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Conversion to Communion: Thomas Cranmer on a Favourite Puritan Theme

Ashley Null

I beseech God bless my good Uncle Brent and make him now to know [that] which in his tender years he could not see....And the Lord open His gracious countenance...unto my aunt, that she may also make a blessed change.¹

So prayed an Elizabethan preacher for his relatives forty years after Henry VIII broke relations with the Roman Pontiff. No doubt, however, our cleric's desire for blessed change was not confined only to his relatives. Indeed, above all else, Puritans longed for a general reformation in religion of the Church of England—a change which would be a real blessing because it was based on nothing but the pure word of God. In the eyes of the godly, the Elizabethan church was only half-way reformed, and but the queen was determined to live by her motto *semper eadem*—‘Always the same’. Little wonder, then, that blessed change was the heart cry of the Puritan movement.

Elizabeth had founded her church on two legacies of England's earlier experiment with Protestantism—Erastian polity and Edwardian liturgy—and both were increasingly anathema to the godly as her reign progressed. Using her prerogative as supreme governor, Elizabeth willed the public face of English religion to be an essentially eclectic adaptation of the more Protestant 1552 prayer book with small, but significant holdovers from the more Catholic 1549. These included the words of administration suggestive of Christ's real presence in the sacrament and the rubric about using vestments for services, both seriously irksome stumbling blocks for many Puritan preachers. Such concessions to Catholicism, and perhaps to the Queen's own conscience, were frustrating signs of regression at a time when they looked for further advancement. That Elizabeth also used her royal prerogative to force the bishops to impose compliance on recalcitrant clergy only inflamed their longing for blessed change, especially when she made matters worse by preventing Edmund Grindal, Archbishop of Canterbury, from exercising his office, precisely because he refused to suppress the Puritan practice of community preaching exercises. Her Tudor blood was not amused by Grindal's

suggestion that she should submit to her clergy in matters of religion rather than the other way around.

So the godly prayed, preached and plotted for change. They also founded numerous divinity lectureships, not only to promote pure biblical teaching but also to provide posts for those Puritan ministers who would not scruple to wear the surplice or officiate by the prayer book.² Arguably, the most famous was our own St Antholin's, and indeed the oldest, if those who suggest that the series began under Edward VI are correct. The lectureship in Puritan divinity at St Antholin's, Budge Row, has been graced by such influential Christian leaders as John and Charles Wesley in the eighteenth century and the three leaders of the first Puritan controversy under Elizabeth—Robert Crowley, John Philpott, and John Gough.³

In such a venerable lecture series, founded to be the wellspring of non-conformity in England, what could be a more unexpected topic than the man Thomas Cranmer. Who, more than he, was the public face of both Edwardian Erastianism and Edwardian Liturgy. Is not Cranmer reported to have said at the coronation of the boy-king Edward, 'Your majesty is God's vice-gerent and Christ's vicar within your own dominions, and to see, with your predecessor Josiah, God truly worshipped'?⁴ Has not liturgical scholarship proved right that memorable jibe of John Field, the London field marshal of Elizabethan Puritan agitation, that Cranmer's prayer books were 'culled and picked out of that popish dunghill, the mass book'?⁵ Although Foxe did his best to enlist Cranmer as the true 'St Thomas of Canterbury' because of his death under Mary,⁶ the polity and liturgy he bequeathed represented to Puritans all that was not blessed in the Church of England, all that still needed changing. What does he and the founders of our lectureship have to do with one another?

Much, for they were all adherents of Reformed theology. While this has not been the conventional portrait of Cranmer for over a century, recent studies have confirmed Cranmer's basic agreement with that Southern strain of continental Protestantism that became known as Reformed, at least as it was emerging during his lifetime.⁷ The theological stream which ran so fast through St Antholin's did not spring up in England only upon the return of the Marian exiles, but in Cranmer's day and by Cranmer's encouragement. The movement grew and adapted—so much so that subsequent generations of

historians have failed to recognise Cranmer as one of their soteriological progenitors. Yet the blessed personal change sought by Puritans for their family, friends and flock Cranmer also desired for the elect of England of his era. Conversion from sin to communion with God was a favourite Puritan theme, and nothing was closer to Cranmer's own heart; consequently, he enshrined his Reformed understanding of the process in the formularies he bequeathed to the Church of England. Those wishing to find Anglican legitimacy for the Puritan approach to the cure of the English soul need look no further than the pioneering work of Thomas Cranmer himself.

Cranmer's Evangelism

Like his first royal master, Cranmer did not make himself easy to love.⁸ In an era noted for the fervent courage of many martyrs for faith, Cranmer's very survival under a king as unprincipled, or at least unpredictable, as Henry VIII has made him suspect. His late vacillation under Mary has only seemed to confirm the image of a man ruled more by the grip of fear than the assurance of the faith. Yet fearful men do not often pass off lightly the criticism of their inferiors; nor do theologically unprincipled prisoners defiantly urge a Spanish Catholic like Mary to repudiate the pope as Antichrist. Fundamentally, Cranmer was a man of faith, and his fundamental principle was that God's love for his enemies worked everything to good.

Indeed, despite the pressures of his office and his era, Cranmer's most striking characteristic was to forgive his enemies. To be sure, Cranmer could act sternly toward evangelicals who, in his view, endangered the whole reforming enterprise by contravening authority with their 'outrageous doings'.⁹ He could also be equally harsh with religious conservatives he considered as repeat offenders. Nevertheless, his customary response to personal wrongs was unmerited forgiveness, often to the irritation of his friends and the delight as well as abuse of his foes. According to Ralph Morice, his principal secretary,

[a] notable quality or virtue he had: to be beneficial unto his enemies, so that in that respect he would not be known to have any enemy at all. For whosoever he had been that had reported evil of him, or otherwise wrought or done to him displeasure, were the reconciliation never so mean or simple on the behalf of his adversary, if he had any thing at all relented, the matter was both pardoned and clearly forgotten...So that

on a time I do remember that Dr Heath, late archbishop of York, partly disliking this his overmuch leniency by him used, said unto him, “My Lord, I now know how to win all things at your hands well enough.” “How so?” (quoth my Lord.) “Marry,” (said Dr Heath,) “I perceive that I must first attempt to do unto you some notable displeasure, and than by a little relenting obtain of you what I can desire.”¹⁰

Such habitual benevolence was not merely the naivety of an innocent in high office. Rather, Cranmer’s demonstrated love for those who opposed him was the conscious decision of a dedicated evangelist. When queried why he was so lenient with ‘papists’, Cranmer replied:

What will ye have a man do to him that is not yet come to the knowledge of the truth of the gospel...if it be a true rule of our Saviour Christ to do good for evil, than let such as are not yet come to favour our religion learn to follow the doctrine of the gospel by our example in using them friendly and charitably.¹¹

Clearly, Cranmer intended his well-known reputation for giving grace to the unworthy to be a cardinal signal, a scarlet cord hung openly from the window of Canterbury, that those with eyes to see would perceive the truth of the gospel which he wished to impart to the Church of England.

For Cranmer’s commitment to love his enemies was more than just another example of traditional medieval piety. It was the very foundation of his living Protestant faith. It was its very foundation. The logic is breath-takingly simple. Christ commands us to love our enemies so that we show ourselves sons of our Father in Heaven. If the highest expression of divine love is to love one’s enemies, that must be the very same kind of love by which God saves sinners. And that, in fact, is what the Apostle Paul himself wrote in Romans 5:10— ‘when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son’. Since God loved those who had not a right to be loved, Cranmer reached out to his opponents with unmerited forgiveness and favour in hope that they would realise that God did likewise when he brought salvation. This emphasis on God’s love for the unworthy is the common thread that runs throughout Cranmer’s theological writings.

Cranmer on Scripture

The radical simplicity of this principle cut through key tenets of medieval teaching. In keeping with the root meaning of the Latin Vulgate's *justificare* 'to make righteous', the Catholic understanding of justification was as a process of transformation to personal holiness. Hence, the primary interest of much of late scholastic penitential instruction lay in encouraging sinners to demonstrate through genuine sorrow and good works that they no longer wanted to be God's enemy. Penitents who did their best to show an increasing love for God gradually acquired an acceptable degree of worthiness that was the necessary preparation for divine forgiveness. Influenced by the Augustinian revival, Cambridge theologian John Fisher insisted that human actions needed the special assistance of prevenient grace to be effective towards justification, and Stephen Gardiner, a Cambridge-trained lawyer, agreed.¹² Once sinners had first co-operated with divine grace toward their justification, they would then receive a supernatural infusion of divine goodness that finished the process of making them fully worthy to be accepted by God.

By his forties Cranmer had concluded that giving human worthiness any role in justification was clean contrary to God's Word. He equated personal merit in any form with the 'works-righteousness' condemned by Paul; consequently, he argued that justification was either totally by the worthiness of our efforts or completely by undeserved divine grace—Scripture gave no other option:

But certain it is, that our election cometh only and wholly of the benefit and grace of God, for the merits of Christ's passion, and for no part of our merits and good works: as St Paul disputeth and proveth at length in the epistle to the Romans and Galatians, and divers other places, saying, 'if from works, then not from grace; if from grace, then not from works.'¹³

Any attempt to make ourselves acceptable to God as the basis for forgiveness was an insult to the depth of the divine love shown for an unworthy humanity by Christ's death on the cross.¹⁴ In short, it was 'the work and glory of God alone to justify the ungodly, to forgive sins, to give life freely out of his goodness, not from any merits of our own'.¹⁵

For the mature Cranmer, the medieval church failed to understand the mutual incompatibility of grace and human worth because they had hidden

the light of God's Word under the bushel-basket of human tradition. Good intentions, holy visions, academic reasoning, venerable teachings, even Church councils—none of these had authority to supersede the plain sense of the Bible, for all of these were subject to the deceitful deceptions of human sinfulness. Pride might lead people to think they could eventually merit God's approval, but that was not the true gospel. God's Word clearly proclaimed free salvation of the unworthy in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the blessed change of conversion began with looking to Scripture alone. Cranmer bequeathed this principle to the Church of England in 'A Fruitful Exhortation to the Reading and Knowledge of Holy Scripture', the opening sermon of the 1547 Book of Homilies and widely accepted as his own.¹⁶ According to this homily, God gave human beings the Bible as 'a sure, a constant and a perpetual instrument of salvation'. On the one hand, Scripture was God's chosen medium to tell human beings the truth about the world around them and the struggles within them: 'In these books we may learn to know ourselves, how vile and miserable we be, and also to know God, how good he is of himself and how he communicateth his goodness unto us and to all creatures.' On the other hand, the Bible was also the means through which God worked supernaturally to turn people's hearts to himself and the doing of his will: '[The words of Holy Scripture] have power to convert [our souls] through God's promise, and they be effectual through God's assistance'. As sinners read of the eternal punishments justly prepared for them and then realised the unconditional mercy of his pardon that God offered in Christ, a new loving faith in God would arise from the bottom of their heart. Hence, Cranmer urged the people of England to 'diligently search for the well of life in the books of the New and Old Testament, and not run to the stinking puddles of men's traditions, devised by man's imagination for our justification and salvation.'¹⁷

Cranmer on Justification

Because of Scripture, Cranmer decided to part company with Fisher and Gardiner. He denied the possibility of any middle transitional stage between the children of God and of the Devil,¹⁸ and he also rejected their traditional factitive understanding of justification where God first made sinners inherently righteous so that he could then accept them. Protestants had noted that the Greek New Testament word for *justificare* was *dikaion*, a

legal term meaning to pronounce a defendant 'not guilty'; consequently, they taught that justification came in a moment of belief that changed a sinner's status before God without changing his personal worthiness for acceptance. Cranmer came to agree. Believing God justified people 'although they were sinners',¹⁹ he embraced the forensic understanding that God imputed Christ's righteousness to the ungodly who turned to him in faith.²⁰ Those who heard God's Word and trusted in his promise of free salvation in Jesus were credited with Christ's worthiness.

Although some scholars have argued otherwise, Cranmer's 'Homily of Salvation' (1547) made this standard Protestant teaching normative for the Church of England.²¹ Cranmer opened the sermon by describing justification in terms of forensic imputation, albeit in non-theological terms:

(i) justifying righteousness was an alien righteousness: 'Because all men be sinners and offenders against God...every man of necessity is constrained to seek another righteousness, or justification to be received at God's own hands';²²

(ii) the righteousness given to the believer through faith because of Christ was not true inherent righteousness but merely reckoned as such by God: 'this justification...is taken, accepted, and allowed of God for our perfect and full justification'.²³

(iii) the only possible source for justification was the imputation of an alien righteousness: 'Christ is now the righteousness of all them that truly do believe in him...forasmuch as that which their infirmity lacketh, Christ's justice hath supplied'.²⁴

Significantly, at no point in this description of justification did Cranmer make any reference to the infusion of a personal righteousness as the basis for the believer's pardoning by God.

In this homily Cranmer also carefully defined the nature of the faith that brought about imputed righteousness. First, saving faith came 'by God's working in us' through the hearing of the Word.²⁵ Secondly, this 'act to believe in Christ' was not the basis for justification, but only what sent the sinner to Christ for pardon.

Indeed, faith was 'far too weak and insufficient and imperfect' to merit remission of sins in its own right.²⁶ Thirdly, justifying faith was more than just intellectual assent to dogmatic statements. Since demons also believed the principal truths of Christianity, 'right and true Christian faith' was not only agreement with Scripture but also 'a sure trust and confidence in God's merciful promises, to be saved from everlasting damnation'.²⁷ According to Cranmer, saving faith always included assurance of a believer's own salvation.

Cranmer on Predestination

Although modern scholarship has rarely acknowledged it, Cranmer's language of assurance was rooted in a commitment to predestination, for his insistence on the personal unworthiness of the justified inevitably led him to hold to unconditional election and effectual grace. Since divine love loves those who have no right to be loved, God saved sinners unconditionally, without any regard for personal merit, whether acquired or infused. Yet if divine love requires that salvation come as an unconditional gift, then God's love must also be able to ensure the full acceptance of that gift. Otherwise human response to divine love would become a necessary condition, and people would be forced ultimately to rely on their own efforts to co-operate with God, something Cranmer considered 'the ready way unto desperation'.²⁸ Therefore, God's love must have the power both to awaken love for God among God-haters and to ensure the perseverance of that love for eternity. With his fellow Protestants, Cranmer concluded that the justified were also the elect, so that God gave saving faith only to those whom he had chosen to deliver from eternal damnation before the foundation of the world.²⁹ Because of their prior election, the justified could be certain of their perseverance: 'the elect shall not wilfully and obstinately withstand God's calling'; they 'will follow Christ's precepts, and rise again when they fall'; and 'they shall perpetually continue and endure'.³⁰

In 'Cranmer's Great Commonplaces', the personal manuscript record of his theological research, Cranmer gathered evidence primarily from Augustine to prove that salvation *sola gratia* meant by predestination without any foresight of an individual's merits. Accordingly, justifying grace was not made available to all.³¹ Rather, before the foundation of the world, God chose a set number of people, his elect, to spend eternity with him.³² He first gave them the grace of conversion to bring about their justification, and then he

gave them the grace of perseverance so that they would continue in their justification until they entered the age to come.³³ God gave his justifying grace freely to the elect before considering any future merits and based solely on the hidden judgement of his will.³⁴ Like a potter who made from the same lump of clay one vessel for honour and another for disrepute, God simply decided to separate out from the mass of damned humanity some which he chose to save according to his own inscrutable counsel.³⁵ While none of those predestined would be lost, none of those passed over could ever be saved.³⁶

A Christian believed in the Lord by his own will and free choice.³⁷ Nevertheless, salvation was not determined by human consent because the gift of grace imparted the Holy Spirit which brought about whatever good pertained to salvation, including consent.³⁸ Like the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus or Xerxes in the presence of Esther, by his omnipotent power God drew the unwilling to himself, took away their heart of stone, gave them his Spirit and made them willing.³⁹ Although some might want faith to begin as a human initiative to which God then granted saving grace, in fact, without God's calling, no one was able to believe.⁴⁰ This inability of the non-elect to believe explained why some hearing the gospel came to faith and others did not.⁴¹ While it was understandable that such a teaching might be difficult to accept, who was man to question his maker, the depths of whose wisdom was beyond the capacity of the human mind? A beast might as well have questioned why it was not made human, as a man to question why God prepared one person for eternal blessedness and another for eternal damnation.⁴²

The full doctrine of predestination found in Cranmer's private papers was not discussed in his homilies. Its only public expression was in the doctrinal formula of the Edwardian era, the Forty-Two Articles. On the one hand, Article X described its basis. Using scriptural language, the article suggested that grace was effectual, bringing about regeneration by redirecting the will itself, not simply by offering to the will the choice for regeneration:

The grace of Christ or 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.⁴³

Unfortunately for the Puritans, Article X was one of those deleted to make the Thirty-Nine Articles. On the other hand, Article XVII described the benefits of predestination and was retained by the Elizabethan Church. Like the earlier homilies, this article concentrated on how election provided ‘sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons’. Those who felt the Spirit of God at work in them could rest assured that any lapse from grace in their lives was only temporary. Significantly, this saving work was defined as repentance, *i.e.*, ‘mortifying the works of the flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things’.⁴⁴ Clearly, then, in Cranmer’s understanding of predestination God determined in his hidden counsel to whom he would give saving grace, and this grace would effectually bring about a redirection of the will, namely, its conversion from sin towards communion with God.

Cranmer on Conversion

Naturally, Cranmer considered this blessed change in the will to be the decisive moment for justification. According to his great notebooks,

He who now has turned to God, grieves from his heart to have sinned, and he has in his heart a firm amendment of a better life--he has rejected all will to sin. Why is he not already just? For whatever of fault still remains, he has from infirmity, not from the wickedness of his heart.⁴⁵

Plainly, Cranmer did not believe that justification based on the external merits of Christ had no internal effect in the justified. Quite to the contrary. For if the glory of divine love was to love the unworthy, the duty and joy of the justified was to return that love to God and to others. Consequently, in the moment of justification Cranmer held that God imparted both faith and love. The believer’s faith laid hold of the extrinsic righteousness of Christ on which basis alone his sins were pardoned. At the same time, however, the Holy Spirit indwelt the believer, stirring in him a love for God and his commandments. This renewal of a person’s will would naturally issue forth in a godly life marked by obedience to divine precepts and repentance for on-going shortcomings caused by the infirmities of human nature. In short, Cranmer believed that justification was being made ‘right-willed’ by faith, not being made inherently righteous, and its evidence was love and repentance toward God and neighbour.

This narrowing of justification to the moment when God renewed the will enabled Cranmer to counter two arguments put forward by the religious conservatives of his day. On the one hand, Fisher and Gardiner had argued for the necessity of good works before justification. Claiming support from Augustine, Cranmer could argue that no work was good before a man had a renewed will, but once he had a good will, he was already pleasing to God before he performed any subsequent works.⁴⁶ Therefore, works had no part in the act of justification. On the other hand, his critics accused justification by faith of encouraging moral laxity. Why should people strive to fight against sin, if their eternal future was already secure? Cranmer's emphasis on the conversion of the will meant that a believer's renewed affections would naturally manifest in a life of right actions. Although good works did not justify, the truly justified were never without good works:

For although God forgives sins because of faith in the blood of Christ, none the less he only forgives those who repent, who forgive sins, who give alms, who are clean in heart, who chastise their body and redirect it into service, who love God and neighbour, who extend themselves in good works, who are earnest to show themselves approved through their good works, not only to God but also to all men, who take off the old man with his works and put on the new man who is created by God, who drive out of their heart the love of sin and bring in the love of God and neighbour, who crucify their flesh with [its] affections and lusts.⁴⁷

Thus, only if believers led a life of on-going repentance could they certify their consciences that their election was sure and stable.⁴⁸

With assurance we come back to the heart of Cranmer's theology. Faith had to include assurance. Grace had to ensure assurance. Life had to be lived to support assurance. Why was assurance so important to Cranmer? Because it provided the determining motive for the believer's new life in Christ. Article X made clear that God did not force the will when he redirected it. How, then, did saving grace effectually draw the human will to love God and to obey his commandments? Gratitude—the gratitude that only came from the assurance of salvation.

In Catholic teaching, Christians were to face the future with a sober uncertainty about their eternal fate, striving to lead a godly life in a constant

state of both hope and fear. Cranmer, however, concluded the medieval teaching of conditional salvation based on human performance actually promoted self-righteous pride or self-damning despair, and neither inspired true love for God. Only the promise of free salvation made possible by God's utterly gracious love inspired a lasting grateful human love:

But if the profession of our faith of the remission of our own sins enter within us into the deepness of our hearts, then it must kindle a warm fire of love in our hearts towards God, and towards all other for the love of God--a fervent mind to seek and procure God's honour, will, and pleasure in all things--a good will and mind to help every man and to do good unto them, so far as our might, wisdom, learning, counsel, health, strength, and all other gifts which we have received of God and will extend,--and, in summa, a firm intent and purpose to do all that is good, and leave all that is evil.⁴⁹

Only the certainty of being eternally knit to God by his love could empower human beings to love him and one another in return: 'For the right and true Christian faith is...to have sure trust and confidence in God's merciful promises to be saved from everlasting damnation by Christ: whereof doth follow a loving heart to obey his commandments.'⁵⁰ When the benefits of God's merciful grace were considered, unless they were 'desperate persons' with 'hearts harder than stones', people would be moved to give themselves wholly unto God and the service of their neighbours.⁵¹ Naturally, Cranmer intended this Christian love to be extended to foes as well as friends, for 'they be his creation and image, and redeemed by Christ as ye are'.⁵² Thus, assurance made possible the blessed inner change in the justified—a loving, living faith that purified the heart from sin's poison and made 'the sinner clean a new man'.⁵³ This gospel of transforming gratitude was what Cranmer tried to spread with his evangelism of 'overmuch leniency'.

Cranmer on Communion

So at last we have come to the heart of Cranmer's theology. God's gracious love inspires a grateful love in his children, turning their wills from wrong to right and binding them to their Heavenly Father as well as to one another forever. Now if loving gratitude is the means for true communion with God, there can be only one instrument which inspires it—God's Word. For only in

the Bible do we learn of our need and God's promises. And if true communion with God is a joining of our wills to his, there can be only one instrument which informs it—God's Word. For only in the Bible do we learn what to seek and how far we fall short. According to Cranmer, the key to godly communion is to 'read, mark, learn and inwardly digest' God's Word.⁵⁴

This Word whosoever is diligent to read and in his heart to print that he readeth, the great affection to the transitory things of this world shall be diminished in him, and the great desire of heavenly things that be therein promised of God shall increase in him. And there is nothing that so much establisheth our faith and trust in God, that so much converteth innocency and pureness of the heart, and also of outward godly life and conversation, as continual reading and meditation of God's Word. For that thing which by perpetual use of reading of Holy Scripture and diligent searching of the same is deeply printed and graven in the heart at length turneth almost into nature. And moreover, the effect and virtue of God's Word is to illuminate the ignorant and to give more light unto them that faithfully and diligently read it, to comfort their hearts, and to encourage them to perform that which of God is commanded.⁵⁵

We have now come full-circle. Conversion to God is birthed by his working through Scripture to tell us and turn us to himself. Communion with God is sustained and strengthened by his working through the same Scripture, continually telling and turning, that he might tether us to ever-increasing conformity to Christ. Little wonder, then, Cranmer urged that 'these books, therefore, ought to be much in our hands, in our eyes, in our ears, in our mouths, but most of all in our heart'.⁵⁶

Such, of course, ironically, was the goal for his prayer books, especially the sacraments. Undoubtedly, Scripture was 'the heavenly meat of our souls',⁵⁷ but Baptism and Holy Communion were its sensible enactment. The use of water, bread and wine, when joined to God's Word, enabled believers to 'see Christ with our eyes, smell him at our nose, taste him with our mouths, grope him with our hands, and perceive him with all our senses'.⁵⁸ Sacraments did indeed confer grace, but not as a separate, second channel in addition to Scripture. They were means of grace precisely because their use of elements made the promises of Scripture sink more easily into the depths of human

hearts, since people's senses were more fully engaged by the presentation.

Thus, the ultimate expression of Cranmer's vision of God's gracious love inspiring grateful human love was the 1552 Holy Communion service. In what he intended to be the central act of English worship, Cranmer wove together his great themes of free justification, on-going repentance, communal fellowship, and godly living and placed them in a sacramental setting which clarified God's incomprehensible sacrificial love for the unworthy as their sole source. Cranmer dropped the explicit invocation of the Holy Spirit over the elements and made their reception the immediate response to the words of Institution. As a result, receiving the sacramental bread and wine, not their prior consecration, became the liturgy's climax. Now the sacramental miracle was not changing material elements but reuniting human wills with the divine. And since he repositioned the prayer of oblation as a post-communion prayer, the community's sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving was their newly-empowered response to God's grace at work in them, not its grounds as previously. Now grateful service was the necessary effect of that gracious reunion and godly love the natural response to remembering God's love.⁵⁹ Lastly, he inserted the recital of the Ten commandments near the beginning of the service and moved the preparation for communion prior to the Great Thanksgiving. Now the new order took participants through the steps which Cranmer believed led to conversion of the will and new life in Christ: Fear inspired by the Law, Faith springing forth from the Gospel, God's gift of Repentance, Re-entry into God's presence, and the Reception of power for a renewed holiness. In short, just as in his doctrine of justification, the supernatural action in Cranmer's Communion service was the renewal of the communicants' will to love Christ and one another, and all because they had first been loved by him.⁶⁰

Concluding Thoughts on Thomas Cranmer

In the end, repentance, not love, has come to symbolise Cranmer himself, his life's work being interpreted by his last days. In the eyes of his critics, Cranmer's recantations prove that at best he was weak and vacillating. In the hearts of his admirers, however, Cranmer's last-minute renunciation of his recantations proved his true commitment to the Protestant faith. But what of Cranmer himself, how did he interpret his last days and the meaning they gave to his life? According to a contemporary account, having previously

been distraught, Cranmer came to the stake with 'a cheerful countenance and willing mind'.

Fire being now put to him, he stretched out his right Hand, and thrust it into the Flame, and held it there a good space, before the Fire came to any other Part of his Body; where his Hand was seen of every Man sensibly burning, crying with a loud Voice, *This Hand hath offended*. As soon as the Fire got up, he was very soon Dead, never stirring or crying all the while.⁶¹

His Catholic executioners surely thought Cranmer was making satisfaction to his Protestant God. Yet his doctrine of repentance would have taught him otherwise, for the God he served saved the unworthy.

Having believed in his own justification by faith, Cranmer would have thought he could fall totally, but not finally. As God's child, the burden of all the multitude of his sins was no cause for him to distrust or despair of help at his Father's hand. For the incredible richness of God's merciful love for him would never have shone brighter than on that cloudy day, precisely because he, the chief promoter of the new faith, had fallen so far as to become a declared enemy of the gospel. To Cranmer, his hand in the fire would have been an act of loving service from a grateful heart turned back to God by the power and promise of his immeasurably loving grace. His final resolve would have been a joyous confirmation that he was indeed one of the elect in whom there would be no fault found in the end. His firmness of purpose would have been sustained by the hope he expressed in the Burial Office that was never read for him: 'the souls of them that be elected, after they be delivered from the burden of the flesh, be in joy and felicity'.⁶²

What, then, can be said to be of Cranmer's reformed theology? Ultimately, Cranmer conceived of God's work in the world as changing human wills, not human worthiness, and he believed God did so by loving the unworthy elect so unconditionally as to inspire in them a reciprocal love for him and others. Such was his gospel. Such was the blessed change he bequeathed to the Puritans. Such is his legacy for Anglicans today, if they so wish.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 As quoted by Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), 23. This paper was originally given as the 2000 St Antholin Charity Lecture. I remain grateful to the Trustees of the St Antholin's Lectureship Charity for permission to reprint this slightly revised version.
- 2 For the history of Puritan lectureships, see Paul S. Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships: The Politics of Religious Dissent, 1560–1662* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1970).
- 3 St Antholin's lectures began no later than 1559. For its history from Elizabethan times to the Twentieth Century, see Isabel M. Calder, 'The St Antholin Lectures', *Church Quarterly Review* 160 (1959), 49-70. For the possible Edwardian origins of the lectureship, see H. Gareth Own, "The London Parish Clergy in the Reign of Elizabeth I" (Ph.D. thesis, London University, 1957), 370.
- 4 John Edmund Cox, *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1846) [Henceforth Cox II], 127.
- 5 This bitter assessment was part of Field's caustic contribution to the Admonition to the Parliament; Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, 120.
- 6 John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (London: John Day, 1570), 2066.
- 7 See Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (London: Yale University Press, 1996) and Ashley Null, *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance: Renewing the Power to Love* (Oxford University Press, 2000).
- 8 For a review of Cranmer historiography, see Jasper Ridley, *Thomas Cranmer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 1-12; Peter Newman Brooks, *Cranmer in Context: Documents from the English Reformation* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1989), 117-27.
- 9 For Cranmer's attitude toward disobedient evangelicals, see John Gough Nichols, *Narratives of the Days of the Reformation* (Westminster: Camden Society, 1859), 247.
- 10 Nichols, *Narratives*, 245-6. For examples of this leniency, see *ibid.* 157, 251-2, 269-72 and MacCulloch, *Cranmer*, 318, 321.
- 11 Nichols, *Narratives*, 246-7.
- 12 *Stephen Gardiner, A declaration of true articles as Georg Loye hath gone about to confute as false* (London: John Herford, 1546), vols 94v-95r.
- 13 Cox II, 95.
- 14 'Sanguis Christi, multis modis contumelia afficitur. Primum, ab iis qui praeter Christi sanguinem, alia excognitant aut supponu[n]t remedia, satisfactiones, aut pretia pro abluendis peccatis', British Library Royal MS 7B.XII [Henceforth 'Cranmer's Great Commonplaces' (CGC) II], 226r.

- 15 *'Solius dei opus est et gloria, iustificare impium, remittere peccata, donare vitam ex sua bonitate gratis, non ex ullis nostris meritis'*, CGC II, 226v.
- 16 Ronald B. Bond, *Certain Sermons or Homilies* (1547) and *A Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion (1570): A Critical Edition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 28.
- 17 *Ibid* 61-2; Cox II, 113-14.
- 18 *'Nec medium est ullum inter filios dei et diaboli'*, CGC II, 213r.
- 19 *Marginalium: 'Iustificavit nos deus cum peccatores essemus'*, CGC II, 104v.
- 20 *'Iustificare subinde significat, iustum pronuntiare, declarare, aut ostendere'*, CGC II, 84r.
- 21 Ridley considered them to fall 'a good way short' of Protestantism; Cranmer, 266. Cf. David Loades, 'Thomas Cranmer: A Biographical Introduction', Thomas Cranmer: *Essays in Commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of his Birth*, ed. Margot Johnson (Durham: Turnstone Ventures, 1990), 1-24 (16). According to John T. Wall, Jr, the homily reflects Cranmer's Erasmian Humanism; 'Godly and Fruitful Lessons: The English Bible, Erasmus' Paraphrases, and the Book of Homilies', *The Godly Kingdom of Tudor England: Great Books of the English Reformation*, ed. John E. Booty (Wilton, Conn.: Morehouse-Barlow Company, 1981), 85-125. Alister McGrath, however, has interpreted the 'Homily of Salvation' as a mixture of both Protestant and patristic doctrine, the fiduciary basis of justification being strongly Melancthonian but its nature conforming to Augustine's factitive approach; *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 288.
- 22 Cox II, 1282.
- 23 *Ibid* 130.
- 24 *Ibid* 129.
- 25 *Ibid* 131-2.
- 26 *Ibid* 133.
- 27 *Ibid* 94.
- 28 Commenting on a correction to the Bishops' Book suggested by Henry VIII, Cranmer wrote: 'These two words...signify that our election and justification cometh partly of our merits, though chiefly it cometh of the goodness of God'; Cox II, 95. Note that he rendered the phrase 'election and justification' as singular, using it as the subject of the third-person singular verb 'cometh' and as the antecedent of the singular neuter pronoun 'it'. That one so sensitive to language as Cranmer should write in such a manner can only mean that he considered election and justification to be part of a unitary process, each equally rooted in divine action and both always occurring in the same human lives.

- 29 CGC II, 91-2.
- 30 *Ibid* 270r.
- 31 *Ibid* 121v, 279v.
- 32 *Ibid* 105v; cf. *Ibid* 282v.
- 33 *Ibid* 230r, 273r, 280r.
- 34 *Ibid* 291r.
- 35 *Ibid* 279v-80r.
- 36 *Ibid* 104v, 270.
- 37 *Ibid* 277r.
- 38 *Ibid* 118r, 227v; 271r-272r.
- 39 *Ibid* 272v; 249v.
- 40 *Ibid* 279v, 285v..
- 41 *Ibid* 120r, 291v-292r.
- 42 Charles Hardwick, *A History of the Articles of Religion* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1904), 302.
- 43 *Ibid* 312.
- 44 '*Qui iam conversus ad deum, peccavisse ex animo dolet, et correctionem vitae melioris firmam in animo habet, omnem peccandi voluntatem abiicit, cur non iam iustus sit? Cum quicquid vitii adhuc supersit, ex infirmitate habeat, non ex animi malitia?*' CGC II, 225v.
- 45 '*Bona opera non habet, cui deest voluntas bona. Quisquis autem bonam habet voluntatem, iam vir bonus est, et deo gratus, ac iustificatus. Ergo qui iustificatus non est, bona opera non habet*', CGC II, 225v.
- 46 '*Licet enim propter fidem in sanguinem Christi condonet deus peccata, tamen non nisi resipiscentibus, nisi dimittentibus peccata, nisi eleemosinam facientibus, nisi mundis corde, nisi castigantibus corpus suum et in servitum redigentibus, nisi deum et proximum diligentibus, nisi in bona opera se extendentibus, nisi intentibus ut per bona opera se probatos exhibeant, non solum deo sed etiam omnibus hominibus, nisi exuentibus veterem hominem cum operibus suis, et induentibus novum hominem qui secundum deum creatur, nisi animo suo expellentibus dilectionem peccati, et admittentibus dilectionem dei et proximi, nisi carnem suam crucifigentibus cum affectibus et concupiscentiis*', CGC II, 226r.
- 47 Cox II, 138-41.
- 48 *Ibid* 86.
- 49 *Ibid* 133.
- 50 *Ibid* 134.
- 51 *Ibid* 149.
- 52 *Ibid* 86.

- 53 Joseph Ketley, ed., *The Two Liturgies . . . in the Reign of King Edward VI* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1844), 439.
- 54 Bond, *Homilies*, 63.
- 55 *Ibid* 62.
- 56 *Ibid*
- 57 John Edmund Cox, ed., *Writings and Disputations of Thomas Cranmer...relative to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1844) [Henceforth Cox I], 41.
- 58 For these and similar changes, see Colin Buchanan, *What did Cranmer think he was doing?*, 2nd edn. (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1982), 21-9.
- 59 '[I]n the Lord's supper neither the substance nor accidents of bread and wine be changed...but the alteration is inwardly in the souls of them that spiritually be refreshed and nourished with Christ's flesh and blood', Cox I, 254.
- 60 From the description of Cranmer's death by 'J.A.', BL Harley MS 422, vols 48-52; reprinted in John Strype, *Memorials of...Thomas Cranmer, sometime Lord Archbishop of Canterbury*, 2 vols. in 1 (London: Richard Chiswell, 1694), Book 3, chap. 21, i.389.
- 61 Ketley, *Two Liturgies*, 319.