

# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 48: Thomas Cranmer & the English Reformation

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## Thomas Cranmer and the English Reformation: Did You Know?

Little-known and remarkable facts about Thomas Cranmer and the English Reformation.

the Editors

As archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer played a key role in the English Reformation. When he first heard about his appointment, though, he balked. Away in Europe, he delayed his return to England for seven weeks, hoping Henry would get impatient and appoint someone else.

Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer*, the liturgy of the Anglican church (including the Episcopal church), is known for its memorable expression of Christian theology. But Cranmer was only a modestly talented student, ranking thirty-second in his Cambridge class of 42.

Before he was a priest, Cranmer married, but his wife died in childbirth within a year. After becoming ordained as a priest, Cranmer married again, and he kept the marriage a secret for his first 14 years as archbishop because priestly marriage was forbidden.

Some have accused Cranmer of making a deal with Henry: if appointed archbishop of Canterbury, he would resolve Henry's "privy question"—his need to legally divorce Catherine of Aragon and marry Anne Boleyn. Long before his appointment, Cranmer believed Henry's divorce was justified and had encouraged Henry to gain wider approval for it.

The divorce question was debated in Europe's major universities, and many theologians had opinions about it. The most unusual may have been Martin Luther's: "I would rather permit the king to marry still another woman and to have, according to the examples of the patriarchs and kings [of Scripture], two women or queens at the same time."

Henry VIII was not a Protestant, even after his break from Rome. He believed in transubstantiation, priestly celibacy, and other Catholic doctrines. He wanted Catholicism without the pope. Thus he had both Protestants and Roman Catholics executed in his reign—anyone who would not acknowledge him as supreme head of his church.

In the early 1530s, William Tyndale was persecuted by Henry VIII and executed in exile for, among other things, translating the Bible into English. Two years later, by Henry VIII's orders, an English Bible was placed in every English church, and everyone was encouraged to read it; the earliest edition of this required Bible contained large portions of Tyndale's translation.

By 1540, however, Henry forbade anyone under the rank of gentleman or merchant to read large portions of the Bible. Henry believed the Devil was causing a sinister understanding of Scripture to enter people's hearts.

Cranmer was almost fanatical in his obedience to his sovereign, whom he believed was the divinely appointed head of the church. For example, to satisfy Henry, he ruled that Henry's marriage to Anne of Cleves would be lawful. But when Henry wanted a divorce six months later, Cranmer approved it on the grounds that the original marriage was unlawful.

Henry VIII liked his archbishop and removed him from harm. When Cranmer's enemies wanted

Cranmer tried for treason, Henry appointed Cranmer the head of the commission to investigate the charges.

In composing his ***Book of Common Prayer***, Cranmer took five medieval liturgical tomes and reduced them into a single volume. His liturgy is still used by the Church of England today, nearly 450 years later.

When Cranmer's ***Book of Common Prayer*** was required to be used in churches across England, thousands rebelled, some violently. But the rebels were disturbed not because of the service's Protestant theology but because it was no longer in Latin but in English.

In the weeks before his execution, Cranmer recanted his Protestantism several times. On the day he was executed, though, he recanted once more—"As for the pope, I refuse him as Christ's enemy and Antichrist, with all his false doctrines"—and so died a Reformation martyr.

At first, Anglicanism flourished in England and its English-speaking colonies (including the Episcopal church in the U.S.). The United Kingdom still has over half of the world's 51 million Anglicans, but today more Anglicans worship in Africa than in the U.S., Canada, and Australia combined.

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## Thomas Cranmer and the English Reformation: From the Editor - Ordinary Hero

Mark Galli

Christian heroes are remembered for their dramatic stands—like Martin Luther, who defied the Holy Roman emperor, popes, yea, all of Christendom. Others are known for their legendary lifestyles—like Francis of Assisi, who literally took Jesus' command to wear but one cloak and no sandals. Such people are inspiring to watch, but really, they don't make much impact on my day-to-day life. In my world, there's no Holy Roman Emperor to defy, and cloak and bare feet don't cut it as business attire in the Chicago area.

Except for the last hour of his long life, Thomas Cranmer made no heroic stands and lived no radical lifestyle. He just tried to work out his faith in one bewildering setting after another. One day Henry VIII, his first boss, would push in a Protestant direction, the next, in a Catholic. In this tumultuous setting, Cranmer had to determine how best to forward the gospel without losing his livelihood, life, or soul.

The tension was too great sometimes, and sometimes he compromised himself—there's just no other way to put it. Once, for instance, he persecuted married priests because Henry ordered it, all the while secretly hiding his own wife in Germany. And at the end of his life, he really blew it: several times he forsook in writing his Protestant faith.

But most of his life, he successfully muddled through the compromises with his faith intact. He managed to survive the perilous fortunes of sixteenth-century politics and push ever so gently, slowly, and patiently for a gospel reformation of England. As a result, he was eventually able to produce, among other things, a prayer book that has nurtured the lives of millions of Christians for over 400 years—the Book of Common Prayer. And, of course, when it really counted, he stood for what he believed, recanting his recantations and suffering death at the stake.

Cranmer is a hero all right, but I find it comforting to see that he was a rather ordinary one. He's a hero for a person like me, who tries to live out the gospel in confusing circumstances, who tries desperately not to lose livelihood, life, or soul in obeying the gospel—and who often feels his obedience to Christ is mere plodding. Cranmer shows me that this paltry offering may be enough for God to use mightily.

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## Courage When It Counted

Thomas Cranmer was the most cautious, even indecisive, of reformers—until his final hour.

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Candles flickered in the darkness as Thomas Cranmer, seated before a plain wooden desk, tried to make sense of his life. It was the night of March 20, 1556. He sat alone and confused in an Oxford jail cell, weary from months of trial, interrogation, and imprisonment. Before him on the desk were strewn a number of official documents.

There were 14 copies of his fifth recantation, in which he had repudiated the heresies of Martin Luther. The Spanish friars had asked him to sign them before morning so they would have sufficient copies for the printers. Though Cranmer had refused to do so the previous night—he had signed one, wasn't that enough?—now he debated whether to put his name to them.

Next to these lay the speech he was to give the next morning, a speech that repudiated his writings that had denied Catholic teaching.

Also before him was a different version of the same speech, which he had just finished composing. After declaring his faith according to the Nicene Creed, the speech swerved sharply: in it he called the pope "Christ's enemy and Anti-christ."

Cranmer agonized. Which speech should he read on the morrow? Which speech represented what he really believed?

His critics—and there were many—had accused him for years of hypocrisy; he was a cowardly archbishop who flip-flopped at crucial moments to curry favor with his king. That wasn't the way Cranmer saw it, but he had to admit it would be hard to interpret the last few months in any other way.

At 5:00 a.m., the exhausted, solitary prisoner, weary of internal debate, brought himself to sign the 14 copies of his recantation. He noted it was four hours before he was to be escorted to the stake and burned alive.

## Thrust into National Affairs

Cranmer was born 66 years earlier in simpler times, on July 2, 1489. Aslacton, Nottinghamshire, far from the intrigue of court life, was his home, and his father, Thomas, belonged to the lowest rank of gentry. He had only enough property to endow his eldest son, so Thomas and his younger brother were destined for church work.

Later in life, Cranmer would blame his "marvelous severe and cruel schoolmaster" for his lack of ability in studies; still, Cranmer attended Cambridge in 1503 and in 1510 became a fellow of Jesus College.

When he fell in love and married a relative of the landlady of the local Dolphin Inn, he lost his fellowship (which was given only to celibates). But his wife, Joan, died in childbirth within a year of their wedding, and Jesus College restored Cranmer to his fellowship.

He now became ordained as a priest and threw himself into his studies, becoming an outstanding theologian, a man of immense, though not original, learning. In about 1520, he joined some scholars who met regularly to discuss Luther's theological revolt on the Continent. In the group, dubbed "Little Germany," were many who would play key roles in the coming decades of the English Reformation, including William Tyndale, Robert Barnes, and of course, Cranmer, who already by 1525 had included in his prayers one for the abolition of papal power in England.

Cranmer's leanings toward reform would have remained merely academic had he not been drawn into the politics of the day. In August 1529, King Henry VIII happened to be in a neighborhood Cranmer was visiting, and Cranmer ended up conversing with two of the king's councilors. For two years, Henry had been scheming: how could he be freed from his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, in order to marry Anne Boleyn? Cranmer told the councilors he believed that the king had the right to divorce Catherine and that the king should seek out English theologians who could firmly establish his case. Henry summoned Cranmer for an interview and commanded him to write a treatise backing the king's right to divorce and defending it with arguments from Scripture, the church fathers, and church councils. Cranmer took up residence at Durham Palace, the home of Anne Boleyn's father, and finished the treatise. But before he could defend it publicly, he was appointed to an embassy dispatched to Rome to lobby for the divorce (of which nothing came), and then to Germany to contact the Lutheran princes. There he met Lutheran reformer Andreas Osiander—and Osiander's niece, Margaret. Osiander's theology and his niece so appealed to Cranmer that, despite his priest's orders, he married her in 1532. He had moved decidedly in the direction of the Reformation, but he was not yet ready to make his marriage, or his theology, public.

### **Archbishop for Henry**

For Cranmer, 1532 proved to be a critical year in another respect. In August, the aged archbishop of Canterbury died. With the divorce question coming to a head, the see would have to be filled quickly.

Thomas Cromwell, Henry's new chief adviser in ecclesiastical affairs, was pursuing the divorce energetically, and to complicate matters, by January 1533, Anne Boleyn was pregnant. Stephen Gardiner, the obvious candidate for the archbishopric, was out of favor, and so (perhaps through the lobbying of the Boleyn family), the king pointed to Cranmer. When Cranmer heard of his appointment, he balked, but by March 1533, Cranmer was consecrated and instituted at Canterbury. He took the obligatory oath to be subject ultimately to the pope—although the day before, he had signed a statement qualifying this oath, saying he was not binding himself to "do or attempt anything which will or may seem to be contrary to God's law, or against His Majesty the King of England."

With his priorities set, Cranmer proceeded to do what was expected of him. In May he convened his court and declared the king's marriage to Catherine of Aragon void from the beginning; he then pronounced the marriage to Anne Boleyn (which had secretly taken place in January) valid.

This would be the first of many Cranmer decisions that make him seem servile. But Cranmer believed in royal absolutism, that his primary duty was to obey the king, God's chosen to lead his nation and church. Cranmer was prepared to sacrifice nearly all other doctrines to this one. If the king were to order him to sin, Cranmer would draw the line. Time and again in Henry's rocky reign, Cranmer was ordered to support religious policies of which he disapproved, and he had to decide whether to resist or obey. Under Henry, he always obeyed.

In 1536, he became convinced by rather dubious evidence that Anne had committed adultery, and he invalidated the marriage. In 1540, he ruled that Henry's proposed marriage to Anne of Cleves was lawful—and when Henry sought a divorce six months later, Cranmer approved it on the grounds that the original marriage was unlawful!

In these matters, he did as he was told, though it seems he convinced himself in each case that he was

doing the right thing. Many times it may have been justified as the right thing to do because Henry wanted it, and Henry was God's voice for Cranmer and the nation.

But Cranmer wasn't a lackey. Time and again, Cranmer alone of all Henry's advisers pleaded for the lives of people who fell out of royal favor. With equal courage, and futility, he pleaded for Sir Thomas More and John Fisher (Catholics who refused to acknowledge Henry as supreme head of the English church), Anne Boleyn (when the king wanted her beheaded), and even Thomas Cromwell.

Cromwell was Henry's point man in ecclesiastical affairs. With his help, by 1536, the Church of England's ties with Rome were completely severed, and Henry had been proclaimed supreme head of the English church. Cromwell had pushed for the distribution of an English Bible in every parish church. With Cranmer, he had helped bring about the Ten Articles (and its commentary, the ***Bishop's Book***), which moved the nation in a Protestant direction.

But Cromwell's plans soured in 1540. He had negotiated Henry's marriage to Anne of Cleves to secure closer ties to German Lutherans. But Henry found Anne disgusting, and with the divorce, Cromwell's enemies convinced Henry that Cromwell should be destroyed.

Cromwell was accused of treason, stripped of his office, and consigned to the Tower. Cranmer was stunned. At once he wrote to Henry, "He that was such a servant in my judgment, in wisdom, diligence, faithfulness, and experience, as no prince in this realm ever had ... I loved him as my friend, for so I took him to be; but I chiefly loved him for the love which I thought I saw him bear ever towards Your Grace."

It was a courageous letter. Cranmer was in danger of being thrown in the Tower himself for declaring himself in this way. Nonetheless, Cromwell was condemned without a trial and beheaded.

### **Awkward Compromise**

By this time, Cranmer had become clearly Protestant in his views. Like Henry, at first, he tried to keep as much of Catholicism as he could, including the doctrine of transubstantiation (which states that Christ is substantially present in the Eucharist even though the bread and wine remain unchanged). By 1538, he had abandoned this view, but already two years earlier, he had developed a Protestant reputation: northern religious rebels believed he was the leader of Henry's Protestant faction.

As Cranmer moved toward a clear Protestant position, Henry began retreating to a Catholic position on many matters. In 1539, Henry proposed that Parliament pass six articles that would, among other things, insist on clergy celibacy and transubstantiation.

Rather than confining his criticisms, as he usually did, to private conversations with the king, Cranmer openly opposed the king's proposed policy, arguing boldly against the Six Articles in the House of Lords. It required no small courage to argue doctrines that were about to become heretical and punishable by death.

But as soon as the Six Articles were passed, Cranmer capitulated completely. How he could justify this as obedience to his sovereign is hard to explain. Cranmer had rejected the doctrines in the articles for at least a year, but as Henry's archbishop, he not only acquiesced after their approval, he enforced them—even when it meant arresting priests who had wives. This seemed especially culpable, considering Cranmer had himself kept a wife, who was now hidden in Germany. To most Protestants, Cranmer had compromised the Reformation.

Still, it wasn't as simple as that, because a few years later, Cranmer smartly criticized the king's theology and grammar in the debates over the 1543 ***King's Book*** (which further defended many Catholic doctrines). Cranmer must have retained sufficient Protestant vigor because in Henry's last years,

Cranmer's enemies laid at least three plots to destroy him. But each time, they were foiled by Henry.

The last attempt was most curious. Cranmer's enemies in the Privy Council (Henry's cabinet), convinced Henry to allow them to arrest Cranmer for treason and commit him to the Tower. Why Henry agreed is hard to say because late at night the day before the planned arrest, he called Cranmer into his room. He gave Cranmer his ring, which signaled his approval, and told Cranmer to produce it when he was examined by the council.

The next day at the council, when Cranmer was told he was to be committed to the Tower, he produced the king's ring. The council was thrown into confusion and immediately went to Henry and apologized profusely.

This king, who usually kept himself above personal feelings for his advisers, found in Cranmer a man he trusted and liked. So it was Cranmer whom Henry asked for on his deathbed, and it was Cranmer's hand that he held when he died.

### **Reform in Full Stride**

With the accession of Edward VI in 1547, Cranmer's time arrived. The young king's guardian, Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, immediately began to transform the Church of England into a decidedly Protestant church. When he fell from power in 1549, John Dudley (later known as the Duke of Northumberland), who had ousted Seymour, moved in an even more extreme Reformed direction.

During this era, Cranmer took the chief role in directing doctrinal matters. In 1547, he published his **Book of Homilies**, which required clergy to preach sermons emphasizing Reformed doctrine. He composed the first **Book of Common Prayer**, only moderately Protestant, in 1549, followed in 1552 by a second that was more clearly Protestant.

During these heady years, Cranmer also produced the **Forty-two Articles** (1553), a set of doctrinal statements that moved the Church of England even more toward a Reformed, Calvinist direction. Clergy, teachers, and university degree candidates were compelled to assent.

Though deprived of any serious influence in affairs of state, Cranmer dominated this religious revolution by his learning, authority, and hard work.

### **Befuddled on Trial**

As Edward VI approached death in July 1553, Cranmer became fatally involved in royal politics. Though he resisted for a long time, he was forced by the dying king and Northumberland to support Protestant Lady Jane Grey (great-niece of Henry VIII) as the new sovereign—even though this struck at custom, statute law, and the will of Henry VIII. Upon Edward's death, Lady Jane Grey was proclaimed queen but was deposed nine days later, and Mary (Henry's daughter by Catherine of Aragon and a devout Catholic) triumphantly entered London.

With Mary's accession, the English Reformation began to unravel. Cranmer's embittered enemy Stephen Gardiner was promoted to the chancellorship, and Cardinal Reginald Pole became archbishop of Canterbury. Parliament repealed the acts of Henry VIII and Edward VI and reintroduced heresy laws. Mary's government began a relentless campaign against Protestants.

Cranmer in the meantime had been charged with treason and imprisoned in November 1553. His trial, though, was a pretext; the queen and her advisers wanted to destroy him and his credibility completely for his long-standing Protestantism.

With Reformers Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer, Cranmer was moved in March 1554 to Oxford to stand trial. In September 1555, after an enfeebling imprisonment, Cranmer was subjected to a long, tedious trial at which he tried to defend his views. Whether from discouragement or isolation or mental torture, Cranmer was often bested in debate.

At one point, interrogator Thomas Martin asked Cranmer if Henry VIII had been head of the English church. Cranmer agreed, "Every king in his own realm and dominion is supreme head, and so he was supreme head of the church of Christ in England."

Martin replied, "Is this always true, and was it ever so in Christ's church?"

"It was so," replied Cranmer.

"Then what say you by Nero ... Was he head of Christ's church?"

"Nero was Peter's head."

"Then he that beheaded the heads of the church," Martin concluded, "and crucified the apostles, was head of Christ's church ... by your newfound understanding of God's Word!"

The foregone verdict was reached after many technical hurdles, and in February 1556, in a ceremony carefully designed to humiliate, Cranmer was degraded from his episcopal and priestly offices. He was forced to wear canvas and cotton garments, mimicking the rich and costly vestments he had worn as archbishop. The pallium, the symbol of his archbishopric, was stripped from his back. The chalice, which had been placed in his hands, was pulled away. The Gospels and Epistles were taken from him; his priestly tunic and stole were stripped from his body. A barber shaved his head, and the tops of his fingers, where he had been anointed, were scraped clean.

Yet Mary's government wanted more. The burning of the archheretic would be even more useful if he would renounce his errors in public, and so a number of means were used to break Cranmer down.

The previous October, he had been forced to witness the burning of Latimer and Ridley, and Ridley's death had been excruciatingly slow. Now he was temporarily removed from prison and placed in pleasant surroundings while government agents tried to stir up his doubts. Spanish friars were called in to apply pressure.

Mental harassment (perhaps even physical torture), a long trial, and a lonely imprisonment all took their toll. So did the fear of death, as Cranmer himself later admitted. But Cranmer's mind was in utter confusion about how to reconcile his longstanding royal absolutism, which required obedience to his queen, and his personal beliefs. A weary and depressed Cranmer was convinced that he was required to submit even to a Catholic sovereign, which is really all that his first four recantations say. It was in the fifth, however, that he completely buckled:

"I, Thomas Cranmer, anathematize every heresy of Luther and Zwingli ... I confess and believe in one, holy, catholic visible church ... I recognize as its supreme head upon earth the Bishop of Rome ... Pope and vicar of Christ, to whom all the faithful are bound subject ... " He went on to affirm the seven sacraments, including transubstantiation. He concluded, "I beg and pray God to deign of his goodness to forgive me the faults I have committed against him and his church." His humiliation was complete.

Still, Queen Mary and Cardinal Pole believed Cranmer must be punished for all the havoc he had wreaked. He would be burned at the stake after making one more profession of his faith.

## Rushing to the Fire

The morning of March 21, 1556, broke with dark skies and fierce rain. At 9:00 a.m. Cranmer was escorted from his cell. As he left, he said to his jailer that if anyone doubted his recantation was sincere, his signed recantation would leave no doubt, and he handed the 14 copies to his jailer. But hidden in his shirt were both the Catholic and Protestant versions of his final speech.

The rain meant the formalities that were to precede the burning had to be moved indoors to St. Mary's Church. The procession chanted psalms as it slowly moved through the rain to St. Mary's. At the church, Cranmer was led to a stage facing the pulpit. There, clothed in a square cap and ragged, thread-bare clothes, he was required to stand and listen to Henry Cole, provost of Eton at Oxford, preach.

Cole spoke of Cranmer's crimes and of God's mercy but also of the need for Cranmer's death—to recompense the death of John Fisher decades earlier. Tears steamed down Cranmer's anxious face as Cole preached. Cole looked at Cranmer and concluded, "I pray you, Master Cranmer, that you will now perform [what] you promised long ago, namely, that you would openly express the true and undoubted profession of your faith."

Cranmer knelt with the congregation in prayer; then he rose and put off his cap. He drew out a piece of paper and began to read. He thanked the people for their prayers and exhorted them in four points: to care less for this world and more for the next, to obey their sovereigns out of the fear of God, to do good to all people, and to be concerned for the poor.

Then he said, "And now, forasmuch as I am come to the last end of my life, whereupon hangeth all my life past and all my life to come ... I shall therefore declare unto you my very faith how I believe, without any color or dissimulation."

His opening words were those of the Nicene Creed, and those immediately following started off as expected but then took a turn: "I come to the great thing that troubleth my conscience more than any other thing that I ever said or did in my life, and that is setting abroad of writings contrary to the truth, which here now I renounce and refuse, as things written with my hand contrary to the truth which I thought in my heart, and written for fear of death and to save my life if it might be—and that is all such bills which I have written or signed with my own hand since my degradation, wherein I have written many things untrue. And forasmuch as my hand offended in writing contrary to my heart, therefore my hand shall first be punished; for if I may come to the fire, it shall be first burned."

Loud murmurs sped through the congregation, but Cranmer continued, "And as for the Pope, I refuse him as Christ's enemy and anti-Christ, with all his false doctrine. And as for the sacrament—"

One of the dignitaries shouted at him to stop. Cranmer boldly continued, saying that his writings "teacheth so true a doctrine of the sacrament that it shall stand at the Last Day before the judgment!"

Cole shouted out, ordering Cranmer taken away. Cranmer was dragged from the stage. But it was Cranmer as much as the friars who rushed to the stake because they had a hard time keeping up with him. When they reached the stake, the friars threatened him and warned him to repent, but Cranmer knelt on the bare ground and prayed. Then he rose, put off his outer garments, and finally stood in a long shirt that touched his bare feet, his long, white beard reaching to his chest.

He clasped the hands of friends who stood nearby and bade them farewell. He was bound to the stake with a steel band around his waist. The fire was kindled at his feet, and quickly the flame leapt up. Cranmer stretched out his right arm and hand into the flame and held it there as he said, "This hand hath offended." Only once did he withdraw it to wipe his face, and then he returned it until it had burned to a

stump.

He stood straight as long as he could, ringed in fire, saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" He then collapsed and was consumed in flame. Rain continued to fall softly, and gently cleansed his ashes.

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## Why Queen Mary Was Bloody And why her persecution of Protestants failed

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In January 1555, John Rogers—Bible translator and Protestant preacher—was being led to the stake. He was asked once more if he would recant. He replied that what he had preached he would seal with his blood.

"Then thou art a heretic," the sheriff replied.

"That shall be known at the day of judgment," said Rogers.

"Well, I will never pray for you," said the sheriff.

"But I will pray for you," replied Rogers.

They walked on as Rogers sang psalms. He was soon met by his wife and eleven children, one an infant in her arms. "This sad sight," remarked chronicler John Foxe, "did not move him, but he cheerfully and patiently went on his way to Smithfield, where he was burnt to ashes in the presence of a great number of people."

Rogers was the first of some 290 Protestants executed during the reign of Mary I, so-called "Bloody Mary." Mary, however, was no more "bloody" than other monarchs of the time—perhaps less so. Henry VIII is said to have executed more than 70,000 people in his long reign, for all sorts of reasons. But Mary's persecution was singularly ineffective: after her reign, Protestantism regained the crown, never to relinquish control of the nation again.

In spite of its mixed success, religious persecution was a common form of social and political control in the sixteenth century. Why? And why, in the case of Mary I, did it fail?

### The Point of Persecution

The word *persecution* is a victim's word. Persecution is always suffered but never inflicted. So monarchs never believed they were "persecuting" others, merely punishing people for breaking divine or human laws. When Cardinal Reginald Pole urged Mary I to harass heretics in her realm, he reminded her that God had placed the sword of justice in her hand "in order that those who disobey the Holy laws may be punished."

It was universally assumed that there was such a thing as true doctrine, and that to reject it carried the sentence of spiritual death. To force the heretic to recant was an act of mercy. Edmund Bonner, the Marian bishop of London later castigated by John Foxe as "bloody Bonner," observed that if such treatment persuaded the heretic to abandon erroneous ideas, he or she would have been saved from the death of body and soul.

If a heretic refused to recant and was finally executed, it was never claimed to be of benefit to the victim. The only people executed were the relapsed and the recalcitrant—those beyond hope of redemption.

In such cases, there were two reasons for the capital sentence. First, heresy was blasphemous and constituted treason against Almighty God. Both blasphemy and secular treason carried the death penalty.

Second, innocent souls might be corrupted and lost if heretics were not silenced. Heresy was seen as a social disease, and those who were irredeemably infected with it were carriers and must be destroyed.

There were other, non-doctrinal, reasons for religious persecution. In Spain, for instance, Catholicism became synonymous with national identity in the 1400s and 1500s. To be an "old Christian" was to be loyal to the crown; thus, Jews and Muslims were ordered to convert or leave the country. Purity of Christian ancestry became a requisite for office or any position of trust. Conversely, suspect religious practices were synonymous with disaffection or even treason. The Castilians blamed Jews for the rise of Protestantism in northern Europe, and the Inquisition became a committee for "unSpanish activities."

In May 1558, Emperor Charles V wrote from his retirement to his daughter Juana, the regent of Spain, lamenting his failure to extinguish the "Jewish heresy" of Luther: "Believe me, my daughter, if so great an evil is not suppressed ... from the very beginning, I cannot promise that the king or anyone else will be in a position to do it afterwards."

England also promoted political identity by religious means; this was true of even Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. The English celebrated the repulse of the Spanish Armada (1588) by striking a medal inscribed *Flavit deus et dispersi sunt* ("God blew, and they were scattered"). Sir William Cecil, a leader in Elizabeth's government, was being disingenuous when he said no one in England was executed for being a Catholic but only for being a traitor.

## **Failed Duty**

To Queen Mary and Cardinal Pole, then, the imprisonment and burning of Protestants was not a policy but a duty. They consequently ignored all evidence that indicated they were failing to have the desired effect.

Mary's Lord Chancellor, Bishop Stephen Gardiner of Winchester, was one of the few who saw what was happening. He was no more tolerant of dissent than the queen, and initially he shared her contempt for the Reformers. But the public's reaction to the first burnings changed his mind. Instead of being cowed and discrediting themselves by surrender, the likes of John Rogers and John Hooper were dying with courage and exploiting their sufferings in a disconcerting manner.

After a few months, according to John Foxe, Gardiner "gave the matter over as utterly discouraged," and began to seek less dramatic means of coercion: imprisonment, civil disabilities, and exile. But by the time Gardiner died in November 1555, it was clear he had failed.

For the remainder of her reign, Mary continued her persecutions, inadvertently gaining more sympathy for Protestantism. Even Thomas Cranmer, the most loyal of subjects, was driven to defy his lawful sovereign. Distraught that his faith was considered treasonable, the fallen archbishop recanted, and then, fearing the fires of hell more than the wrath of princes, withdrew his recantation and died a martyr.

By making a hero out of this unheroic man, the queen and the cardinal unintentionally demonstrated the limitations of persecution.

Such violence could be effective against small, dissident minorities, especially if they were unpopular. The Spanish Inquisition was successful not because of its exceptional ferocity or ruthless efficiency but because it commanded the overwhelming support of the aristocracy and people of Spain.

In the reign of Philip II, it was alleged that 20,000 voluntary informers provided the Inquisition with information. **Autos da fe**, at which the penitent were reconciled and the impenitent burned, were popular spectacles attracting thousands of enthusiastic onlookers. It was the shame of public humiliation as much as the fear of fire that drove the accused to confess and submit, even when they were not clear about the charges against them.

In February 1486, for example, no fewer than 750 penitents were reconciled in the Toledo cathedral. When they were told they would never again be eligible to hold an office or position of public respect, the crowds cheered.

Such demonstrations did not take place in England. It was not that the English were squeamish—public executions attracted large crowds. But heresy did not arouse public indignation as it did in Spain. Neutral observers testified that in 1555, English spectators were more likely to sympathize with the victims than to execrate them—especially if the victims handled themselves with courage. This did not necessarily mean there were large numbers of covert Protestants scattered throughout England, but clearly the largest number of executions took place in London, an area that had embraced Protestantism far more warmly than most parts of the country.

In seeking to make an example of the heretics where it would be most effective, the authorities miscalculated and, to the contrary, encouraged defiance and evasion. Charles V's English ambassador exaggerated when he claimed that the realm was riddled with heresy, but positive enthusiasm for the Queen's proceedings, particularly the persecution, was in short supply.

### **Best-Seller Makes History**

Queen Mary is remembered not only as the ruler who failed to return England to the Catholic church but also as "Bloody Mary." Mary's nearly 300 executions might soon have been forgotten if it had not been for writer John Foxe. Driven partly by religious zeal and partly by what can only be described as humanitarian indignation, Foxe set out to celebrate the martyrs of English Protestantism, and in the process, to pillory the previous regime as a clique of murderous hispanophile gangsters.

It is hard to overemphasize the impact his **Acts and Monuments** had the twenty years following its 1563 publication. By the second edition (1570), it was part of the national myth, which was growing partly spontaneously and partly by official encouragement. Foxe provided both a history and theology for the triumph of the Reformation and, perhaps unintentionally, a national ideology, as well.

It was Mary's misfortune to have her well-meaning efforts so comprehensively eviscerated on the altar of history. In Spanish mythology "Anna Boleyna" became a demon; in English mythology it was "Bloody Mary."

A persecution will succeed if it produces only victims, and if it targets a small, unpopular minority at that. It may succeed if it produces only martyrs. But it will certainly fail if it produces martyrologies.

# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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## A Tale of Two Martyrs

The burning of Reformers Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer

Dr. Ridley, entering the place [of execution] first, earnestly holding up both his hands, looked towards heaven; then shortly after, seeing Mr. Latimer, with a cheerful look, he ran to him and embraced him, saying, "Be of good heart, brother, for God will either assuage the fury of the flame, or else strengthen us to abide it."

He then went to the stake, and, kneeling down, prayed with great fervor, while Mr. Latimer following, kneeled also, and prayed with like earnestness. After this, they arose and conversed together, and, while thus employed, Dr. Smith began his sermon to them.

Dr. Ridley, then, with Mr. Latimer, kneeled to my Lord Williams, the vice chancellor of Oxford, and the other commissioners, who sat upon a form, and said, "I beseech you, my lord, even for Christ's sake, that I may speak but two or three words."

And whilst my lord bent his head to the mayor and vice-chancellor, to know whether he might have leave to speak, the bailiffs and Dr. Marshal, the vice-chancellor, ran hastily unto him, and, with their hands stopping his mouth, said, "Mr. Ridley, if you will revoke your erroneous opinions, you shall not only have liberty so to do, but also your life."

"Not otherwise?" said Dr. Ridley.

"No," answered Dr. Marshal. "Therefore, if you will not do so, there is no remedy: you must suffer for your deserts."

"Well," said the martyr, "so long as the breath is in my body, I will never deny my Lord Christ and his known truth. God's will be done in me."

They were then commanded to prepare immediately for the stake. Then the smith took a chain of iron and placed it about both their waists; and as he was knocking in the staple, Dr. Ridley took the chain in his hand, and, looking aside to the smith, said, "Good fellow, knock it in hard, for the flesh will have its course."

They then brought a lighted faggot, and laid it at Dr. Ridley's feet, upon which Mr. Latimer said, "Be of good comfort, Mr. Ridley, and play the man! We shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust never shall be put out."

When Dr. Ridley saw the fire flaming up towards him, he cried out, with an amazing loud voice, "Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit: Lord, receive my spirit!" and continued to repeat, "Lord, Lord, receive my spirit!"

Mr. Latimer cried as vehemently, "O Father of heaven, receive my soul!" after which he soon died, seemingly with little pain.

Owing to the bad arrangement of the fire [about Ridley], it burned all Ridley's lower parts before it

touched his upper and made him struggle under the faggots. Ridley, in his agony, often desired the spectators to let the fire come to him, saying, "I cannot burn." Yet in all his torment, he did not forget always to call upon God, "Lord, have mercy upon me!"

As soon as the fire touched the gunpowder [hung around his neck], he was seen to stir no more, but burned on the other side, falling down at Mr. Latimer's feet, his body being divided.

The dreadful sight filled almost every eye with tears, for some pitied their persons, who thought their souls had no need thereof.

—*John Foxe, Acts and Monuments (1570)*

(a condensed excerpt)

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## Destroying the Monasteries

Where was Thomas Cranmer during this unscrupulous chapter in the English Reformation?

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In the 1530s, prior John Houghton, head of a London monastery, was considered "a last flowering, a winter rose, of English medieval [monasticism]." Houghton looked on his Carthusian monks as "angels of God," and their monastic rule was kept with fervor. It was commonly said that if people wished to hear divine service carried out with due reverence, they should visit his London Charterhouse.

English monasteries of the 1500s were centers of Catholic devotion. They also owned large tracts of land and—in their crosses, vestments, images, and Communion ware—precious metals and jewels. Thus they became an obvious target for Henry VIII, and their dissolution (along with the destruction of "chantries"), one of the most disturbing chapters in the English Reformation.

### Destroying Monasteries

Formally, the dismantling of monasteries in the 1530s had little to do with rising Protestantism. The most powerful motive was Henry's need to finance his government, especially his armies. But it was Henry's anti-papal mood—and the acquiescence of the Reformers—that made dissolution possible.

The most important fact to Henry was this: the annual net income of religious houses was more than 130,000 pounds (three times larger than the income of the crown's land holdings). Nonetheless, he needed cause to take that glittering prize. So in the summer of 1535, Thomas Cromwell, the king's vice-regent for ecclesiastical affairs, conducted an investigation of religious houses to compile an unfavorable report to justify the dissolution.

Still, taking bias into account, not all reports to Cromwell were distortions. One agent's reports reads, "I went to Eynsham, where I found a raw sort of religious persons ... almost in all kinds of sin." Though impressed with how the abbot was "chaste of his living" and took good care of his house, the agent concluded, "I can object [to] nothing but that he is negligent in overseeing his brethren."

With most Catholic monasteries, however, it wasn't moral neglect but devotion to the Pope that accelerated dissolution.

In 1535, monks of the London Charterhouse, for example, were required to take an oath on the Gospels to accept the king as supreme head of the church. Prior John Houghton, among others, refused. He was tried at Westminster Hall in April, and he and his fellow prisoners were condemned to death. They were executed in their monastic habits, with the hair shirts of their rule beneath. They died, as one sympathizer put it, "for the love of Jesus, and for the faith of His bride, the Catholic Church."

With formal reasons in hand, Parliament passed acts in 1536 and 1539 to dismantle all religious houses, taking their possessions and lands, with all income reverting to the crown.

For example, the London Charterhouse was closed and the remaining monks disbanded in November 1538: "The church and buildings, desecrated and forlorn, were used as a store for the king's pavilions and

arms.”

Another Catholic lamented the destruction of so many houses across England: “The abbeyes [were] one of the beauties of this realm to all men and strangers passing through the same.”

What was Archbishop Thomas Cranmer’s part in this policy? Most of the monastic land sold passed into laymen’s hands, not to bishops or archbishops. Cranmer did not profit from such developments.

He did garner materials for his personal library, though. Cranmer was a great book man and from these monastic libraries created one of the greatest collections of books and manuscripts in Tudor England.

In addition, Cranmer wrote a brave letter to Cromwell in 1535, attempting to halt the persecution of the Carthusians. Cranmer advised Cromwell to persuade them to submit rather than punish them. Cranmer, in fact, offered his services: “And if it would please the king’s highness to send them unto me, I suppose I could do very much with them in this behalf.” Cranmer’s proposal, however, was rejected.

Money Maker. ***Though Catholic monks hid many valuable religious objects, the English government still more than doubled its income by seizing church property. In the process, a great deal of medieval religious art was forever destroyed.***

### **No More Praying for the Dead**

Chantries were institutions founded for the saying of masses for the dead. Like religious houses, chantries were sources of great income and held large amounts of property. Under an act of Parliament in 1547, chantries were also dissolved. The value of possessions seized by the government was less than that taken from the monasteries. Still, traditional figures—that the dissolution involved 2,374 chantries, 90 colleges, and 110 almshouses—are almost certainly underestimated.

The motives for dissolving chantries were mixed: the crown wanted to obtain money for wars against France and Scotland, and praying for the dead was deemed “superstitious.”

Chantries, however, lay at the heart of popular religion. Though some chantries were in decline, their dissolution raised strong feelings. In 1549, during the dissolution of two local chantries, the local people became angry. A Yorkshire mob of some 3,000 murdered a former mayor of York and a chantry commissioner and his wife.

Cranmer had come to reject praying for the dead. He wrote, “Correction without repentance can nothing avail; and they that be dead [are] past the time of repentance, and so no correction or torments in purgatory can avail them.” Still Cranmer did not profit from the chantry dissolutions. He openly disapproved of the appropriation of property by the crown and asked that chantry endowments be used to found schools—to no avail.

Yet, since reformers like Cranmer were closely allied with the government, their cause suffered from involvement in the destruction of these popular religious institutions.

## Thomas Cranmer and the English Reformation: A Gallery - Reform from on High

The English Reformation, more than others, was the work of the principalities and powers.

Don Alban, Jr., is editor of *Power for Living*, published by Scripture Press.

### Henry VIII (1491–1547) *Head of his church*

Rarely has Europe seen a king with ecclesiastical loyalties so outspoken yet so susceptible to change as those of England's temperamental Henry VIII.

Roman Catholicism initially found in Henry a champion, and Henry's allegiance was expressed in both ink and blood. In 1513, the 22-year-old monarch waged a "holy war" in Europe on behalf of Pope Julius II, who had promised Henry recognition as "Most Christian King" if he would "utterly exterminate the king of France."

Eight years later, Henry attacked Martin Luther in a book that defended Catholicism's seven sacraments. For his rhetorical efforts, Rome titled Henry "Defender of the Faith."

Other episodes from Henry's early years, however, hint that his allegiance to Rome was anything but absolute. Henry was a Renaissance king—he learned to speak Latin, French, and Spanish; and he was an accomplished musician and dabbled in theology and in Renaissance humanism, which was often critical of Catholicism.

Henry had also welcomed the appearance in England of a New Testament in Greek and Latin, compiled by his friend, the famous humanist Erasmus—despite the protests of many Catholic clergymen, who believed the distribution of the Scriptures was a great threat to their religious control.

If Henry's esteem for humanism weakened his bond to Catholicism, his passion for women severed it. Partly because he needed a male heir, and partly because he was infatuated with Anne Boleyn, Henry divorced his first wife, Catherine, during the late 1520s—and opened a split with the Catholic church that only widened in the 1530s.

The king's disgust with his fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, a Protestant princess, led to a divorce and a distancing from Protestantism. (Because of politics, religion, and passion, Henry ended up going through six wives, two of whom lost their heads as a result of losing his favor.)

Henry's whimsical ecclesiastical loyalties showed in the conflicting church-related directives he issued during the 1530s. He permitted the circulation of English-language Bibles and dissolved the country's Catholic monasteries. But in 1539, he issued the Six Articles, which reaffirmed his Catholic views on priestly celibacy, the Mass, and the hearing of confession.

Henry never embraced Protestantism as much as he embraced himself as head of the church. Thus he persecuted both Catholics and radical Protestants during his reign—anyone who refused to accept his authority in the church. Still, he did more to open England's doors to Protestantism than any figure of his

time.

### **Thomas Cromwell**

**(c. 1485–1540)**

#### ***Made reformation a political reality***

Transforming the nation's Catholic clergy into leaders of a reformed Church of England was no easy task, and it was largely the work of Thomas Cromwell.

Cromwell spent (some say ill-spent) his early years adventuring with the French army in Italy. When he returned to England, he took up his father's cloth trade and practiced law on the side. He helped Lord Chancellor Thomas Wolsey dismantle some monasteries to fund Oxford University, and after Wolsey's fall from power (1529), Cromwell entered the king's service.

At Henry's insistence, Cromwell pressured provincial bishops at Canterbury in January 1531 to recognize Henry as "sole protector of the church and clergy of England, and, so far as is allowed by the law of Christ, also our supreme head"—effectively undercutting their ultimate allegiance to Rome and beginning Henry's break with the pope.

Because of Cromwell's effectiveness, in 1535 Henry appointed him vicar general, which entailed supervising church affairs. During the next half decade, Cromwell took several steps to strengthen Henry's control of English churches. He dissolved hundreds of the country's monasteries between the years 1536 and 1539, and in the process he swelled the crown's coffers.

Cromwell also ordered two important injunctions: the first required priests to refrain from practicing various Roman Catholic rituals; the second required each church to have a copy of the Bible in English. Wrote one contemporary, "God himself spoke under the arched roofs of those old chapels or time-worn cathedrals, where for generations nothing had been heard but masses and litanies."

Cromwell's efforts to sever English ties to Rome weren't always successful. Less than two years after the death of Jane Seymour, Henry's third wife, Cromwell directed the king's attention to Anne of Cleves, a German princess of Protestant parentage. This marriage, Cromwell argued, would bless the monarch with several diplomatic advantages.

The marriage, however, was disastrous. Anne's physical unattractiveness, ignorance of English, and dull character repulsed Henry. He blamed Cromwell for the fiasco; charges of treason were brought against Cromwell shortly after the king's marriage.

Cromwell's refusal to support Henry's subsequent divorce proceedings against Anne of Cleves sealed his fate. The fallen reformer was executed at Tower Hill on July 28, 1540, supposedly for betraying the crown.

### **Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset**

**(c. 1506–1552)**

#### ***Opened the door to Protestant reform***

When Henry VIII died in January 1547, his son and heir, Edward, was only 9 years old and, naturally, unprepared for royal responsibilities. Henry, however, had prepared the way for a regent: Edward Seymour, Edward's uncle, became Lord Protector of the Realm.

Seymour, or Somerset (by which name he is usually referred since he became Duke of Somerset in 1547), was a Protestant with Calvinist sympathies. He directed reforms that far surpassed the changes

initiated by Henry. Under his influence, Parliament revoked the Catholic-leaning Six Articles and dismantled the restrictions Henry had placed, late in his reign, on the printing of the Scriptures. After a military victory over the Scots at Pinkie (1547), Edward distributed Bibles in the Scottish Lowlands in an attempt to convert the populace.

He also confiscated chantries (endowments for saying of masses for the dead), endowed chapels, hospitals, and guilds. Demolition of these Catholic institutions garnered wealth for the crown.

Somerset's reforms also garnered criticism from both Roman Catholics and radical Protestants, who denounced him as overly-conservative. He got into further trouble by using his power for personal financial gain.

When he was removed from being Lord Protector, it came as no surprise. In 1549 he made the mistake of placing John Dudley, Earl of Warwick, in charge of military forces that were to extinguish a revolt in Norfolk. Instead, Dudley, a radical Protestant, orchestrated the downfall of Somerset and himself became Lord Protector.

Somerset was committed to the Tower and two years later beheaded for alleged treason.

### **John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland (1502–1553)**

#### ***Pushed the Protestant envelope***

During his brief stint as Edward VI's protector, Dudley promoted religious reform in England at a pace more rapid than Henry's subjects imagined possible. He guided the Church of England from its still ambiguous religious status to one of Protestant distinctiveness.

Dudley, usually called Northumberland (he made himself Duke of Northumberland in 1551), filled ecclesiastical positions with devout Protestants, the most influential of which was John Hooper, who became bishop of both Gloucester and Worcester in 1552. To Roman Catholics, Hooper was a radical in the cast of "fanatical" reformers Calvin and Zwingli.

With Northumberland's blessing, Cranmer revised his 1549 ***Book of Common Prayer***, which, according to many Protestants, lacked the requisite flavor of reform. The 1552 ***Book of Common Prayer*** went further in abolishing medieval vestments and rejecting both Catholic and even Lutheran views of the Eucharist.

Going further still, Northumberland attained royal assent to the ***Forty-Two Articles***, which set forth a Calvinist doctrinal stance—including predestination—for the Church of England.

Eventually, Northumberland fell into disfavor with reformers, both for his attempts to profit financially from his position and to secure ties to the crown through the marriage of his son to Lady Jane Grey—heir apparent as far as many Protestants were concerned.

When Edward died in July 1553, however, Catholic Mary became queen. She sent Northumberland to the Tower, where he was executed within a month.

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## The English Reformation's Most Famous Martyrs

**Nicholas Ridley**  
(1500–1555)

*Shaped Cranmer's thinking*

Nicholas Ridley had one of the finest minds in England, and after attending Cambridge and the Sorbonne in Paris, settled down to a scholarly career at Cambridge. About 1534, he began showing interest in Protestantism, and in 1537, he became chaplain to Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. He influenced Cranmer's thinking, moving Cranmer from the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation.

In the 1540s, when a Roman Catholic reaction set in during Henry's reign, he was suspected of heresy, but during the reign of Edward VI, he became bishop of Rochester, and eventually bishop of London, as well.

Ridley influenced the *Book of Common Prayer*, where his theology of the Eucharist was given special place: Christ's sacrifice was not "repeated," as in the Catholic liturgy. Instead, worshipers offered a "sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving."

As bishop of London, Ridley had stone altars replaced by wooden tables for observing Communion, which caused an uproar in the city. He also instituted pastoral work in the city, aiding the poor and founding hospitals and schools.

Just before King Edward died, Ridley unwisely supported the claim of Lady Jane Grey to the throne. When Mary became queen, Ridley was imprisoned in the Tower of London. He was joined by Hugh Latimer and Thomas Cranmer, and all three were taken to Oxford, where their "heretical" opinions were examined. When given an opportunity to recant his views, Ridley declined, and he was condemned to be burned.

**Hugh Latimer**  
(1485–1555)

*Unflinching herald*

Hugh Latimer started out as a passionate Catholic, and his conversion to Protestantism was extraordinary.

During his years at Cambridge University (he enrolled in 1506), he gained a reputation both as an ascetic and extraordinary preacher. Upon receiving a degree in theology in 1524, he delivered a lecture in which he assailed German Lutheran Philip Melancthon for his high view of Scripture.

Among Latimer's listeners was Thomas Bilney, a leader of a society of Protestants at Cambridge. After the lecture, Bilney asked Latimer to hear his confession. The startled Latimer, believing his lecture had converted the evangelical, readily complied. The "confession," however, was a stealthily worded sermon on the comfort and confidence the Scriptures can bring. Latimer was moved to tears—and to Protestantism.

Latimer's sermons now targeted Catholicism and social injustice. He preached boldly, daring in 1530 to utter a sermon before Henry VIII that denounced violence as a means of protecting God's Word. For this

he won the king's respect.

This farmer's son soon became one of Henry's chief advisers after the king's break with Rome in 1534. Appointed bishop of Worcester, he supported Henry's dissolution of the monasteries. When he opposed the king's Six Articles, though, he was put under house arrest for six years.

Under Edward VI, Latimer flourished as a leading preacher of Protestantism. But with the ascension of Mary, he was again imprisoned. His refusal to compromise his convictions only earned him the stake. He was executed next to Nicholas Ridley.

***(See A Tale of Two Martyrs, for a description of Ridley's and Latimer's martyrdoms.)***

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## Thomas Cranmer and the English Reformation: Christian History Timeline

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### Thomas Cranmer

#### **SCHOLAR AND TEACHER 1489–1526**

**1489 July 2.** Born at Aslockton, Nottinghamshire, second son of small landholder

**1503–11** Undergraduate studies at Jesus College, Cambridge

**1515** Marries; wife dies in childbirth

**1515–26** Fellow of Jesus College; ordained; university preacher; completes doctorate

#### **DIPLOMAT AND ARCHBISHOP 1527–1547**

**1527** Henry VIII seeks to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon

**1529** Cranmer suggests Henry seek university opinion on the divorce question

**1530-32** Serves as an ambassador to the Continent; marries Margaret, niece of Lutheran reformer Osiander

**1533** Becomes Archbishop of Canterbury; declares Henry's marriage invalid; Anne Boleyn becomes queen

**1534** Act of Supremacy recognizes king as "supreme head" of church in England

**1536** Ten Articles outline early Protestant theology; Parliament dissolves smaller monasteries

**1537** *Bishop's Book*, a commentary on the Ten Articles; Pilgrimage of Grace, a popular Catholic uprising against reforms

**1538** Henry VIII orders English Bible to be put in every parish church

**1539** Remaining monasteries dissolved; Henry's Six Articles enforce a more Catholic theology, including priestly celibacy; Cranmer sends his wife to Germany

**1543** Henry's *King's Book* prohibits Scripture reading; Cranmer accused of heresy, but Henry protects him

**1547** Henry dies holding Cranmer's hand

### **REFORMER AND LITURGIST 1547–1553**

**1547** Nine-year-old Edward VI becomes king; Somerset becomes Lord Protector; priests required to preach from Cranmer's *Homilies*

**1549** Act of Uniformity orders use of Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer*; Northumberland becomes Lord Protector

**1552** Cranmer revises *Book of Common Prayer*; Cranmer's Forty-Two Articles outline a Calvinist doctrine for Church of England

**1553** Cranmer supports Lady Jane Grey to succeed Edward; **July 6**, Edward dies

### **MARTYR 1553–1556**

**1553 Aug.** Mary enters London in triumph and becomes queen; **Nov.** Cranmer convicted of high treason and imprisoned

**1555 Sept.** Cranmer tried and convicted of heresy; **Oct.** Ridley and Latimer executed

**1556 Jan.** Cranmer signs first submission; **Mar. 21**, renounces recantations and burned at stake

**1558** Mary dies; Elizabeth I becomes queen and begins promoting Protestantism

### **Other Reformation Events**

### **SCHOLAR AND TEACHER 1489–1526**

**1516** Erasmus publishes Greek New Testament

**1517** Luther's *95 Theses* attacks sale of indulgences

**1519** Charles V elected Holy Roman Emperor; Zwingli's preaching sparks Swiss Reformation

**1524** Peasants' Revolt in Germany

### **DIPLOMAT AND ARCHBISHOP 1527–1547**

**1529** Luther and Zwingli fail to resolve differences over Communion at Marburg Colloquy

**1530** Augsburg Confession outlines Lutheran beliefs

**1535** Anabaptists take over Münster and are defeated

**1536** First edition of Calvin's *Institutes*

**1540** Society of Jesus ("Jesuits") founded

**1545** Council of Trent begins

**1546** Luther dies; Emperor seeks to suppress Lutheranism in German Schmalkaldic war

***REFORMER AND LITURGIST 1547–1553***

**1548** Augsburg Interim seeks to reimpose Roman Catholicism on Germany; Martin Bucer and other reformers flee to England

***MARTYR 1553–1556***

**1555** Peace of Augsburg allows German states to choose between Lutheranism and Catholicism

**1559** Persecution of French Protestants intensifies

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## Catholic Counterpoint

What was it like to be on the losing side of England's Reformation?

Dennis Martin

***Most of us know about the English Reformation from the writings of those who triumphed, the Protestants. But to understand the English Reformation fully, we must also ask, what was it like to be a Catholic during this time of religious turmoil?***

***The question becomes more important because recent scholars of the English Reformation have argued that the English Catholic church was not as corrupt—nor the Protestant Reformation as pure—as many people believe.***

***To gain a broader grasp of this turbulent time, Christian History invited Catholic historian Dennis Martin, a Wheaton College graduate who teaches medieval and Reformation history at Loyola University in Chicago, to offer a Catholic perspective on the English Reformation.***

On May 4, 1535, in London, three Carthusian monks and one Bridgettine monk were hanged until partially conscious. Then their bellies were cut open, their intestines wrenched out and tossed on a fire, and their hearts ripped out by hand. The bodies were beheaded and quartered, and the pieces were posted at various locations throughout England. As the executioner slit open his belly, John Houghton, prior of the London Carthusian monastery, said, "O most holy Jesus, have mercy upon me in this hour."

This was the punishment for treason in sixteenth-century England. Their crime? Refusal to recognize "the king, our sovereign, to be the supreme head of the Church of England afore the Apostles of Christ's Church."

No one had ever questioned the piety, learning, and spiritual vitality of the Carthusians and the Bridgettines. Their monastic houses were frequented by devout lay people for prayer and spiritual growth. In fact, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, who knew two of the victims personally, opposed the executions, but only because he hoped the monks could eventually be convinced to recognize the king as head of the church.

And that gives us a clue as to what many recent historians think is the real nature of the English Reformation.

### **Naked Power Grab**

The conventional story of the English Reformation has been told by Protestants. It begins by describing the Catholic church as moribund and lacking popular support. Protestants triumphed over a decadent church that was in collusion with power-hungry political rulers. The incident above, and others like it, suggests another story.

Unfortunately, many historians have overlooked a significant fact: the Church of England's victory over the Pope was possible only because the king and Parliament seized absolute control of English religion. Henry grabbed the power of the church for himself, and his regime systematically destroyed the symbols, institutions, and customs that had sanctified English daily life for a thousand years.

Historians Eamon Duffy (in *The Stripping of the Altars*) and Christopher Haigh (in *English Reformations*) have shown that the Reformation in England largely came from the top down. Protestants accused Catholic bishops and monks of manipulating the common folk to believe superstitions and practice idolatry, but some of the most blatant examples of manipulation and intimidation came from Henry VIII and Thomas Cromwell.

For instance, facing widespread defiance of royal efforts to eliminate veneration of the saints, in 1538 Vicar General Thomas Cromwell staged an elaborate set of demonstrations rigged to "prove" that miracles associated with images of saints were hoaxes.

Cromwell and Henry made sure the Bible was made available to the English people. But they soon became alarmed that, instead of leading to "meekness" among his subjects, Bible reading fostered arguments in taverns, churches, and ale houses. So in April 1539, Henry drafted a degree that forbade anyone but licensed graduates of universities and parish priests to expound the Scriptures.

This desire to control the religion of the populace was not restricted to the king. Cranmer was a strong and persistent advocate of the king's headship of the English church. In his homily at Edward VI's coronation, he said to his new sovereign, "Your majesty is God's vice-regent and Christ's vicar within your own dominions."

Nowhere is this absolutism clearer than in the decree of March 1551 that "for as much as the King's Majestie had neede presently of a mass of money," all the remaining precious metal and valuable church furnishings were taken by the government. Such church furnishings belonged to the parish, and they were cherished by descendants of the donors. This decree from on high struck at the heart of local religion and history.

Those who think the Protestant Reformation threw off the yoke of tyrannical church leaders and restored a New Testament church must realize that not Scripture but a sacralized king was in charge of the English Reformation from start to finish.

### **Attacking Practice**

The Reformation in England was more an attack on religious practice than on doctrine, as Protestant, Catholic, and secular scholars alike realize today. According to Duffy, the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries in England witnessed a massive effort to teach Christianity to the people: "The teachings of late medieval Christianity were graphically represented within the liturgy, endlessly reiterated in sermons, rhymed in verse treatises and saints' lives, enacted in the Corpus Christi and miracle plays, which absorbed so much lay energy and expenditure, and carved and painted on the walls, screens, benches, and windows of the parish churches."

So it's not surprising that with his Act of Supremacy in 1534, Henry intended to keep England's religious practices largely as they were: Catholic. All he wanted to do was to change who was in charge of the church. Most elite members of society knuckled under or maintained silence, although even silence, as the case of Thomas More illustrates, could be costly.

Archbishop Cranmer, though cautious throughout the 1530s, tried to attack firmly Catholic religious practices. Other Protestants were less patient. Hugh Latimer did not stop at railing against Catholic "image-worship." He presided in May 1538 over a "jolly muster," as a traditional-minded friar, John Forest, was roasted alive over a fire made of a wooden statue of a saint hauled out of a pilgrimage church.

King Henry became alarmed at such anarchic iconoclasm and tried to apply the brakes from 1539 to

1547, but it was too late. The king had set in motion changes in 1534, and these changes made possible the success of the all-out assault on traditional religious practice under Edward (1547–1553).

## **Crushed with Stones**

Still, during Henry's and Edward's reigns, support for Catholic religious practice remained strong, as popular rebellions in 1536, 1548, 1549, and 1554 show. But even after the Elizabethan settlement, when Protestantism ruled the nation uncontested, traditional Catholicism remained deeply embedded in all classes. Nowhere is the strength of lay devotion more evident than in the story of Margaret Clitherow.

Born about 1553 in a leading Protestant family of York, Margaret married a wealthy tradesman, John Clitherow, in 1571. Three years later, she became a Roman Catholic, although her husband remained Protestant.

In March 1586, when she was in her early thirties, she was arrested for harboring Catholic priests. She refused to plead guilty or innocent, lest her children and husband be compelled to testify against her. The penalty for refusing to plead was to be crushed to death under nearly half a ton of weights. Even her Protestant neighbors respected her and refused to testify against her.

Why did Margaret Clitherow turn to the Catholic faith, especially in Elizabethan England? Not because of birth or indoctrination, nor because she was hoodwinked by superstitious, semi-pagan, idolatrous beliefs. For Margaret, the church was an institution with historical continuity to the apostles and the incarnate Jesus Christ:

"I am fully resolved in all things touching my faith, which I ground upon Jesus Christ, and by him I steadfastly believe to be saved, which faith I acknowledge to be the same that he left to his apostles, and they to their successors from time to time, and is taught in the Catholic Church through all Christendom, and promised to remain with her unto the world's end, and hell-gates shall not prevail against the same faith; for if an angel come from heaven, and preach any other doctrine than we have received, the Apostle biddeth us not believe him."

Margaret was convinced that a mere change at the top, such as Henry VIII envisioned and Elizabeth was establishing with finality, actually constituted a massive betrayal of Christ's Church.

On Annunciation Day (March 25) 1586, as the weights crashed down on the heavy oak door that covered her, as her ribs could be heard to crack, Margaret said, "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! Have mercy on me." Her body was left under the door and weights from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., then stuffed secretly in a rubbish heap.

I have yet to encounter stories of the English Carthusians and Bridgettines or of Margaret Clitherow or John Forest in the pages of any standard textbook covering the Reformation in England. They shed a different light on the "glory" of the English Reformation.

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## Acrobat Theologian

**It's not easy to take a balanced view of doctrines like predestination and Communion—but Cranmer did.**

Gerald Bray is Anglican professor of divinity at Beeson Divinity School, Birmingham, Alabama. He is editor of *Documents of the English Reformation* (Fortress, 1994).

After the Church of England broke from Rome in 1534, it needed to define what it uniquely believed. Conservatives, like King Henry VIII, wanted a church whose faith was Catholic in essentials. Many academics, particularly at Cambridge, wanted reforms that were clearly Protestant. How could these theological concerns be reconciled or balanced?

What eventually emerged was something in between, a theology that has come to characterize worldwide Anglicanism. In large part, this was the judicious work of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, a pastoral theologian who had a genius for what we now know as the "middle way."

### The Way to the Middle

The document that most clearly articulates this middle way is called the Thirty-Nine Articles; these have become the foundation of Anglican theology. They are a statement of faith based on Cranmer's Forty-Two Articles, and it can be reasonably claimed that Cranmer is the father of modern Anglicanism.

As early as 1535, agents of the king were negotiating with German Lutherans, who wanted the Church of England to subscribe to the Augsburg Confession of 1530. After months of deliberation, negotiations were broken off.

At the same time, Cranmer was busy working on a shorter statement of faith, known as the Ten Articles of 1536, which served as the basis of faith for the Church of England for the next few years. Out of them came a commentary, generally known today as the *Bishops' Book* (1537), which explained the main points of the Christian faith, including the Ten Articles, to ordinary members of the Church of England.

In the Ten Articles, Lutheran influence is felt in many places. In Article 5, on justification, for example, Cranmer states, "Sinners attain this justification by contrition and faith joined with charity ... not as though our contrition or faith, or any works proceeding thereof, can worthily merit or deserve to obtain the said justification, for the only mercy and grace of the Father, promised freely unto us for his Son's sake, Jesus Christ, and the merits of his blood and passion, be the only sufficient and worthy causes thereof."

On the other hand, Catholic practices like the veneration of images, the cult of the saints, and prayers for the dead were reaffirmed. And Article 4, on the Lord's Supper, can be interpreted in either a Lutheran or a Catholic view of Christ's presence in Communion.

This middle road took a turn toward Rome in the late 1530s, when the king decided the Church of England had gone too far in Luther's direction. In 1539, Parliament passed an act that set out six points of traditional Catholic doctrine that Henry wanted the church to maintain. One of these articles clearly reaffirmed the medieval doctrine of transubstantiation—that the bread and wine become in substance the body and blood of Christ. Another rejected clerical marriage. Though the act did not expressly contradict the Ten Articles, its spirit was decidedly Catholic.

In 1543, Cranmer suffered a further reversal of his Lutheran sympathies when the king issued his own commentary on the church's faith, the *King's Book*, which was notably more Catholic in tone and an attempt to counteract the *Bishops' Book*.

It was not until Henry died, in 1547, that Cranmer was free to develop his doctrinal ideas, but then there were pressing problems that demanded his attention—for one, reordering the church's worship.

It wasn't until 1553 that he was able to devote himself to a new statement of faith, consisting of forty-two articles. These articles, though, officially lasted only six months because Catholic Queen Mary I ascended the throne.

But after the accession of Elizabeth I in 1558, Cranmer's Forty-Two Articles were rescued from oblivion and revised. They were published in 1563, and in a final form in 1571, as the Thirty-Nine Articles. In 1628 King Charles I declared that these articles would be the definitive statement of the church's doctrine, and so they have remained ever since.

### **Middle Way on Predestination**

The subsequent progress of Protestantism, and more detailed confessional statements like the 1647 Westminster Confession, have obscured the fact that in their own day, the Forty-Two Articles were the most developed and most systematic expression of Protestantism that had yet appeared. By comparison, the Thirty-Nine Articles occasionally appear to be less advanced. Yet on matters of deep and lasting controversy, the Thirty-Nine Articles strike a balance that clearly reflects Cranmer's own judicious and cautious temperament.

An excellent example is the seventeenth article, which deals with the thorny subject of predestination. Cranmer states that "Predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God," thereby restating a doctrine that had been affirmed since Augustine (354–430). Cranmer continues, stating that this doctrine is "full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ." For such people, he adds, it puts to death the works of the flesh, points them to heavenly things, establishes their faith in Christ's salvation, and kindles their love of God.

At the same time, Cranmer knew the serious consequences this doctrine has: "For curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's predestination is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the Devil may thrust them either into desperation or into a recklessness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation." What comes across more than anything else is Cranmer's immense pastoral sensitivity, a feature often sadly lacking in other Reformed discussions of this issue.

The revision of 1563, however, drops Cranmer's warning that "The decrees of predestination are unknown to us"—an unfortunate omission that later generations have had cause to regret.

Another omission from the text of 1563 is the Article on Grace, originally published as Article 10:

"The Grace of Christ, of the Holy Ghost by him given, doth take away the stony heart and giveth an heart of flesh. And although those that have no will to good things, he maketh them to will, and those that would evil things, he maketh them not to will the same; yet nevertheless he enforceth not the will. And therefore no man when he sinneth can excuse himself, as not worthy to be blamed or condemned, by alleging that he sinned unwillingly or under compulsion."

Few statements about the will are more carefully phrased. In it we find the grace of God that directs the will of the converted without forcing it, and yet each person remains responsible for his or her sins. It is

possible to say more on this subject, but it would be difficult to say less—or to say it this well!

## **The Sacramental Center**

Another example of Cranmer's pastoral sensitivity can be found in Article 25 (or 26, as it was in the Forty-Two Articles), which touched on the sensitive matter of the sacraments. These were a continual bone of contention, not only between Protestants and Catholics but also between Lutherans and Reformed Protestants.

In explaining so delicate a matter, Cranmer begins with the principle that Christ instituted the sacraments as a means of binding his people together. As he puts it, "Our Lord Jesus Christ hath knit together a company of new people with sacraments, most few in number, most easy to be kept, most excellent in signification."

He then expresses a Protestant view by saying that they do not work *ex opere operato* ("by the work having been performed," meaning by the priest simply having said the correct words in the liturgy, as some medieval theologians had taught). Instead, they must be received in the right spirit. Here Cranmer is very firm indeed, following the New Testament itself: "They that receive the sacraments unworthily purchase to themselves damnation, as St. Paul saith."

But having made this point, he goes on to stress what is right in Catholic theology, and what he felt some Protestants were in danger of ignoring: the sacraments "be not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses and effectual signs of grace towards us."

There is no room in his mind for superstition, but neither did Cranmer believe the sacraments could be reduced to what he might call "mere symbols." Once again, we see the middle way at work.

In regard to transubstantiation (in Article 29, now Article 28), he rejected it: "Christ was taken up into heaven, and there shall continue to the end of the world, a faithful man ought not either to believe or openly to confess the real and bodily presence ... of Christ's flesh and blood."

This was also the view of St. Augustine and therefore enjoyed the authority of the greatest doctor of the Western church. Even in the open dispute with Rome then, Cranmer was careful to anchor his thoughts in the deeper tradition of the Fathers, which all sides in the debate acknowledged.

## **Balancing Act**

Cranmer left to the Church of England a balanced and careful expression of Christian truth, stating what is necessary but avoiding extremes. At its best, Anglicanism continues to hold that balance and to reach out across the Christian world. Like Cranmer, Anglicans faithful to his legacy look for the middle way between extremes, and seek to find in it an authentic response to the challenge of the Word of God.

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## The Most Healthful Medicine

Why, and how, everyone should read the Bible

Thomas Cranmer

*To help people read the Bible, Cranmer wrote a preface to the Great Bible (1540), which was appointed by Henry VIII to be placed in churches across England. In the preface, the archbishop pastorally counsels two types of parishioners and shows his zeal for and devotion to Scripture.*

For two sundry sorts of people it seemeth much necessary that something be said in the entry of this book.

For truly some there are that be too slow and need the spur; some other seem too quick and need more of the bridle; some lose their game by short shooting, some by overshooting; some walk too much on the left hand, some too much on the right.

In the former sort be all they that refuse to read, or to hear read the Scripture in the vulgar [common] tongues; much worse they that also let [hinder] or discourage the other from the reading or hearing thereof.

Neither can I well tell [which] of them I may judge the [greater] offender, him that doth obstinately refuse so godly and goodly knowledge, or him that so ungodly and so ungodly doth abuse the same.

### Food, Fire, Light

And as touching the former, I would marvel much that any man should be so mad as to refuse in darkness, light; in hunger, food; in cold, fire.

I would marvel (I say) at this, save that I consider how much custom and usage may do. So that if there were a people ... which never saw the sun by reason that they be situated far toward the North Pole and be enclosed and overshadowed with high mountains, it is credible and like enough that if, by the power and will of God, the mountains should sink down and give place, [and] the light of the sun might have entrance to them—at the first some of them would be offended therewith.

Such is the nature of custom that it causeth us to bear all things well and easily wherewith we have been accustomed, and to be offended with all things thereunto contrary.

And therefore I can well think them worthy pardon which, at the coming abroad of Scripture, doubted and drew back. But such as will persist still in their willfulness, I must needs judge not only foolish, forward, and obstinate, but also peevish, perverse, and indurate.

### The Utility of Scripture

But now to ... pass [on from] custom, and to weigh, as wise men ever should, the thing in [its] own nature: let us here discuss what availeth Scripture to be had and read [by] the lay and vulgar [common] people. And to this question I intend here to say nothing but that was spoken and written by the noble

doctor and most moral divine, St. John Chrysostom [the Greek church father of Antioch and Constantinople, 340–407], in his third sermon *De Lazaro*.

He exhorteth there his audience that every man should read by himself at home in the mean days and time, between sermon and sermon, to the intent they might both more profoundly fix in their minds and memories that he had said before upon such texts, whereupon he had already preached; and also that they might have their minds the more ready and better prepared to receive and perceive that which he should say from thenceforth in his sermons, upon such texts as he had not yet declared and preached upon.

In few words [we] comprehend the largeness and utility of the Scripture, how it containeth fruitful instruction and erudition for every man; [how] if anything be necessary to be learned, of the holy Scripture we may learn it. If falsehood shall be reprov'd, thereof we may gather wherewithal. If anything be to be corrected and amended, if there need any exhortation or consolation, of the Scripture we may well learn.

In the Scriptures be the fat pastures of the soul; therein is no venomous meat, no unwholesome thing; they be the very dainty and pure feeding. He that is ignorant shall find there what he should learn. He that is a perverse sinner shall there find his damnation to make him to tremble for fear. He that laboreth to serve God shall find there his glory and the promises of eternal life, exhorting him more diligently to labor.

Herein may princes learn how to govern their subjects; subjects [may learn] obedience, love, and dread to [wards] their princes; husbands how they should behave them unto their wives [and] how to educate their children and servants; and contrary, the wives, children, and servants may know their duty to their husbands, parents, and masters.

Here men, women, young, old, learned, unlearned, rich, poor, priests, laymen, lords, ladies, officers, tenants and mean men, virgins, wives, widows, lawyers, merchants, artificers, husbands—and all manner of persons, of what estate or condition soever they be—may in this book learn what they ought to believe, what they ought to do, and what they should not do, as well concerning Almighty God as also concerning themselves and all other.

Briefly, to the reading of the Scripture none can be enemy, but that either be so sick that they love not to hear of any medicine, or else that be so ignorant that they know not Scripture to be the most healthful medicine.

### **Sober and Fruitful Learner**

Therefore now to come to the second and latter part of my purpose. There is nothing so good in this world but it may be abused and turned from fruitful and wholesome to hurtful and noisome.

What is there above better than the sun, the moon, the stars? Yet was there [any] that took occasion by the great beauty and virtue of them to dishonor God and to defile themselves with idolatry, giving the honor of the living God and Creator of all things to such things as he had created? What is there here beneath better than fire, water, meats, drinks, metals of gold, silver, iron, and steel? Yet we see daily great harm and much mischief done by every one of these.

Thus to them that be evil of themselves everything setteth forward and increaseth their evil, be it of [its] own nature a thing never so good; like as contrarily, to them that studieth and endeavoreth themselves to goodness, everything prevaieth them and profiteth unto good, be it of [its] own nature a thing never so bad. ... Even as out of most venomous worms is made treacle [antedote for poison], the most sovereign medicine for the preservation of man's health in time of danger.

Wherefore I would advise you all that cometh to the reading or hearing of this book, which is the Word of God, the most precious jewel and most holy relic that remaineth upon earth, that ye bring with you the fear of God, and that ye do it with all due reverence, and use your knowledge thereof not to vainglory [or] frivolous disputation but to the honor of God, increase of virtue, and edification both of yourselves and other.

Every man that cometh to the reading of this holy book ought to bring with him ... [also] a firm and stable purpose to reform his own self according thereunto; and so to continue, proceed, and prosper from time to time, showing himself to be a sober and fruitful hearer and learner. Which if he do, he shall prove at the length well able to teach, though not with his mouth yet with his living and good example, which is surely the most lively and most effectual form and manner of teaching.

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## Unmatched Masterpiece

The cadences of Cranmer's Book of Common Prayer continue to nurture Christians worldwide.

Roger Beckwith is acting warden of Latimer House at Oxford University. He is author of *The Service of Holy Communion and Its Revision* (Marcham, 1972).

It is a strange experience for some Protestants to attend a service at an Anglican or Episcopal church. The sermon may be as good or as bad as elsewhere, but the prayers, rather than spoken extemporarily, follow a set form of words.

Many are surprised to learn that such liturgical prayers were the norm in nearly all the sixteenth-century Reformation churches. Neither Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, nor Cranmer thought it unscriptural to use set prayers. There were set prayers in the Old Testament (e.g., the Psalms) and in the New (e.g., the Lord's Prayer). Their only concern was to have good set prayers, not bad ones.

Though this concern drove all the liturgies produced in this era, none came off as successfully as did Thomas Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer*.

It has become not only a classic of English literature, but more important, its cadences and theology have spiritually nurtured millions of Christians for more than 400 years.

## On Again, Off Again

The Prayer Book, as it is also called, was first published in 1549–1550. It contained the orders of worship for various services (morning and evening prayer, Sunday Eucharist, Ash Wednesday, and others); each service included instructions on when to stand, sit, and kneel, and the many prayers and litanies worshipers were to use.

The Prayer Book has been revised several times—and several times suppressed. Cranmer himself revised it in 1552 to bring out its meaning more explicitly. At the same time, he attached to it a confession of faith (the Forty-Two Articles, later revised to become the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion).

When the young reforming king, Edward VI, died in 1553, Queen Mary attempted to restore Roman Catholicism and so banned the Prayer Book. After Mary's short reign, Elizabeth brought the Prayer Book back, in a slightly amended form. It was slightly amended again by James I in 1604, but in the English Civil War (1649–1660), when the Puritan party ruled England, it was banned again.

After the restoration of the monarchy, the Prayer Book returned once more, with many small amendments but with its general character and quality unchanged. Though there have been further revisions among non-English Anglicans, the 1662 form is used in England to this day.

## Preserving the Best

To Cranmer, and other Reformers, carefully thought-out phrases, based on Scripture, were likely to better express one's intentions than the suggestions of the moment. And if the prayers were fixed, people could get to know them, think about them, memorize them, and enter fully into their meaning. But Cranmer had inherited a vast corpus of medieval liturgies, so he was faced with a number of tasks.

First, these services needed to be translated from Latin into English. Second, unscriptural teaching needed to be replaced by biblical teaching. Third, he wanted to simplify and condense the five medieval manuals of worship into one volume. Finally, he wanted to revive the regular, orderly reading and preaching of the Bible.

Some of the Reformers, notably Zwingli and to some degree Calvin, thought it best to abolish the old services and start again. Cranmer, along with Luther, thought it better to keep what was good in the old services and simply change what needed changing.

Two examples of what Cranmer preserved, by translating Latin prayers into English, are the following collects (prayers that "collect" or summarize the theme of the service).

**For the Sunday between Ascension Day and Pentecost:** "O God the King of glory, who hast exalted thine only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph unto thy Kingdom in heaven: we beseech thee, leave us not comfortless, but send to us thine Holy Ghost to comfort us, and exalt us unto the same place whither our Saviour Christ is gone before, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen."

**For Pentecost Sunday:** "God, who as at this time didst teach the hearts of thy faithful people by the sending to them the light of thy Holy Spirit: grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through the merits of Christ Jesus our Savior, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen."

In some instances, Cranmer composed something afresh. Take these examples.

**For the first Sunday in Advent:** "Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility, that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen."

**For the second Sunday in Advent:** "Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen."

Just a few words and phrases need a comment: "world without end" (age without end), "faithful people" (believing people), and "quick and dead" (living and dead). But the biblical allusions in these prayers are easy to see (particularly John 14:31, Acts 9:31, and Romans 13:12 and 15:4), and the language, amazingly, is still accessible today.

## Unmatched Masterpiece

Cranmer called it the **Book of Common Prayer** because it was intended for the whole nation, clergy and laity alike, and all classes of society. Though illiteracy was still widespread, he wanted everybody to have the book in hand and to read it as well as hear it. The fact that the **Book of Common Prayer** has worn so well is some indication that he succeeded.

Today the Prayer Book is again under attack for its occasional obscurities (though one wonders whether Cranmer's theology is often the offense). At the same time, in some free-church traditions, liturgical worship has been revived. But no liturgy produced in the last few hundred years has equalled Cranmer's, either for biblical content or for power and grace of expression.

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## Perfect Words for the Contrite Heart

***For the following part of his Book of Common Prayer, Cranmer drew on a number of medieval sources and yet composed something greater than their sum. The introduction was said by the priest, the prayer by the "whole congregation ... kneeling."***

Dearly beloved brethren, the Scripture moveth us in sundry places to acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness, and that we should not dissemble nor cloke them before the face of Almighty God our heavenly Father, but confess them with an humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart—to the end that we may obtain forgiveness of the same by his infinite goodness and mercy.

And although we ought at all times humbly to knowledge our sins before God, yet ought we most chiefly so to do when we assemble and meet together, to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands, to set forth his most worthy praise, to hear his most holy Word, and to ask those things which be requisite and necessary, as well for the body as the soul.

Wherefore I pray and beseech you, as many as be here present, to accompany me with a pure heart and humble voice unto the throne of the heavenly grace, saying after me:

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways, like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us.

But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us miserable offenders. Spare thou them, O God, which confess their faults. Restore thou them that be penitent, according to thy promises declared unto mankind, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of thy holy name. Amen.

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## Thomas Cranmer and the English Reformation: Christian History Interview - The Tradition Continues

The distinctive legacy of Thomas Cranmer, and the Anglican "middle way" today.

an interview with Alister McGrath

***Thomas Cranmer helped bring about the English Reformation, which in turn produced the Anglican church—a church that believes it combines the best of Protestantism and Catholicism. To discuss Cranmer's legacy in the modern world, Christian History talked with Anglican Alister McGrath, professor of theology at Oxford University. He is author of many books, including The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation (Blackwell, 1993).***

**Christian History: If Cranmer hadn't lived, or if he had been martyred earlier, how might the English Reformation have been different?**

Alister McGrath: It may have taken longer to achieve. Cranmer was a diplomat. He was prepared to give Henry what he wanted while he tried to accomplish his Reformation agenda. Sometimes he did things against his own will—like enforcing Henry's Six Articles, especially the article requiring priestly celibacy. But Cranmer realized that if he didn't go along, the Reformation wouldn't continue.

In Henry's reign, people in high positions tended to have short lives because Henry was determined to get his way. Cranmer managed to stay alive and made at least some headway for the Reformation.

Having survived Henry's reign, Cranmer was in a position to push the Reformation forward much more speedily under Edward VI. That, in fact, is when he made his greatest contributions, the ***Book of Common Prayer*** and the Forty-Two Articles.

**Considering he recanted several times, how much impact did his martyrdom have?**

It excited a lot of reaction. Some scholars argue that the popular rise against Queen Mary was partly due to his dramatic recantation of his recantations, and of his holding forth his right hand into the fire.

Clearly the recantations were a problem. Cranmer was a fallible and weak man, yet he showed strength when strength really needed to be shown. Consequently, in his death, Cranmer may have had as great an influence as he had in his life.

**Is Cranmer a household name in England today?**

No. The English Reformation has no major name associated with it. It was pushed forward by a collection of people, and none of them are in the same league as Luther or Calvin.

Of the English Reformers, Cranmer would probably be the most familiar. But most English people tend to remember Cranmer either for his ***Book of Common Prayer*** or for his martyrdom. But I don't think there's any great popular understanding of what Cranmer stood for theologically.

**What is distinctive about the Anglican Christianity Cranmer and others carved out?**

First, like the Reformation in general, it puts a major emphasis on Scripture and the importance of doctrines such as justification by faith.

But this is supplemented by a strong emphasis on historical continuity. Tradition mattered to Cranmer, and he was particularly interested in patristics, the writings of the early church fathers. To Anglicans, the early church is seen as a defining moment in the interpretation of Scripture. Therefore, writers like Augustine, Athanasius, and others are of major importance.

That carries through to this day. If you look at the writings of Anglican evangelicals like James Packer and John Stott, they constantly refer to those who have interpreted Scripture before us.

**Obviously one Anglican distinctive would be the use of the *Book of Common Prayer*.**

For Anglicans, having a set public liturgy is extremely important. Liturgy does many things, one of which is to encourage doctrinal correctness. The words of the liturgy embody an orthodox Christianity, so that a priest or parishioner who is theologically unorthodox is still required to use an orthodox liturgy.

A public liturgy also keeps in check the radical individualism of preachers who want to preach only their favorite biblical texts. The ***Book of Common Prayer*** (BOC) obliges Anglicans to hear all of Scripture read in worship over a three-year cycle. Though we've always had mavericks, the liturgy discourages such.

In some sense, then, the BOC is Anglicanism's teaching office. Methodists use hymns in much the same way. Other traditions use preaching. For Anglicans, traditionally it's been the liturgy.

**Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Anglicanism is its emphasis on the *via media*, the middle way. Is that still important?**

Historically it's been very important. Though it is implicit in Cranmer, it doesn't become articulated as such until Richard Hooker (c. 1544–1600), in his ***Treatise on the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity***. He argues that Anglicanism follows a middle way, retaining the best of Roman Catholicism (liturgy and tradition) and Protestantism (authority of Scripture and justification by faith).

Recently, in a book called ***The Renewal of Anglicanism***, I argue that a more helpful middle way today would run between fundamentalism and liberalism. Anglicanism at its best avoids fundamentalism, which rejects culture, and liberalism, which accommodates itself too much to culture.

For both Episcopalians in the United States and Anglicans in Britain, the real opponents are no longer other Protestants or Roman Catholics but unbelievers, and these unbelievers are looking for a Christian faith that is distinctive but not culture rejecting.

**What is the state of Anglicanism in England today? Some reports suggest that only 2 percent of Anglicans attend church.**

It varies from one region to another, and certainly, the horror story of the 2 percent would apply in some inner-city areas. But in general, church attendance is much higher than that, perhaps averaging between 15 and 20 percent. The Church of England, because it is a state church, has always had this gap between official membership and the committed.

There is much evidence that Anglicanism is being renewed by various evangelical and charismatic groups. On the other hand, we seem to have a reluctance to recognize that certain beliefs and practices are simply non-Christian or anti-Christian. Some bishops have argued publicly for the ordination of homosexuals or against the bodily resurrection of Jesus. When a bishop is consecrated, the bishop is asked to defend the orthodox faith. Though we have the ability to enforce more theological conformity, we don't seem to be doing that.

**What about internationally? Today there are more Anglicans worshipping in Africa than in America, Canada, and Australia combined.**

The big growth area for Anglicanism is in Africa and Asia, where Anglicanism has not been tainted by the Enlightenment and Western culture. In Africa, Anglicanism is dynamic and vibrant, not cerebral and reserved. It's not a western form of Anglicanism at all. The western form of Anglicanism has accommodated itself to western culture. Maybe the time has come for Africans to send missionaries to North America and to Europe.

**Is it time to update the liturgy again? Is there a need for a new Thomas Cranmer, a new *Book of Common Prayer*?**

In 1980, we updated our liturgy by adding a supplementary book called ***Alternative Service Book***, which includes updated liturgies. So there has been a move toward liturgical renewal.

But that's been going on for over 15 years now, and in many quarters there's a certain weariness with liturgical innovation. Many people find innovation quite unsettling. They do like some guidelines, some norms regarding public worship. But who knows what

the future holds?

**In your study of Cranmer and the English Reformation, what are you especially thankful for?**

Cranmer has helped me put into words what I feel about Communion. In his *Book of Common Prayer*, he used some very powerful phrases to describe the meaning of the death of Christ and its importance to us. His phrases tend to stick in the mind and act as triggers to theological reflection.

Let me give you one small example. In the service, we thank God that in Communion he is "assuring us of thy gracious favor." To me, that is a very helpful phrase, and it triggers a Lutheran turn of thought in me. It reminds me that one of the functions of the sacrament is to reassure me of the total trustworthiness of God and his love for us in Christ.

There are many such phrases throughout the liturgy that act in this way on me. I'm thankful for Cranmer's ability to express the wonders of the gospel in such memorable words.

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 48: Thomas Cranmer & the English Reformation

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## Thomas Cranmer and the English Reformation: Recommended Resources

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### Cranmer's Life

- Jasper Ridley, *Thomas Cranmer* (Oxford, 1962). This is a full-scale, modern biography but not altogether satisfactory. It needs to be supplemented by theological studies, such as the following:
- G.W. Bromiley, *Thomas Cranmer: Archbishop and Martyr* (Church Book Room, 1955) and *Thomas Cranmer: Theologian* (Oxford, 1956). These books, by the translator of Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, highlight the Protestant nature of Cranmer's theology.
- Patrick Collinson, Thomas Cranmer, in *The English Religious Tradition and the Genius of Anglicanism*, (G. Rowell, 1992), pages 79–103. An important essay by the historian of Elizabethan Puritanism.
- A.F. Polard, *Thomas Cranmer and the English Reformation* (1905; Putnam Archon, 1965). An older but still useful history that emphasizes the political involvements of Cranmer.
- J.G. Nichols, *Narratives of the Days of the Reformation, chiefly from Manuscripts of John Fox the Martyrologist: with two contemporary biographies of Archbishop Cranmer* (Camden Society, 1859). Interesting sixteenth-century accounts.

### Background and Related Works

- For a general history of the English Reformation, see A.G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, second edition (Pennsylvania State, 1989). In addition, see Peter Brooks, *Cranmer in Context, Documents from the English Reformation* (Fortress, 1989).
- For the theological background, see P.E. Hughes, *Theology of the English Reformers* (Eerdmans, 1965) and D.B. Knox, *The Doctrine of Faith* (1961).
- In *The Godly Kingdom of Tudor England* (1981), edited by John E. Booty, the English Reformation is viewed in terms of the Bible, homilies, articles of religion, catechisms, and the *Book of Common Prayer*.
- On the controversial matter of Cranmer's teachings on the Eucharist, see Peter Brooks, *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of the Eucharist: An Essay in Historical Development* (New York and London, 1965), a comprehensive survey with a closely argued point of view. Compare with C.W. Dugmore, *The Mass and the English Reformers* (London, 1958) and C.C. Richardson, *Zwingli and Cranmer on the Eucharist (1949)*.

### Cranmer's Writings

- *Writings and Disputations ... relative to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*, ed. John E. Cox, Parker Society, xv (Cambridge, 1844).
- *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters*, ed. John E. Cox, Parker Society, xvi (Cambridge, 1846), contains letters and other documents.
- *The Two Liturgies, A.D. 1549 and A.D. 1552: with other Documents*, ed. Joseph Ketley, Parker Society (Cambridge, 1844).
- In addition, there are selections from Cranmer's writings, such as *Selected Writings*, ed. Carl S. Meyer (1961); *English Reformers*, ed. T.H.L. Parker, Library of Christian Classics, 26 (Westminster, 1966); and *The Works of Thomas Cranmer*, G. Duffield, ed. (Cambridge, 1965).



# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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## Thomas Cranmer and the English Reformation: History in the Making - Longhairs for Jesus

It scandalized many Christians and made *Time* magazine—so, like whatever happened to the Jesus Movement?

Jon Trott is a senior editor with *Cornerstone* magazine and has been a member of Chicago's JPUSA since 1977.

The last two years of the sixties saw flower power wilt with a vengeance. Vietnam burned on. Anton LaVey's Church of Satan was thriving. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy were assassinated in the space of two months. Charles Manson's murderous crew offered up their victims to nihilism. Mick Jagger sang "Sympathy for the Devil" as an Altamont rock concert fan was killed by Hell's Angels.

At the same time, along came the Jesus People—earnest, alive, "freaks" with smiles instead of frowns or vacant stares. The long hair was confusing to many Christians, but the message sounded first century: "Get ready! Repent because Jesus is coming back soon!"

Some Christians criticized it, saying it had a "simplistic mentality," with "an excessive emphasis on experience and feeling." Others called the Jesus Movement counterfeit Christianity. In 1971, the mass media noticed, and *Look*, *Time*, *Life*, and *Newsweek* gave the movement mostly positive, though somewhat superficial, reviews.

That was about 25 years ago. Looking back, who were these "Jesus People"? And what has happened to them today?

### Communal Beginnings

The Jesus Movement, like the time that spawned it, was psychedelic in the variety of its participants. A 1974 study suggested that at its apex, the movement comprised 30,000 to 3 million people, depending on how one defined a "Jesus Person." But one common factor was a testimony of a personal, revolutionary encounter with living Truth:

"When I was in the peace movement," said one young convert, "I was always looking for peace and joy and love, and there never seemed to be any. I'd come home at night and it just didn't seem real, it just didn't last. You know, it says in the Bible that if you build a house on sand that, when the wind and water come, it will blow away. But if you build a house on rock, when the wind and the water come, it will stand firm.

"When I heard about Jesus, it just blew my mind that something came before and then just went on into eternity. It blew my mind that I could be grounded into that rock ... I had always believed that there was a truth, a rock, that you could grab hold of and that wouldn't change, but I was never able to find it until I found Jesus."

Ted Wise, who some credit with starting the movement in the spring of 1967 (he denies it), was a Sausalito, California, sailmaker whose wife had rediscovered her lost childhood faith. Tired of the drugs and esoteric Eastern religions he'd found in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district, Wise began reading the Bible for himself and made a decision for Christ. Wise then started a Christian commune, The House of Acts.

"We all moved in together—eight adults and seven children in a two-bedroom house," House told **Look** magazine. "It was a situation where prayer and faith in God's will was an absolute necessity." Through the late sixties, such Christian communes spread across the west coast.

### **Southern California Splash**

Another early convert who influenced the movement was Lonnie Frisbee, an extroverted longhair. After he was introduced to Chuck Smith, pastor of Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California, Frisbee moved into Smith's house. Lonnie brought home so many converts, a new home had to be found in May 1968. Within two weeks, 35 young men had accepted the Lord and had moved into the house. "We had built bunks out into the garage," recalls Smith, "and they were sleeping wall to wall through the house. One kid was even sleeping in the bathtub."

The commune was called "House of Miracles" and would ultimately spin off into a number of related communes of Jesus People known as the Shiloh communities. At their high point, Shiloh claimed 187 communities across the country. (In 1987, after leadership struggles and an encounter with the IRS, Shiloh's last community closed its doors.)

Smith's ocean baptisms of young counterculture converts made excellent copy for journalists and thus helped publicize the movement. Smith, dressed in a tee shirt and slacks and surrounded by young men and women, stood hip-deep in the Pacific, and one after another, he plunged the new converts beneath the waves. Each newly-baptized Christian seemed to emerge with a beatific smile.

As in much of the movement, there was an infectious joy at Calvary, expressed in the twin slogans, "One way!" and "Maranatha!" (Come quickly). The belief that Jesus was coming back **soon** lent an urgent dynamism to the movement. Smith's lack of flamboyance or charisma (one observer said he resembled a grocery clerk) lent credence to the idea that Calvary's revival was Spirit-led rather than man-made. By 1974, with a massive infusion of young Jesus People, Calvary Chapel opened facilities that held 2,300.

Frisbee eventually became estranged from Smith and then ping-ponged between various churches and movements. He eventually faded from public view and died in 1994.

Today Calvary Chapel thrives, with Chuck Smith's Sunday morning services averaging 8,000 in attendance. Calvary has spun off churches across the country and world, all of which reach out to youth on the youth culture's turf.

### **Disciplined Army**

The Jesus Movement's northern west-coast branch was, to many observers, less "trippy" and more demanding. Linda Meissner—known for her work with David Wilkerson in his **Cross and the Switchblade**—headed up the Jesus People Army (JPA) in Seattle. She wanted disciples, not just converts, as her extensive training programs and communal houses attested. She wanted to lead a last-days army of disciplined young evangelists to spread the gospel across the world.

Meissner's striking beauty and intense Christianity drew those who were aching to commit to something real, total, and lasting. At its peak, the JPA numbered an impressive 5,000 members. But as the media frenzy faded and a split within JPA developed (precipitated in large part by Linda's separation from her husband), her dream was in trouble. In desperation, Meissner attached the JPA to David Moses Berg and his separatist group, the Children of God (COG).

The COG had its genesis in a 1968 California Teen Challenge run by Berg and developed into a communal group headquartered in Texas. Berg's "Mo Letters" (instructions to his followers) became

virtual scripture to COG members. The COG saw itself as the sole possessor of truth, while the rest of the church (Jesus People included) were part of the Great Whore of Babylon. By 1973, Berg would shock people with his use of sex for evangelism—"flirty fishing"—and promoting sex outside of marriage. But in the late sixties and early seventies, his group was mainly known as the hard-core element of the Jesus Movement, extremely organized and intense about Scripture study.

Some Jesus People thought Berg was too sectarian and legalistic—among other things, COG members used to disrupt mainline church services by standing up and declaring God's judgments on the startled congregations. Eventually, Meissner's portion of JPA faded into obscurity under the onus of Berg's reputation, and Linda dropped from sight.

### **Midwest Version**

Meissner's original vision was not lost. Jim and Sue Palosaari, who had become Christians via a Meissner disciple, moved to Milwaukee in 1971 to start a JPA counterpart. Beginning with only seven members, Jesus People Milwaukee and its Discipleship Training School quickly bloomed.

The midwest Jesus People built close ties with local churches and invited pastors to teach young disciples, who lived in an old hospital building. The daily regimen centered on basic Bible teaching coupled with witnessing to Milwaukee's Brady Street counterculture.

JP Milwaukee grew to nearly 200 by February of 1972 and then divided itself into various ministries. A troupe of 30 went to Europe to evangelize but soon found themselves broke, eating army K-rations and fried potatoes, and living in an abandoned German bar. After being rescued by a wealthy English sponsor (who wanted to provide an alternative to the COG, who had lured his son into their group), the group evangelized in Europe and then the States for a couple of years.

A second group from Milwaukee called itself Jesus People USA, since their only address was a brightly painted school bus with Jesus emblazoned on the side. JPUSA started grassroots revivals in various Michigan towns, especially in the Upper Peninsula.

A Houghton-Hancock, Michigan, newspaper portrayed JPUSA's arrival: "A large bus and several cars with Jesus painted on the side roll into the Houghton-Hancock area. Thirty-six freaky-looking kids spill out onto the streets. The girls with ankle-length dresses and long-haired boys fortified with armloads of [Jesus] papers scatter and start rapping with the closest passerby...."

"Each morning the group assembles to pray and study the Word of God. Classes include studies in Romans, Apologetics, Old Testament Survey, Life of Paul, the Study of Cults, Christian Leadership.... The afternoons are spent on the streets witnessing person to person. In the evening, the group gathers for rallies which feature the 'Resurrection' Jesus rock band."

After Florida and Michigan stints, the group settled in inner-city Chicago in May 1973. After two years in a church basement, they moved into a six-flat apartment building. Like many of the Jesus Movement's communal experiments, they had leadership problems but survived their head elder's departure.

JPUSA continues to live communally with a membership over 400, evangelizing and serving the poor through various ministries. In 1989, JPUSA joined the Evangelical Covenant Church and lives in a ten-story apartment building in Chicago's uptown ghetto. The community also publishes **Cornerstone** magazine.

### **Permanent Fixture**

Many groups born of the Jesus Movement have disintegrated for one reason or another, but others retain vital, nationally known ministries, including Jews for Jesus and The Christian World Liberation Front, which spawned the cult researching group, Spiritual Counterfeits Project.

As one scholar put it, "Several of [the movement's] groups have achieved a remarkable degree of strength and stability and must now be considered more or less permanent fixtures on the religious scene in America, and even around the world."

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