon's incumbents, his omission from the plaque suggests that he made almost no impression, either good or bad, on the local population. See MacCulloch's letter to Dean Lewis, May 7, 2013, at <http://bowbrook.blogspot.com.au/2013/06/st-giles-church-bredon-or-case-of.html> (accessed December 10, 2014). This accords with what MacCulloch says in his biography of Cranmer: "During the year [1531] Cranmer may even have spent some time in his benefice of Bredon, although no doubt for the most part the parish was left to the attentions of farmers and a flock of curates..." Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 53.

10 See MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, 2.

to priestly piety but to the recipient's election. More centrally, he was intent on placing an English Bible in the pews of every English Church, and constructing a liturgy by which the people would be led to digest inwardly the words of Scripture.

This is not to say that the road of Cranmerian reform was straight or smooth. Henry himself was only unevenly persuaded by Protestant theology, and while the reforms gathered pace under Edward VI, there was also significant rebellion in some quarters against the sharp break with past practice and belief. And under Mary I, of course, the entire Protestant experiment was—at least temporarily—overturned, with Cranmer himself being executed by burning in Broad Street, Oxford, on 21 March 1556.

Yet Cranmer's legacy, as does that of so many martyrs (and yet so few theologians), lived—and lives—on. Whereas only students and scholars tend these days to read Luther's *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, the *Summa* of Aquinas, or Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, countless Anglican Christians around the world still worship each week using Cranmer's liturgy, or at least various authorized versions of it. Closing in on its quincentenary, the *BCP* continues to shape the worshiping practices of Christian communities. While John Moorman notes, with perhaps a touch too much nostalgic poignancy, that: "The [1662] Prayer Book is not used anywhere anymore," he also insists that, despite this loss, "Anglican worship is [still fundamentally] the work of Thomas Cranmer."<sup>11</sup> Moreover, some parts of the *BCP* have found their way into the liturgies of other denominations, taking Cranmer's influence beyond the Anglican Church itself. As Andrew Curnow has suggested, the *BCP* has been the single most significant factor in defining Anglicanism since its inception, not only the Communion's worship but also its theology and ecclesiology.<sup>12</sup>

Evidently, therefore, Cranmer's is a living legacy. But the more interesting question concerns the nature of this legacy. Cranmer's reforming agenda was neither simply liturgical nor theological. On the contrary, it was *also* formative and educative. If seminary studies and college courses comprise the "explicit curriculum" of Anglican theological education, the

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11 John R.H. Moorman, "After Cranmer," in *Thomas Cranmer: Essays in Commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of his Birth*, ed. Margot Johnson (Durham: Turnstone Ventures, 1990), 25.

12 Andrew Curnow, "Preface," in Prayer Book Society of Victoria, *An Anglican Treasure: The 1662 Book of Common Prayer in the 21st Century* (Heidelberg, Vic.: Prayer Book Society of Australia, 2006), vii.

*BCP* is what I would call its “soft edge.” Through the medium of common structured worship, Cranmer’s intention was to change the minds, attitudes and beliefs of the English people. His success in doing so evidences the fact that the ownership of theological education rests not (or not only) with Bible colleges and divinity schools, but also with gathered worshipping communities.

Through the rest of this article, I will develop this claim by tracing the evolution of the *BCP*, and in particular the distinctions between the 1549 and 1552 versions.<sup>13</sup> By looking at the ways in which, through liturgical formularies it changed the doctrinal substance of what had gone before, we can see its educative aspect in sharper clarity.

#### LITURGY AND / AS EDUCATION

Before doing so, however, a few words are in order about the educative nature of worship and liturgy. John Colwell’s brilliant little book, *The Rhythm of Doctrine*, quite deliberately structures the study of dogmatics around the liturgical year. In doing so, Colwell self-consciously follows Stanley Hauerwas’ lead, whose course on ethics at Duke University is oriented around the eucharistic service. According to Hauerwas, priests and ministers need to do their work so that it makes sense in light of the Eucharist; in the Eucharist, he says, “God is made present in the bread and the wine in a way that makes its communicants an alternative to the world.”<sup>14</sup> That is to say, eucharistic liturgy educates as much as it praises. As John Colwell puts it, “A knowledge of God other than in the context of worship is no true knowledge of the one who is truly God . . . God is only truly known

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13 As this article concerns Cranmer, I will not discuss the revisions of 1559 and 1604, nor even the final 1662 version. As Geoffrey Bromiley has noted, the amendments contained in those three later iterations were “slight” and “mostly superficial.” Indeed, he says, “the only authorised Prayer Book today is in fact very much the book which Cranmer gave to the Church in 1552.” Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop and Martyr* (London: The Church Book Room, 1956), 87. Similarly, John Moorman notes that, while the *Book* of 1552 did not last long as a version in its own right, nonetheless the 1662 iteration is essentially the 1552 edition with only minor changes. Moorman, “After Cranmer,” 26. Anthony Gelston suggests that it is the 1549 version which is the more stable. See Anthony Gelston, “Cranmer and the Daily Services,” in *Thomas Cranmer: Essays in Commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of his Birth*, ed. Margot Johnson (Durham: Turnstone Ventures, 1990), 78. The substantive point is the same: it is Cranmer’s own two versions of the *BCP* that have predominantly shaped worship and theology, and not the three later editions.

14 Stanley Hauerwas, “Theology Vital to True Christian Ministry,” *The Melbourne Anglican*, March 2014, 5.

as the one he truly is, [if he is known] as the one who draws our worship.”<sup>15</sup> Colwell is contending no less than that revelation and praise are two sides of the one coin. Or, to put it somewhat crudely, theological epistemology—indeed, the study of God as an academic discipline (as though it were only that)—that is divorced from the life and heart of worshipping communities leads with some inevitability to the knowledge of an idol. Colwell is saying nothing other than what Prosper’s dictum also states: that *how* one prays, and *who* one thinks one is praying to, are mutually informative.

Gordon Lathrop, writing from the Lutheran tradition, is perhaps one of the best contemporary exponents of precisely this type of liturgical theology. Liturgy, he says, is (or at least should be) the clearest expression of what we are trying to say together, *as* the Church *in* the world. It serves, therefore, both a proclamatory function (externally) as well as an affirmatory and educative function (internally). Not only does praise address *God*, it addresses *us* who offer it—and the *content* of that address (what we learn through it) is shaped by the structure of and nature in which the address is put. One of the reasons liturgy does this is because such liturgical learnings do not rely solely on one authoritative voice—for example, a bishop, or the popular theologian-of-the-month—but rely rather on the diversity of Christian voices that have *gathered* across the ages, traditions and locations.<sup>16</sup>

In worship, therefore, we see the church speaking (certainly, and hopefully always) to the *God whom* it worships, and also in part to the *world about* the God whom the Church proclaims. But we also, and just as importantly, see the Church speaking to *itself* about its own shared knowledge of that God, a knowledge that has evolved and been refined through generations of praise and adoration. As Dan Hardy and David Ford put it, praising and knowing God are inseparable: “Knowing this God is to know a glory and love that evokes all our astonishment, thanks and praise; praising this God is a matter of *affirming truth* as well as expressing adoration and love.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, theological education involves not merely systematic and expository teaching, or the articulation of propositional truth-claims. On the contrary, theological education is far more a matter of an imaginative dance of word, song and symbol that combine in liturgy to proclaim and to

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15 John E. Colwell, *The Rhythm of Doctrine: A Liturgical Sketch of Christian Faith and Faithfulness* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 2.

16 Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 9.

17 Dan Hardy and David Ford, *Jubilate: Theology in Praise* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984), 108; emphasis added.

propose, to adore and to affirm. Worship and liturgy thus exist as a collective voice of the Church across the ages that connects the knowledge of God with the praise of God. To express this in more typically Anglican tones, New Testament scholar Dorothy Lee has commented that the theological understanding of Anglicanism “is expressed, not in [a] unique creed or catechism nor even in doctrinal statement, but fundamentally in our liturgy: in our community prayer, in our preaching, in our celebration of the sacraments. These contain and articulate our theology.”<sup>18</sup> Worship and theological education are, that is to say, inextricably linked. The study of God should be *jubilant*—rejoicing in and exalting God. And the praise of God in liturgy and worship should be, and is, *educative* for our knowledge of the God whom we praise. And so, at last, to Cranmer and his *Book*, for in and through this book we see exemplified, in both purpose and consequence, the harmony of liturgy and learning.

#### EDUCATIVE LITURGY AND LITURGICAL EDUCATION IN THE *BCP*

The first liturgical innovations introduced by Cranmer in fact pre-dated the *BCP*. Gelston is right to say that Cranmer had been working on revisions to the daily services for at least a decade before the 1549 edition.<sup>19</sup> Certainly by 1538, the rubrics of the Daily Office were insisting that the people be *instructed* by the reading of Scripture. In and of itself this suggests that the readings should be in English even while the service itself was retained in Latin. In his preface to the Great Bible of 1540, Cranmer writes similarly that:

In the Scriptures be the fat pastures of the soul ... He that is ignorant, shall find there what he should learn ... Herein may princes learn how to govern their subjects: subjects obedience, love and dread to their princes: husbands, how they should behave them unto their wives; how to educate their children and servants: and contrary the wives, children and servants may know their duty to their husbands, parents and masters.<sup>20</sup>

In Gordon Jeanes’ words, these innovations showed above all that what was uppermost in Cranmer’s mind was both comprehension of the Bible *and*—

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18 Dorothy Lee, “The Canaanite Woman (Matthew 15: 21-28): Reclaiming the Voice of Scripture in Ministry,” cited in Mark Brolly, “Welcome to Others, Clarity about Faith Essential,” *The Melbourne Anglican* March 2014, 4.

19 Gelston, “Cranmer and the Daily Services,” 51.

20 Thomas Cranmer, ‘Preface to the Bible’, in G.E. Duffield (ed.), *The Work of Thomas Cranmer II* (Appleford: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1964), 87.



inextricably in consequence—the formation of a Christian people and society.<sup>21</sup> Social education was thus no unforeseen result of liturgical change. On the contrary, the one was necessarily entailed by the other. True enough, these early revisions were cautious and minimal—reflective, perhaps, of Cranmer’s diplomatic sensibilities towards an irascible king. The following years, however, saw increasingly radical and rapid liturgical change.

In 1548, the “Order of Communion” provided for communicants to receive both bread *and* wine. This was a bold enough move, but pedagogically the more significant shift was linguistic. The Order required that the eucharistic devotions—that is, the exhortations, confession and absolution—be in English. This was deliberately educative. Hugh Bates puts it well when he says that:

Cranmer’s particular, and very proper, concerns were the language barrier which excluded the great majority from effective participation in what was supposed to be the central act of the church’s worship ... Here, if nowhere else, people needed to be absolutely clear about what they were doing.<sup>22</sup>

Nonetheless, not everything was changed. The precedence of the Mass itself was retained, and the language apart from the eucharistic devotional material was still Latin. Some things were added (vernacular prayers) but little of substance was removed.

Then, in 1549, the first edition of the *BCP* was published. It too was conservative, compromising and conciliatory in tone. And yet it was noticeably more revolutionary in aspect than any of Cranmer’s previous liturgical modifications. For the Archbishop, it was vitally important to the religious health of the English people that: a) the whole, or at least the major part, of the Bible should be read over the course of a year, so as to allow for the refutation of heresy by a more thorough knowledge of Scripture; b) worship be in the vernacular, to facilitate *intelligent participation*; c) the rules and rubrics for worship be simplified and better understood, again to avoid the confusion caused by Roman accretions; and d) all liturgical material be actually Scripture, or at the very least consonant with it. These four

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21 Gordon Jeanes, “Cranmer and Common Prayer,” in *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer*, ed. Charles Hefling and Cynthia Shattuck (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 22.

22 Hugh Bates, “The Worthy Communicant,” in *Thomas Cranmer: Essays in Commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of his Birth*, ed. Margot Johnson (Durham: Turnstone Ventures, 1990), 115.

underlying principles illustrate well the educative nature of Cranmer's reforming agenda.

Based heavily upon the so-called Rite of Sarum, that is, the old Latin rite, the 1549 *BCP*'s most obvious—and formatively significant—innovation was that it was now entirely in English. How, reasoned Cranmer, could the people profit from any instruction if they could not understand what was being said?<sup>23</sup> The other major change was that the eucharistic service was supplanted in significance and priority by the inclusion of Morning and Evening Prayers. Matins and Evensong were now more liturgically central than Holy Communion. This suggests far more than simply an eschewing of the Roman rite. Insofar as the daily prayers were shaped by Scripture—readings from the Psalter, canticles from the Gospels—these offices were, and were intended to be, instructive in scriptural literacy. The prayer services, as well as the Eucharist, became primarily concerned with “education and prayer, intended to ground the Christian population in the knowledge and practice of their faith.”<sup>24</sup>

The commemoration of Saints' Days was also a casualty of the 1549 version. The Calendar was whittled down to a mere twenty-five major celebrations, with the festivals of the Assumption, Corpus Christi and the Holy Cross all being removed. Those days that were left were limited to those that celebrated major New Testament characters such as the evangelists and apostles. In a none-too-subtle repudiation of the Roman cult of Mary, all but two of the various celebrations of the Virgin were eradicated from liturgy and, it was hoped, the popular religious mind.<sup>25</sup> Once again, this held an educative function, as the invocation of saints became steadily less tolerable. With the exception of a few notable exemplars from Scripture, saints were “evicted,” to use Jeanes' phrase.<sup>26</sup> Those saints who were liturgically retained were kept as examples to follow rather than mediators. The deceased, that is, were spoken or prayed *about*, and not *to*.

However, the shape of the Communion service itself in the 1549 *BCP* was ambiguous. On the one hand, clerical vestments were retained, and the title of the service—“The Supper of the Lord and Holy Communion, commonly called the Mass”—conceded ground to the Roman rite. The sign of the cross was to be made over the elements at the point of *epiclesis*:

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23 Gelston, “Cranmer and the Daily Services,” 52.

24 Jeanes, “Cranmer and Common Prayer,” 31.

25 Brian Cummings (ed.), *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), xxvii. Cummings notes, though, that the very retention by Cranmer of a Calendar at all flew in the face of trends amongst the continental Reformers.

26 Jeanes, “Cranmer and Common Prayer,” 29.

Heare us (o merciful father) we beseech thee: and with thy holy spirit and word, vouchsafe to bl+esse and sanc+tify these thy gyftes, and creatures of bread and wine, that they maie be unto us the body and bloude of thy moste derely beloved sonne Jesus Christe.<sup>27</sup>

Bryan Spinks notes that these words, with the retention of the crossing, suggest that at least in 1549 Cranmer was more amenable to the sacramental theology of Peter Martyr than Martin Bucer. Whereas Bucer was critical of any petition that requested sanctification of the elements rather than the communicants, Martyr insisted that God indeed does “translate [the bread and wine] from the natural order, and profane degree in which they were, to a sacramental state and order” by the work of the Word and Spirit.<sup>28</sup> As Bishop Gardiner observed, such wording was not incompatible with the doctrine of transubstantiation.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, there was no elevation of the host in 1549—the high point of the medieval Mass—because, while Cranmer did not want to deny a real presence of Christ in the elements, he did not support the explanation of the “how” that transubstantiation offered.

The ambiguity inherent in the Communion was illustrated most evidently by the words of institution, which were capable of being interpreted in a variety of ways, depending upon one’s theological predilections. As mentioned earlier, Cranmer’s sacramental theology differed from the Thomistic *ex opere operato* by contending that the sacraments signify grace but confer it only upon the elect. Thus, the words “The body of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life” *could* (and should, according to this Cranmerian theology) be understood as referring to the communicant receiving by faith the body of Christ. But, the very same words could just as well be heard as referring to the administered bread itself. A sop, as it were, to less reformed sensibilities. For all his reforming zeal, Cranmer was evidently unable (or unwilling) to entirely remove all traces of Roman theology. No wonder, then that Cranmer’s nemesis, Bishop Gardiner—even while imprisoned in the Tower—found himself able to endorse the 1549 BCP as being “agreeable to the Catholic doctrine on the real presence.”<sup>30</sup>

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27 See Cummings, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 30.

28 Bryan D. Spinks, “And with thy Holy Spirite and Worde’: Further Thoughts on the Source of Cranmer’s Petition for Sanctification in the 1549 Communion Service,” in *Thomas Cranmer: Essays in Commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of his Birth*, ed. Margot Johnson (Durham: Turnstone Ventures, 1990), 98–99.

29 Spinks, “And with thy Holy Spirite and Worde,” 100.

30 Tavard, *The Quest for Catholicity*, 19.

Perhaps because the first version left too much of the Roman rite intact, three years after its first iteration the *BCP* was revised in somewhat more stridently Protestant tones. In the *Book's* 1552 edition, not only was the service of Holy Communion made secondary in liturgical prominence to the two daily offices of Morning and Evening Prayer, but the wording and ritual of the service itself were heavily curtailed. There was now no reserved sacrament and there were no priestly vestments. The service itself was simply called "The Order of Administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion"—that is, the postscriptive reference to the Mass from the 1549 edition was no more. Also gone were *all* intercessions for the departed; prayers in the 1552 version were only for the "Church militant *here on earth*." The "altar" had become a mere "table." Most important of all, though, there was decidedly nothing that resembled transubstantiation, or that could be taken to imply it. The controversial words from 1549 were now rendered simply as:

Heare us O mercyefull father wee beeseche thee; and graunt that wee, receyving these thy creatures of bread and wyne, accordinge to thy sonne our Savioure Jesus Christ's holy institucion, in remembrance of his death and passion, maye be partakers of his most blessed body and blood.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, all ambiguity in the words of institution from 1549 had been removed in the 1552 edition: "Take and eat this, in *remembrance* that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thy heart by faith, with thanksgiving."<sup>32</sup> One could no longer say or hear the institutional narrative as if it conceded ground to Roman sacramental theology. The elements were indeed set aside for a holy purpose, but neither Cranmer nor now the liturgy, ascribed any holiness to them in and of themselves.

None of this was solely for the purpose of liturgical propriety. While Cranmer was clearly determined to rid the English Church of what he considered to be popish corruption, the liturgical innovations were pedagogical as well as theological in nature. By translating prayer and Communion services into the vernacular, by encouraging congregational participation through responsorial psalms and litanies, and by reshaping the Eucharist from an utterly transcendental event to one of memorial and acclamation, Cranmer was seeking to use the liturgy to *teach* as well as to worship. In contrast to the continental Reformers, for whom preaching was of central and abiding

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31 See *The Book of Common Prayer*, 1552. Accessed at [http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1552/Communion\\_1552.htm](http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1552/Communion_1552.htm). See also Bates, "The Worthy Communicant," 112.

32 See Bates, "The Worthy Communicant," 113.

importance, the Cranmerian services relied far less on the expository or oratory skills of a preacher through which to educate the people in the faith, and far more on the structure and content of the liturgy itself.

Of course, the *BCP* includes more than just the services of Communion and the Morning and Evening Prayers. There is not time in this article to discuss them, but much the same educative element can be seen in the baptismal, marriage and funeral rites. And, structurally, the very fact that the *BCP* contained schedules of readings of psalms and lessons in itself enhanced its utility as a teaching tool and not simply a rubric for worship. The entire *Book*, in content and structure, was nothing less (and a good deal more) than a catechetical curriculum.

#### CONCLUSION

Cranmer, of course, died knowing that under Mary's reign, his educative reform was being systematically undone. He had no way of knowing that Mary herself would be dead only two years after his own execution, and that under Elizabeth the *Book of Common Prayer* would be reinstated. Little more than a century after Cranmer's death, in 1662, a revised *BCP* was authorized in law to be the only approved liturgy of the Church of England. That this took place just as the British imperial expansion throughout the world was gathering pace meant that, where English settlers went, the *Book* went with them, quite literally to the ends of the earth.<sup>33</sup>

Nonetheless, Cranmer's liturgical revolution did not meet with universal acceptance, neither at the time nor now. Not all Anglican theological colleges train their ordinands either to be familiar with or to use prayer book liturgies. Partly in consequence, one can wander into some Anglican churches these days and hardly be able to discern anything vaguely Cranmerian. Yet such places have been noticeable by their exceptionalism. They are evident precisely because they have turned their back on what is most distinctively Anglican. As a concluding editorial note, I would dare to suggest that what they have subsequently lost outweighs any stylistic freedom they may have found. Liturgical liberty has often come at the expense of formation in faith. Why? Because what Cranmer's genius offered most of all was not so much a set of restrictive rubrics for prayer, but a way of teaching the people *about* God in the midst of their prayers *to* God.

Prosper would indeed have approved.

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33 Bryan Spinks, "From Elizabeth I to Charles II," in *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer*, ed. Charles Hefling and Cynthia Shattuck (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 54.

Saint Thomas the Apostle. The Conversion of Saint Paul. The Purification of Saint Mary the Virgin. Evening Prayer from All Saints' Day until the Friday before the First Sunday of Advent. Evening Prayer from the day after Ascension Day until the Day of Pentecost. Evening Prayer on Friday. Evening Prayer on Monday. Morning and Evening Prayer from The Book of Common Prayer. Night Prayer (Compline). Notes. The Book of Common Prayer (1928). The Order for. The Administration of the Lord's Supper. or. Holy Communion. ¶ Then followeth the Sermon. After which, the Priest, when there is a Communion, shall return to the Holy Table, and begin the Offertory, saying one or more of these Sentences following, as he thinketh most convenient. REMEMBER the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. Acts xx. 35. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. St. Matt. v. 16. The Book of Common Prayer (1662) is one of the most beloved liturgical texts in the Christian church, and remains a definitive expression of Anglican identity today. It is still widely used around the world, in public worship and private devotion, and is revered for both its linguistic and theological virtues. "The Book of Common Prayer" with its timeless liturgies, lectionary, psalms, and prayers has long held worldwide Anglicanism together. In addition to the rich liturgy of the prayer book, I commend the use of the prayers that are found in the appendix, especially the prayers for the spread of the gospel and for those who are persecuted. In the remainder of the book, Blunt systematically goes through each part of the Prayer Book, offering historical background, theological insight, and practical explanations of each part. For anyone who wants to understand the Prayer Book better, and especially for those who want to use it as their Rule of Life in worshiping God, Blunt's book is a treasure trove of information that would be difficult to obtain from a variety of other sources. Many commentaries and guides to The Book of Common Prayer have been made ever since the first Prayer Book in 1549, but the 19th century definitely marked the high point for such works, both in terms of the number of works and in terms of the level of scholarship. If historians have generally regarded Thomas Cranmer as the most complex character among the churchmen of the sixteenth-century Reformation in England, his theological legacy, particularly when finely tuned, is none too difficult to determine. For, somewhat akin to Beethoven's masterly Eroica symphony, there is a heroic quality about the life and work of the diligent scholar Henry VIII chose to be archbishop of Canterbury. Modern scholarship may spurn such a judgement, no doubt deeming it 'old hat', simplistic, even partisan and divisive. And although it would be inappropriate to liken work on the Book of Common Prayer that followed to the light, playful passage of the scherzo, the Protestant convictions of a young and eager Edward VI at least gave Cranmer new freedom to experiment.