

*The Journal*  
of  
**The Church of England**  
**(Continuing)**



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**Issue No: 34**

**July 2006**

# CONSTITUTION

1. **Doctrine:** The doctrine of the Continuing Church shall be that of the 39 Articles of Religion understood in their original, natural and intended sense.
2. **Worship:** The worship of the Continuing Church shall be generally according to the Book of Common Prayer (1662).

The Authorised Version of the Bible shall be the only version used in the lectern and the pulpit and in public readings and expositions at all meetings of the Continuing Church.

3. **Ministry:** The consecration and ordination of ministers shall be according to the Ordinal of the Book of Common Prayer (1662). The Continuing Church believes in the ministry of women according to Scripture which does not permit them to teach or exercise authority, particularly as bishops, priests, and deacons.
4. **Discipline:** The church shall be episcopally governed. A general assembly shall be held not less than once a year consisting of the bishop and the ministers of the church and representatives of the local congregations to transact the business of the denomination and for mutual encouragement and edification.
5. **Membership:** New churches may apply for membership of the Continuing Church on the basis of their agreement with the doctrine, worship and discipline of that body.

Membership of the local church shall be on the basis of baptism and confirmation and approval by the local presbyter.

Any matters incapable of resolution shall be referred to the Ordinary.

The Continuing Church publishes a prayer letter, "Intercessions." It is available free of charge to those who would like to receive news and to pray for the various needs.

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Dear Friends,

I look forward to our Annual day at Benson on 1st July, and to hearing Bishop David Samuel lead our devotions and speak, as well as the Rev. Baruch Maoz, who opened the first Jewish Christian church building in Israel, we believe since apostolic times. He was opposed by the Orthodox to the point where they hired top lawyers to behave like Sanballat did to Nehemiah as he sought to rebuild the wall. Mr. Maoz started from nothing and recently handed over a church of some 400 to a successor. Let nothing stand between you and coming, and try to invite many others. Both our speakers have written key books, and there will be a bookstall.

At the hospice bedside of a Christian lady this week as she fought her way painfully to glory, in agony, it came home afresh to me that you and I are not exempt from even extreme suffering. We would not say these things to those going through the valley of the shadow, but we who are not yet there would be wise to consider some of the reasons why we are chosen in the furnace of affliction.

We are only ordinary saved sinners, and need to be purified by suffering. Without it, we would degenerate. We undergo suffering for the sake of other sinners, who are only won sacrificially, and so, as the Apostle put it, we fill up in our bodies that which is lacking of the sufferings of Christ for his body's sake, the Church.

We are part of a worldwide Church which has ever suffered excruciatingly. We are a 'peculiar people', separate from this effete age which prefers the pleasures of sin for a season, to the path of pain. When we get to heaven we shall enter the gates as part of that vast throng, not of the noble army of martyrs, nor of the apostles and eminent saints, but of that great host of nobodies, of sinners who have nothing and owe everything to Christ. We will go in with those who came out of great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

So even as Christ suffered, arm yourselves with the same mind. Do like Richard Baxter and spend time each day considering heaven, and the glory that shall be revealed in us.

You and I may be called to acute suffering. You have a choice, either to refuse to

accept ill at the Lord's hand, or to rejoice in tribulation. Prepare now!

To God be the glory,

Your friend and bishop



Edward Malcolm

**L**ARGE print editions of the *Journal* are available. If you or anyone you know would benefit from this larger size, please contact the Editor.

The large-print issue is supplied in an A4 format, with a comb binding. *Intercessions* will also be supplied at the larger size.

# THE MARYRDOM OF THOMAS CRANMER

Edward Malcolm

**Mark 9:43** *And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched.*

THOMAS Cranmer was burned on 21st March, the first day of Spring, 450 years ago in Oxford. The words of our text sum up his life excellently. Here is a life that is commonly dismissed as ‘doubting Thomas’, half-reformed, timid, unworthy, devious. Accusations include: “The wretched Cranmer followed the discreditable path of temporizing’, lacked ‘consistency’, showed a ‘subserviency in Court life “that sounded tones of discord rather than of the high principle to be expected” of an Archbishop.’ He is accused of being a pathetic figure who yielded to Henry’s every whim, whose theological confusion brought about irregular changes in doctrine akin to heresy. He is seen as bringing about secular and spiritual scandal. He is accused of ambition, lust, being as ignorant as a goose on a village green, having a mind worthy of an ostler in an inn. He is called ‘this pernicious prelate..that either gave such a filthy precedent and example, or sowed such pestilent heresies.’

Cardinal Allen said ‘Cranmer was a notorious perjured, and often relapsed into Apostata, recanting, swearing and forswearing at every turn.’ Bishop Bossuet said such strong things against him that others accuse Bossuet of ‘bitter invective’. Nicholas Harpsfield called him ‘worse than Wolsey’.

But the leaders of the Anglo Catholic movement went further, Hurrell Froude their historian said, ‘The only good thing about Cranmer was that he burned well’, and that ‘The Reformation was a limb badly set—it must be broken again in order to be righted.’

By the Puritans in general he is not much admired, as being undecided, half-reformed, Roman Catholic and Protestant, a political chameleon whose liturgy smelt of Rome and whose reforms needed taking much further and setting right by Scripture. They called the Prayer Book ‘impure superstitions’. Knox, who said that, cited as proof, ‘O Lord, open thou are lips and our mouth shall show forth thy praise’, on the grounds that it was not found in the Bible but was translated out of the Roman liturgy. Later Puritans especially Cartwright, objected to Cranmer’s Prayer Book as ‘an unperfect book, culled and picked out of that popish dunghill, the Mass book full of abominations’.

Ryle sums up our position well, ‘There is none certainly in the list of our Reformers to whom the Church of England, on the whole, is so much indebted. He was only a mortal man, and had his weaknesses and infirmities, it must be admitted;

but still he was a great man, and a good man.’

His story is of a man thrust into high office young, with half-reformed views, in turbulent and dangerous times. He was slow to come to firm opinions, hard to convince, but once convinced, he was honest enough to change his mind, and admitted doing so on many subjects.

His life and death are well known, so we turn to some of the questions his life raises.

## **Accusations Answered**

His detractors ever since his death have accused him of five things.

**First, of Heresy.** On the day Cranmer was due to die he was set on a platform and Dr Cole who preached for two hours, ended by calling on the condemned man to profess his faith, ”that all men may understand that you are a catholic indeed”. “I will do it,” said the Archbishop, “and that with a good will”. The speech had been sent to the printer three days before, ending with Cranmer repudiating his writings on Holy Communion as “untrue books” and asserting “transubstantiation”, [that the bread and wine were actually the very body blood, bones and sinews of Christ, and that the worshipper chewed them with his teeth and swallowed them with his throat].

Cranmer took out a piece of paper, but what they did not know was that he had rewritten the last paragraph. He read the original draft until he reached the last paragraph. This is what he actually delivered on the morning of 21st March 1556:

“...and now I come to the great thing which so much troubleth my conscience, more than anything I ever did, or said in my whole life, and that is the setting forth of a writing contrary to the truth; which now I here 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 might be. And that is all such bills and papers, which I have written or signed with my hand since my degradation, wherein I have written many things untrue. And forasmuch as my hand offended, writing contrary to my heart, my hand shall first be punished there-for; for, may I come to the fire, it shall be first burned. And as for the Pope, I refuse him, as Christ’s enemy, and antichrist, with all his false doctrine. And as for the sacrament, I believe as I have taught in my book against the Bishop of Winchester, the which my book teacheth so true a doctrine of the sacrament, that it shall stand at the last day before the judgment of God, where the papistical doctrine contrary thereto shall be ashamed to show her face.”

We think of him, correctly, as a Protestant martyr, but he saw himself as a catholic martyr. He was showing himself, as Dr. Cole demanded 'a catholic indeed', by abjuring his recantations, the Papal claims and the real presence. To him, as to all the reformers, and to us, Protestantism was precisely a quest for catholicism—that is, for solidarity with the catholic church that the Lord Jesus founded. The reformation was the work of churchmen, not a lay reaction against ecclesiastical superstition, tyranny, and graft, nor an outbreak of nationalistic separatism, but a conscious attempt to restore to the Church of the West the catholicity it had lost. To the reformers catholicity was a theological and historical concept, its essence lying in faithfulness to the Gospel word and sacramental teaching and usage of the apostles at the beginning. Thus to them catholicity was apostolicity, and apostolicity faithfulness to the Apostles' doctrines. The Catholic Church had been corrupted, and there apostolicity was lacking. Cranmer judged that three or four centuries before his time due to Papal absolutism, priestcraft, the doctrine of the Mass, the neglect of the Bible, both all over Europe and in Britain there had been a grievous lapse from true Catholicism, and the overriding concern of all true churchmen should be to see this restored.

**Secondly, of Duplicity.** It is sufficient to say with Dr. Loades 'Controversy over the final moments of Cranmer's life began almost before the fire which burned him was cold'. In the oath of obedience to the Pope which he gave at his triple consecration, as bishop, Archbishop and Papal Legate, he swore obedience, but immediately followed it by a solemn protestation declaring that his oath would not override the law of God and his loyalty to the King, or act to the hindrance of 'reformation of the Christian religion, the government of the English Church, the prerogative of the crown, or the well-being of the same commonwealth', and he swore 'to prosecute and reform matters wheresoever they seem to me to be for the reform of the English church.' Thus he is accused of benefiting from papal bulls while formally repudiating their authority.' The words have been said 'to reflect no credit on him at all'. The opposite view of this is that he had the honesty and forethought to say what he had long intended plainly, and the only reason the Pope was duplicitous enough to let him do so, was political fear of losing Henry, and so England.

**Thirdly, of Temporizing.** He has been accused of other acts of 'duplicity'. 'The wretched Cranmer' is alleged to have followed a 'discreditable course of temporizing', all along, including his role in the 'pretended divorce of Henry VIII'.

Another accusation is his attitude to John Lambert, alias Nicholson, a fellow student from Cranmer's days at Jesus College, who had preached in 1536 that it was sinful to pray to saints, thus arousing the wrath of Latimer and Cranmer, who had not yet had their eyes opened to that truth. Lambert's later trial in 1538 with which

Cranmer was connected, has caused much heart searching amongst Cranmer's biographers. The reason is that Bishop Tunstall, seeking to embarrass Cranmer later in his life, reminded him of what he had said against Lambert in defence of the real presence, (Lambert was burned for heresy). Cranmer had no hesitation in admitting that he had then defended 'the untruth which I then took for the truth ... but praise be to the everliving God who hath wiped away those Satanish scales from mine eyes'. This is the answer to many of the Anglo Catholic statements that Cranmer and the other reformers believed what Anglo Catholics do in such matters as invocation of saints and much else. We answer that if two trains are travelling, one from Edinburgh to London, the other from London to Edinburgh, there is a fleeting point at which they are at the same point. Cranmer was going from Rome to Protestantism, the Anglo Catholics from Protestantism to Rome, fast.

The other side of the temporizing accusations brought by Protestants later, is that he sought a middle way between Rome and Protestantism, and did not stand up for the Gospel. The Reformation was predicted all along by Catholics as certain to open the way for social and religious radicalism. This troubled Luther, Calvin, the Continental Reformers and the English ones, as it had Wycliffe in the Peasant's Revolt being laid at his door. That is why Luther took sides against the Peasant's revolt, Calvin's attitude to the Anabaptists, and explains the opposition to what we would regard as good Gospel men by senior reformers to anyone they feared was going too far. That he was against perceived extremism does prove that he sought a middle way. What he sought was a return to the catholic faith of the true Church in it's early days.

In the Prayer Book Preface Cranmer allowed all that the Bible did not forbid, a position very different from that of John Knox who took Calvin's position, that all stemming from fallen human nature was unfit to be used in the worship of God, as man's mind is fallen. They accuse the Church of England of not holding to Scripture's doctrine of depravity and say that only what is found in Scripture is to be used, as this is in the words and form God has revealed. Thus hymns are out, Psalms being our Divine Hymn Book, and all ancient forms of prayer are out unless specifically contained in Scripture. We reply that there are three parts to worship, prayer, praise and preaching and reading from the Bible. If the only words allowed are what is contained in the Bible, what of prayer and preaching? And whilst the Psalms prophesy of Christ, we have clearer light than the Old Testament. They also refused set forms and wished spontaneity.

**Fourth, of Subservience.** Another allegation is his 'general subservience to court life, whether to Sovereigns or to protectors.' Cranmer found it very hard to be disobedient to his Sovereign, even Mary.

## Cranmer's Trial

All these allegations are covered by a look at his trial and condemnation in Oxford in 1555. The government had dealt with the plotters in the attempt to set Lady Jane Grey on the throne, and Wyatt's rebellion. They then wished to confront the religious leaders of the Edwardian Reformation, and it would take the form of an attempt to destroy their doctrines before the people of England. The three singled out as representing everything the Catholic establishment hated most were Ridley, Latimer and Cranmer, as between them representing the whole of the Protestant movement. In the words of the Cambridge University when it chose its men to oppose them they were 'the especial instigators and shock-troops' of the attack on the Church's unity (so Strype). Cranmer was also in the conspiracy against the Queen, though late and unwillingly, under pressure, like Calvin was over Servetus' death.

We have differing contradictory accounts of his trial. Foxe is the best, and seems to have used accounts from those present. The other main ones is 'Cranmer's Recantacions', a Roman Catholic account, and Cranmer's later notes, with Strype. It is a reconstruction, and so open to historians to argue. The whole idea of the Roman Catholics was to secure their most important recantation so far in the whole of Europe. That thread runs through the whole affair, and their treatment of him was designed to wear him down by psychological pressure. The trial was merely a show, his fate had already been decided.

The Pope had appointed James Brooks, an old enemy of Cranmer's since university days as his Inquisitor-General, and he sat with lawyers representing both the Crown, and Bonner and Gardiner. This trial was so important that it was given preference and Ridley and Latimer's trials put back a month. Thus they showed that Cranmer was the real architect of the English Reformation in the eyes of his enemies. To give the trial a semblance of impartiality Cranmer was released from prison and put under house arrest for the trial. Cranmer's whole life was put on trial, his perjured papal oaths, his marriage, his public writings. This put him on the defensive, for he was a master of the theology of the Lord's Supper, and having lost a disputation on this with him earlier, they left it aside and more advantageous ground for the prosecution was chosen, the inconsistencies of his career. To defend himself was a difficult task, unless prepared to die for his beliefs in the fire.

**Fifthly, of Cowardice.** Cranmer did show weakness, and to buy his life recanted on six successive occasions, going to great lengths in the end to deny all he had stood for. Late at night, under great pressure and in tears, he finally signed the last of his recantations. Against that it must be borne in mind that he alone in all the realm dared to stand up and plead for Anne Boleyn's life, and he settled the affairs of the family after they fell from favour. He was a marked man, in continual danger all his career, his only safety on earth being the King's favour, a notoriously fickle thing. His

enemies hatched many plots, and did their utmost continually to undermine his authority, using able men.

He came in and showed his obedience to the Queen by taking off his cap to the lawyers representing her, but not to the central figure, the Inquisitor general, as Crammer had consistently refused papal authority. This was made worse as Brooks was seated directly under the pyx containing the reserved sacrament. Cranmer thus slighted both the man and the real presence. Brooks then set out to outline all Cranmer's inconsistencies, from his disobedience when first appointed to Canterbury, betraying the Pope's trust, summing up two decades with the phrase 'first your heart hath fallen, then your tongue and your pen.' Worse still these lapses 'besides your own damage, have caused many more to fall.' Cranmer replied at length that he made a careful distinction between loyalty to the crown and complete rejection of the pope, saying that it was great grief to him to see two royal prosecutors collaborating with the representative of a foreign power. He said if he had offended against the law of the land the Queen had powers to punish him, but he had always made a distinction between papal canon law and the law of the realm, saying 'he who swears to both must needs incur perjury to one'. He dealt with the charges that he had promoted heresy and schism, saying he had devoted many years to proving the Pope to be the antichrist (whose great mark was that he usurped authority over princes). He held the charges to be absurd.

The Queen's lawyer Martin then defined the spheres of the two authorities. Cranmer then repudiated Brooks' authority and said he could not tell who the Pope was 'unless he be antichrist'. He pointed out Brooks' past inconsistency. The Queen's other lawyer, Story, raised the relation of the Royal Supremacy in relation to the Church. Was there a Church before any King became a Christian? Now Cranmer, 15 years before, had argued that proper Church discipline could not be before there was a Christian King, and the Church became perfect only when there was a Christian King. Martin argued that the authority was Peter and his successors. Then the lawyers made Cranmer reluctantly confess that all oaths, good and bad, ought to be obeyed. Then admit that he connived, however reluctantly at becoming Archbishop, in condemning Lambert, and at changing the text of the Jonas catechism between editions. They then asked him who was Supreme Head of the Church? Cranmer replied Christ. Then not Henry VIII? Cranmer said he meant not so, but that every king in his own realm. Then what about Nero? That forced Cranmer to say, in the end that Nero was head of the Church. Was that creditable to Henry VIII?

The next inconsistencies were his marriages. To Joan? That was before his ordination His second marriage? That was an act of personal consistency. He defended his Eucharistic doctrine well. They tried to make out that he had changed his position three times, meaning he was unstable, he replied 'I but taught two contrary doctrines of the same'.

The cross examination then turned to his Archiepiscopal oaths of loyalty, to which he could only answer 'that he did nothing but by the laws of the realm.' However he also answered that he avowed his intention of reforming the Church. In his account of proceedings he said he tried to make them see this. Thus he had to agree that almost everything thrown at him had some truth in it, but said he never meant any implications drawn from this of treachery, disobedience or heresy.

We must leave the trial there, except to say of the number of university dons from Oxford fetched as witnesses, some had personal grudges against Cranmer for his action against them in the past. At least one had been helped by him in the past and taken Cranmer's side against Stokesley. They do not come over well as honest witnesses.

These things are important as they are still charges brought against Cranmer by his various enemies.

As for his change of heart before his burning, let those who condemn him remember what TC Hammond said in a broadcast address in Sydney, Australia at the 400th anniversary in 1956.

'With a duplicity which nobody can commend, Cranmer was subject to treatment of an atrocious kind. Pressure was brought to bear on him to purchase his life by recantation. We regret, as everybody regrets, the painful circumstances that led him to deny what was his earnest conviction. But as none of us have been placed in the painful position of having to purchase our freedom at the cost of our convictions, it may be that we should be more patient than we usually are in offering our censures upon those who were weak. We must remember that the period was a time of transition. Foxe, in the Book of Martyrs, draws attention to the fact that there were something like 40 or 50 recantations in the time of Henry VIII and a little later. Men were convinced of the truth of the reformed position and then hesitated, not only because it was a new position and had not yet, as it were, proved to the full the reasonable grounds on which the position could be held, but also because the acceptance of these new views involved them in serious personal trouble. And so they recanted. Recantations were not on one side only. We have such men as Harding, who became most bitter persecutors of the new faith, and yet had at one time adopted it, no doubt from sincere convictions. These are lamentable features in human nature, and Cranmer yielded, to his own great regret. He forfeited his claim to be a leader of Christian thought in integrity. He gave way and signing recantation after recantation, at last openly renounced that conviction for which he suffered a great deal and which he had thought to impress on others. But he retrieved his sad mistake. At the stake he confounded his adversaries and his declaration that he would thrust his hand into the fire as that had offended, has gone down in history and ennobled Cranmer. By one

great act he revoked the evil of his past unworthy compromise, and stands before the world today as a repentant, avowed Protestant, one who was faithful in the end that to Christ.’

## **Cranmer’s Importance**

Listen to a modern and typical; view “Thomas Cranmer was a notable ecclesiastical statesman and much involved in the separation of the Church of England from the papacy. As an archbishop of the Reformation, he presided over a Church in transition, revising services, re-formulating doctrine and re-drafting canon law. In pastoral ministry, he afforded both faithful and not so faithful a reasonable diversity of worship within a single comprehensive church. His considerable intellectual development, a lifetime’s study of the Scriptures, and his characteristic moderation make his writings of real significance for the English-speaking world”. That is the blurb on a recent book by Brooks, Cambridge lecturer in Reformation Studies.

Our view is that in his lifetime his powers were regularly underestimated, and the same habit still persists after 450 years.

## **His Early Theology**

He wrote a treatise entitled *A Defence of the True and Catholic Doctrine of the Sacrament...grounded and stablished upon God’s holy word, and approved by the consent of the most ancient Doctors of the Church*. He wrote that as a reply to a book against his position by Gardiner of Winchester, and it represents Cranmer’s mature views.

It is important to see how he reached those views. He was intellectually cautious and conservative, painstaking and thorough, his convictions forming slowly after long and deliberate study. As a young man he was studious and deeply conventional. He wrote regretfully in 1551 of the time ‘many years past’, when he held ‘that error of the real presence...as of transubstantiation, of the sacrifice propitiatory of the priests in the mass, of pilgrimages, purgatory, pardons, and many other superstitions and errors that came from Rome; being brought up from youth in them, and noursled therein for lack of good instruction from my youth, the outrageous floods of papistical errors at that time overflowing the world’

He graduated and studied humanism, Faber, Erasmus and good Latin authors. Humanism was not secularism, but most humanists, like Erasmus and More, remained in the Roman Catholic Church. In 1517 Luther challenged the thinking of the day.

## **His Bible Study**

Cranmer wrote of that time: ‘considering what great controversy was in matters of religion (not only in trifles, but in the chieftest articles of our salvation)’ he ‘bent

himself to try out the truth herein; and... applied his whole study three years to the...Scriptures' (using we believe Erasmus' NT). 'After this he gave his mind to good writers, both new and old, not rashly running over them, for he was a slow reader, but a diligent marker of whatsoever he read; for he seldom read without a pen in hand...'

## **His Maturing Faith**

Early on he came to believe the pope to be the antichrist, and later that papal claims were null and void, and agreed with Luther, that the Scriptures vested all civil and ecclesiastical power under Christ in the person of the supreme civil magistrate, who in England was the King. Foxe says that at his examination before Brooks in 1555, he said how that in 1533 he had scrupled to become the Archbishop of Canterbury, because, 'if he accepted that office then he must receive it at the pope's hand; which he neither would nor could do, for that his highness was only supreme governor of this Church of England, as well in causes ecclesiastical as temporal, and that the full right and donation of all manner of bishoprics and benefices... appertained to his grace, and not to any other foreign authority.' He said that the King staying a while musing on that, asked me how I was able to prove it. At which time I alleged many texts out of the scriptures, and the fathers also'. He is also reported as, 'approving the supreme and highest authority of kings in their realms and dominions, disclosing therewithal the intolerable usurpation of the pope of Rome.' Of the papacy in 1536 he wrote to Henry that he had daily prayed for many years that he might see the power of Rome destroyed, and now rejoiced that in England, at any rate, his prayers had been answered.

The next matter was acceptance of Luther's 'Justification by faith.' Cranmer was the main author of *The Institution of a Christian Man* (1538). That is the first clear statement, but much he wrote earlier like *Notes on Justification* and his time in Nuremberg (1532) shows he probably came to believe this much earlier.

Although he is not noted for any defence of this, his whole thinking on Holy Communion is based on this, that the sacraments depend upon free grace, the reality of one's free forgiveness, acceptance and adoption in Christ, and sacraments are confirming the promises of the Gospel and occasions for deepening and strengthening faith. Thus the sacraments are the opposite of the Roman view, that they confer grace. Rather they are about the Gospel, the promises preached and held forth visibly. This is the key of the Reformation, and first appears in Cranmer in 1538 in *Of the use of the Sacraments*.

The third change was to deny the Real presence, which he says was in 1546 when 'Dr. Ridley did confer with me and by sundry persuasions and authorities of doctors drew me from my opinion'. Cranmer published the Justus Jonas catechism in 1548 which could be read to have taught Lutheran Consubstantiation, but Cranmer

insisted more than once that the catechism taught no such thing, ‘although divers ignorant persons, not used to read ancient authors, not acquainted with their phrase and manner of speech, misread it to assert the real presence and corporeal reception of a corporeally present Christ.’ Thus Cranmer, whilst keeping to the words and spirit of the Justus Jonas catechism unobtrusively edited out all that pointed to an unambiguously Lutheran doctrine, as distinct from his own ‘catholic’ teaching.

## **His Prayer Book**

For the last three years of Edward’s reign Cranmer had to retire almost completely from public life in order to produce both the second Prayer Book, his reply to Gardiner, the Articles and canon law revision.

Cranmer was never original in thought, wishing simply to be a good catholic, and to find words that reflected accurately the Bible, the Fathers and the Reformation teaching. His gifts were in language, understanding ancient documents, writing beautiful prose, seeing deep, discriminating, comparing and in synthesis. His finished work was free of personal quirks and oddities, unlike Luther’s. The ideas will never date, even if the language does. The services have a timeless quality because they contain the distilled thought of centuries, he having traversed the whole field of historic Christian exposition in order to sift out and bring into focus the immensities and eternities of the Christian faith. He hated controversy and systems, and wanted only to put into worship form (the Prayer Book) and into confessional form (the Articles) the Christian verities. Thus he produced three great Homilies in 1547 on Salvation, faith, and Good Works, and a writing called the *Defence*. His gift was in liturgy, and to know what should go in and where, in a service, is based on a thorough grasp of theology, and a mastery of language.

Note how he regarded Scripture, for in reply to Henry’s proposal to substitute ‘suffer us not to be led into temptation’ for ‘lead us not into temptation’, Cranmer replied to the King in the *Institution* ‘we should not alter any word in the scripture, which wholly is ministered unto us by the Ghost of God, 2 Pet. I [verse 21] although it shall appear in many places to signify unto us much absurdity; but first the scripture must be set out in God’s words’—and then one can explain and comment.

## **Did Cranmer Stop Half-way?**

A common accusation against Cranmer today is that he went back to the Fathers in his liturgy, but was mistaken in believing that they were synonymous with the New Testament beliefs and practices. Thus the purity which he sought, he did not find. He founded a Church that needed further reformation to conform it to the New Testament. The answer is that Cranmer accepted all that Scripture did not forbid in making his liturgy. Many who accuse him of not going far enough, believe that what is not in Scripture is to be rejected as unfit for Christian worship.

Cranmer did not really hold the 'golden age' of the Church to be when Christian Princes ruled, although he was trapped into having to admit to having written this, by prosecuting lawyers when fighting for his life in court at the end. Remember, his views matured slowly, and he must be judged by his most mature beliefs, not by the troubled and half-reformed path which led up to them. His own views of where the perfect Church was to be found, when he not under such pressure, were set out in an anonymous tract *Of Unwritten Verities*, ascribed by Strype to Cranmer, and certainly wholly in his style. In it he explains that the New Testament had been written, and with the Old Testament, 'authorised' in the Church (he means recognised and declared authoritative) under the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit in the 'golden time' that followed Pentecost—'the time of the most high and gracious shedding out of the mercy of God into the world, that ever was from the beginning of the world unto this day.' By that he claims: first, that the witness of Christ's apostles, uniquely inspired as it was by the Holy Spirit, provides the standard of faith for all after ages; and second, that the authority of the NT is not a conferred authority by ecclesiastical enactment, but by the intrinsic witness it contains; and third, that the canon of scripture is not guaranteed to us by an infallible church say-so, but by the Holy Spirit's faithfulness to his Pentecostal mission to glorify the exalted Christ before men's eyes. Having inspired the written accounts to the glory of Christ, the Spirit did not omit to move the infant church to acknowledge their truth, authority and edifying power. Thus Cranmer accepted the scriptures as the fixed element in catholicity, 'and more receive we not, because these old fathers of the first church testify in their books, that there was no more than these required to be believed as the scripture of God.'

He held the sufficiency of scripture to salvation, their usefulness as a means of grace, and the most important matter for a Christian was to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the Bible. Here in lie his attempts to get the Bible into the hands of the people, and to reform the liturgy and the lectionary so as to make England a Bible-loving, Bible reading church. This was his ideal: acknowledgement of human sinfulness personally, and acceptance of grace alone for forgiveness. To him the trouble was the mass, and its 'satisfaction for sins'.

'Take away the root, ground, and fountain of all the chief errors, whereby the bishop of Rome corrupted the pure foundation of Christian faith and doctrine... satisfactory masses, trentals, scala coelu, foundations of chantries, monasteries, pardons, and a thousand other abuses...'

Rather 'Christ's 'full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world.' Cranmer therefore taught faith as the only ground of salvation. He also taught election and final perseverance, and good works springing out of faith. Thus the Prayer Book order is sin-grace-faith in sequence. The

Holy Communion, as an enemy of Cranmer's theology, Dom Gregory Dix, the main brains behind the Alternative Services Book acknowledged, 'As a piece of liturgical craftsmanship it is in the first rank...it is *not* a disorderly attempt at a catholic rite, but the only effective attempt ever made to give liturgical expression to the doctrine of 'justification by faith alone'.'

## **Cranmer Today**

Cranmer's writings are obscure at times, over-subtle and his meaning not entirely clear at points. All this we freely admit, but he is still correct and the way ahead for English Christians lies down the path he pioneered. We also admit some of his ideas are fragmentary and undeveloped, that he misread certain Fathers, in a few instances, and that he appeals to one side of the Fathers, and that he had less fire and energy about him than other great reformers of his time and is guilty occasionally of over-simplification and not following the logic of his own ideas.

We reject however the vogue amongst ecumenicists, Romanists and fellow-travellers—where they will even deign to speak of the Reformation, to set the Fathers and the Reformers against one another, and Reformer against Reformer. This, in another form, is not unknown amongst evangelicals, setting the Bible against both Fathers and Reformers, and the Reformers against each other.

There stands Cranmer, the man who has suffered the opprobrium of the centuries. Macaulay in his History of England, summed him up thus: 'Saintly in his professions, unscrupulous in his dealings, zealous for nothing, bold in speculation, a coward and a timeserver in action, a placable enemy and a lukewarm friend, he was in every way qualified to arrange the terms of the coalition between the religious and worldly enemies of Popery.' Is that so? Thomas Scott, the commentator, writing of his own earlier unreasonable hatred of Methodism, said, 'Such is the language of prejudice.'

Let us honour this servant of God, the central figure God raised up to reform the English church.

# THOMAS CRANMER'S LEGACY\*

David N Samuel

**2 Timothy 1:7** *“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”*

HERE, on this spot, four hundred and fifty years ago, Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, was burned to death. Why? That is the great question. Was he guilty of some great crime of murder, violence or robbery? No, he was burned to death because he denied the supreme authority of the pope, and that the bread and wine of the communion service were the actual body and blood of Christ.

Unlike the world of today, the world then was dominated by religion, but it was a religion of fear.

First, there was the fear of purgatory. After death, the church taught, the soul went to purgatory, where its sufferings were as intense as those of hell, but were of temporal not eternal duration. If you had money, you might shorten your time there by buying indulgences from the pope.

Secondly, there was the fear of Jesus Christ. That may seem strange, but then people could not read the Bible. Jesus was portrayed by the church as a judge, not as a Saviour. You did not go to Jesus for mercy or pity. You were supposed to go to Mary his mother, “the Refuge of Sinners.”

Thirdly, there was fear of the priest. In order to receive forgiveness you had to confess your sins to a priest. He had enormous power. He could withhold the sacraments from you, and cut you off from grace and salvation.

All this fear was the fruit of ignorance—ignorance of the Bible. The Bible was a closed book, few people could read it. Much of the popular preaching was not based on the Bible at all. It was about the legends of the saints. Cranmer wrote of these things, and condemned “the errors of the mass, of pilgrimages, purgatory, pardons, and many other superstitions and errors that came from Rome, being brought up from my youth in them .... The outrageous flood of papistical errors at the time overflowing the world.”

But this was all a travesty, a caricature of true religion. *“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”*

Now, the Reformation changed all that, and delivered people from such slavery and darkness. The Reformation began in Germany with Martin Luther. Luther's great quest was, How can I find a gracious God? a merciful God? He followed conscientiously the teaching of the church; he became a monk. He fasted, prayed

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\* A talk given at Oxford on the 450th Anniversary of the martyrdom of Thomas Cranmer.

and scourged himself. But it was of no avail. Then he began to read the Bible. There he found a gracious God. He discovered that we are justified by grace through faith in Christ—not by works.

These teachings of the Reformation came across to England, to Cambridge, where Cranmer was at the University. Cranmer was a very cautious man. He did not accept these teachings straightaway. He set himself to study the Bible for three years. And after that the Fathers of the church. He came to the conclusion that Luther was right; that the teachings of Rome and the Bible did not agree. He came to believe that we are justified (put right with God) not by works, but by faith in Jesus Christ. He later wrote: “This is the strong rock and foundation of Christian religion . . . . This whosoever denieth is not to be counted for a Christian man.”

Now Cranmer did three things to establish this religion of the Bible in England.

First, he encouraged the King to set up the Bible in English in all parish churches. He wanted people to read and hear the Bible in their own language. He believed the salvation and well-being of the individual and the nation depended on hearing and obeying the Truth. The church is not a law unto itself; it must be ruled by the teaching of Scripture. He wrote, “If the church proceed further to make any new articles of faith besides the Scripture, or contrary to the Scripture, or direct not the form of life according to the same; then it is not the pillar of truth, nor the church of Christ.” Let us note that well! It is a warning for our time.

Secondly, he substituted for the mass a simple service of Holy Communion. The central idea of the mass is that it is a sacrifice for sins. Each time the priest offers a mass he is said to be performing a sacrifice to take away sins. But the Bible teaches that Christ has made on perfect sacrifice for sins, once, for all upon the cross. The work of redemption is finished, never to be repeated. Cranmer said the “the sacrifice of the mass is injurious to the sacrifice of Christ . . . . it is an abominable blasphemy to give that office and dignity to a priest . . . . which pertaineth only to Christ.”

Thirdly, Cranmer brought preaching back to its proper place. “Preaching”, he said, “is the office of salvation.” That is, preaching is the God-appointed means by which mercy, pardon, and righteousness are proclaimed to sinners. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” Take away preaching and you take away salvation. It is the means God has chosen to bring grace, forgiveness and peace to men.

So you see, Cranmer’s reformation of religion in England replaced the religion of feat with that of “power, love and a sound mind.”

Bishop Ryle summed it all up in this way: “The Reformation found Englishmen steeped in ignorance, and left them in possession of knowledge; it found them without Bibles, and left them with a Bible in every parish: found them in darkness, and left them in comparative light; found their priest-ridden and left them enjoying the liberty Christ bestows; found them strangers to the blood of atonement, to faith,

grace, and holiness, and left them with the key to those things in their hands; found them blind and left them seeing; found them slaves and left them free. Forever let us thank God for the Reformation.”

Now, if we could leave the matter there, that would be just fine; but we cannot. The enemies of the Reformation were ever on the watch, and when there was a change of monarch they saw their chance. Mary, an ardent Roman Catholic, came to the thrones. The Reformation was suppressed by force. Cranmer and other leaders were arrested and thrown into prison. Under prolonged ill-treatment, among many other things being brought out to the roof of his prison to see Latimer and Ridley burned to death, he gave way, and signed a recantation of his beliefs.

But although he had recanted Mary still intended he should die. He was taken to St Mary's Church for a show trial. He was expected to make his submission, but instead he astonished the whole assembly by declaring: “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, I believe as I have taught in my book against the bishop of Winchester, the which my book teacheth so true a doctrine of the sacrament, that it shall stand at the last day before the judgment of God, where the papistical doctrine contrary thereto shall be ashamed to show her face.”

Yes, and it will stand! For Cranmer was speaking truth, eternal truth, the everlasting Gospel. But his words were too much for those who accused him. Pandemonium broke out. “Stop the heretic's mouth and take him away!” they cried. And they pulled him down from the platform and hurried him away to execution.

He was brought here to this spot where we stand, and fastened to a stake with an iron chain. The faggots were heaped about him. Then the fire was lit. As it rose up, he thrust his right hand, with which he had signed the recantation, into the flame, and held it there till it was burned, repeating, “This unworthy right hand.” Also using the words of Stephen, the first martyr, “*Lord Jesus receive my spirit.*”

So ended the life of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury.

In conclusion, there are two things I will say. First, to you who are Protestants, ministers and people, stand fast in the faith of Christ and the Bible. Do not compromise. Hold fast to the truth as it is in Jesus, and do not swerve from it to the left or the right, whatever the consequences. God will honour such faithfulness.

Secondly, to you who have not thought about these things and are simply living for the present world, the life and death of this man, Thomas Cranmer, is a testimony to spiritual reality, to the world to come. You, too, have an immortal soul. You, too, will one day appear before God. Awaken now to the realities of life and death, to God, and righteousness, and your eternal destiny. Like Thomas Cranmer, put your trust in Jesus Christ. Be sure of this: there is salvation in no other, “*For there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*” Acts 4:12. Amen.

# THE ATHANASIAN CREED

*A Sermon preached at St. Mary's Chapel, Castle Street, Reading, on  
Trinity Sunday 2006*

**Roger Beckwith**

**Matthew 28:18-20** *And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world".* Amen.

THESE words, spoken by the risen Christ to his followers on a mountain in Galilee, were the words of a man, to whom had been given, as he says, all the power of God (‘all power in heaven and in earth’). This, then, was a man unlike any other man – a man to whom rightly belonged all the power of God (and who now, in his glorification, would openly exercise it) because he was also God. There you have the mystery of the Incarnation. And he sends his followers out to teach all nations, baptizing them in the threefold name, the name of the Father (his Father), of the Son (himself) and of the Holy Spirit (his Spirit). There you have the mystery of the Trinity. The Incarnation and the Trinity: these are the two great mysteries which are expounded for us in the Athanasian Creed, the creed which we used this morning. The mystery of the Trinity is that there is only one God and yet three divine persons are this one God, and the mystery of the Incarnation is that one of those three divine persons, Jesus, became human as well as remaining divine.

The early church was troubled by many attempts to rationalize away these two mysteries. We call the attempts ‘heresies’. Some misguided people said, if there are three persons, there must be three gods. Others, if God is one, the three persons cannot really be distinct, but just different appearances of the one person. Others again, if God is one, and the three persons are distinct, only one of the three persons, the Father, can be God, but not the Son or the Holy Spirit, who are not God at all. This third way of rationalizing away the mystery is perhaps the worst, because it is so degrading to Jesus and to the Holy Spirit. It is called Arianism, after its fourth-century propagator Arius, and it had more success than any of these other mistakes. Arianism is not dead even today: Unitarianism is really a form of Arianism, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses are Arians. Misguided people also attempted to rationalize away Jesus’s two natures. Some said, if he has two natures, he must be two different persons; others said, if he is one person, one of his two natures must have swallowed

up the other. In all these cases, as you can see, human reason is being applied to dissolve the mystery, but the church found that, if it was to be faithful to the Bible, it has to live with the mystery. God, after all, is greater than man, and we should not be surprised if we cannot fully understand the mystery of his being.

The Nicene Creed, which we use at Holy Communion, was one of the church's ways of guarding people against Arianism, and making it clear that the Son and the Holy Spirit are God, no less than the Father. It describes the Son, you will remember, as 'God of God', which is the old English way of saying 'God *from* God' (God the Son from God the Father); and the Creed describes the Holy Spirit as 'the Lord', giving him the other divine title, corresponding to the Hebrew name Jehovah. The Athanasian Creed, which we used as our creed this morning, was another and more detailed preservative against Arianism, dating from the fifth or sixth century, about a hundred years or so later than the Nicene Creed. It is called the Athanasian Creed not because the great theologian Athanasius of Alexandria wrote it but because it expresses his teaching, Athanasius having been the chief opponent of the teaching of Arius, back in the fourth century when Arius lived. It is the only one of the three creeds which was originally composed in Latin, not Greek, and it comes from Gaul (ancient France) or Spain, where Arianism was then rampant: the Gothic kings of Spain were Arians.

The creed, as you will have seen, falls into two parts, the first part dealing with the mystery of the Trinity and the second part dealing with the mystery of the Incarnation. In each case, the mystery is very simple but very deep; it is at first stated by the creed in the simplest terms, and it is then thought through. With regard to the Trinity, we are told at the outset, 'The Catholic Faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in unity, neither confounding (mixing up) the Persons, nor dividing the Substance (the being or nature of God, which is single and unique)'. Then, with regard to the Incarnation, we are told at the beginning of the second half of the creed, 'The right Faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man'. Everything else follows from these two basic statements.

The Athanasian Creed is well known for its severe warnings, which have often troubled people. The Cornish poet Richard Polwhele, who lived at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and was a clergyman, recalls in his memoirs a visit he paid to another parish to conduct the morning service on a Sunday when the Athanasian Creed was due to be used, and he was asked before the service whether he intended to use it. When he enquired the reason for the question, he was told, If you do use it, there is no lunch for you up at the squire's house afterwards! The squire was probably one of those who disliked the warnings the creed gives. But to understand the true purpose of these warnings, we need to see the creed in the context where it was composed, and where there was a real danger of people

deliberately rejecting orthodox Christianity and choosing to be Arians. It was a choice between truth and error, between honouring Jesus Christ and dishonouring him. The creed is not thinking of people who might make a mistake, or might not be very well informed, or even of people who might be inconsistent in their thinking (as many of us are), but of people who might make a deliberate choice to set their face against the belief that Jesus is God, as the Arians did, or to turn their backs on this belief, after previously holding it, and to become Arians instead. And if they did this, the creed said, they were imperilling their salvation, as indeed they were.

The warning statements come at the beginning, the middle and the end of the creed. It starts, 'Whosoever will be saved' (and 'will', in older English, is not the equivalent of 'shall' but means 'wish to'; so) 'Whosoever wishes to be saved' (you have a choice, says the writer of the creed, so make the right choice), 'Whosoever wishes to be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith'. 'Before all things' probably does not mean 'above all things' but literally 'before'—this is the first conscious step in a Christian's life: his first step is that he 'hold the catholic (or Christian) faith'. The word 'catholic' is a Greek word, literally meaning 'universal'. It does not refer to the faith of the *Roman* Catholic church, which *claims* to be universal, but only by a great exaggeration. 'The catholic faith' is the universal Christian faith, the biblical faith, 'mere Christianity' as C.S. Lewis called it. Errors and heresies belong to particular persons and groups, but the catholic faith belongs to the whole Christian church, the church in general. And having first 'held the catholic faith', the creed says, you need to continue in the faith—to 'keep' it. And so the creed goes on, 'which faith except everyone do *keep* whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly'. Arianism dishonours Christ, so have nothing to do with it, the creed tells us; if you go that way, you are leaving Christianity behind.

The other warning statements depend on this one. In the middle of the creed we have two warnings, 'He therefore that will be (wishes to be) saved must thus think of the Trinity' and 'Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ'. At the end of the creed we have, 'This is the Catholic Faith (the universal Christian faith) which except a man believe faithfully he cannot be saved'.

No one much likes being warned: it means that there is danger. But warnings are not given to destroy us, they are given to preserve us. If we choose deliberately against the Christian faith, as these Spaniards and Gauls of the fifth or sixth century were in danger of doing, we are choosing against Jesus Christ, we are choosing not to have him for our Lord and Saviour. It is a choice we should really be glad to be warned against, is it not? And this creed certainly does warn us!

But before concluding, let us go back and look again at the positive truths which the creed highlights, that 'we *worship* one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity' and

that ‘our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man’. Certainly, if we want to be biblical, we ‘must thus think of the Trinity’. But the Trinity is not just a doctrine, an object of thought—he is personal, an object of worship. The Trinity is another name for God, and, as the creed says, ‘we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in unity’. If we worship the Father (as we do when we say the Lord’s Prayer), if we worship the Son (as we do when we use the prayer ‘O Saviour of the world’ in the Visitation of the Sick) and if we worship the Holy Spirit (as we do when use the hymn ‘Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire’ in the Ordinal), we are worshipping the Holy Trinity in each of his three persons. This is the Christian way of prayer. May we never stray away from it.

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# “BY WHAT AUTHORITY?”

Edward J Malcolm

THOMAS Cranmer restored the authority of the Church of England. He did so by exposing the pretended authority of the Bishop of Rome as being based on a false premise. Freed from the shackles of superstitious and oppressive practices the Church of England flourished, under God, as a place in which “the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ’s ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite unto the same” (Article XIX, *Of the Church*). However, for Cranmer and the English Reformers, as well as for those on the Continent, authority had its source in God himself. The means through which that authority is transmitted to the Church is the Bible, the infallible and inspired Word of God. Cranmer set the Bible back in its rightful place, a place from which it had been dislodged by the claims of the papacy and by the attention given to unwritten—and so unverifiable—tradition. Reason, divorced from the authoritative instruction of the Bible, became the ally of tradition and so of oppression. The Protestant Reformation, with its return to the centrality of the Bible, restored the godly order and authority.

The Anglican Communion is, at the present time, in the throes of a crisis over authority. Once again, reason stands in opposition to Scripture, and tradition finds itself being drawn in as the ally of reason. The result is the bringing in of practices which are alien to orthodoxy, which have no claim on tradition, and which are clearly contrary to God’s word written.

How has the authority of the Bible been once again discarded? Who is affected by this new counter-reformation movement? What ought the Church to be doing toward the restoration of orthodoxy in this and other matters?

## **The Enlightenment—Knowledge, or Truth?**

The Reformation was not the only movement to take place at the end of the Middle Ages. The other, which marked the end of the Middle Ages and which was partially responsible for the Reformation, was the Renaissance. This revival of classical learning was itself brought about by the fall of Constantinople. The last bastion of the Eastern Church had been under threat from the advancing Moslem empire ever since 1204 when the frustrated soldiers of the Fourth Crusade had sacked the city in search of treasure. During the intervening period until its fall in 1453 scholars and clergy from Constantinople began to make their way to Europe, where they were welcomed, in particular by an Italian bishop. They brought with them manuscripts of classical works, and the Greek New Testament. The former

sparked interest in classical learning and so the Renaissance; the latter, in the hands of Desiderius Erasmus, building on the work of Lorenzo Valla, led to the Protestant Reformation.

With the publication of Erasmus's *Novum Instrumentum*, the Greek New Testament, came the realisation among students of the Bible that many of Rome's greatest claims and most central tenets had no support in Scripture. They saw that what the Bible taught as being the way of salvation differed markedly from that which Rome taught. They saw the supremacy of Scripture, being the infallible and inspired Word of God, and so submitted to that rather than the Pope.

This supremacy of Scripture is enshrined in the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. Beside the words of Article XIX, quoted above, Article VI, *Of the Sufficiency of the holy Scriptures for salvation*, says this—

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

Article XIX, *Of the Authority of Church*, states,

The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in controversies of Faith: And yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and preserver of holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree any thing against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce any thing to be believed for necessity of Salvation.

Plainly, then, the authority of the Church is subservient to the authority of the Bible. Indeed, the Church only has authority when it correctly expounds Scripture.

The later Articles, especially Article XXXVII, *Of the Civil Magistrates*, show that the State is also subject to the Word of God, so that the King and his magistrates derive their authority from God, and are there to uphold and defend justice, being told that they must "restrain with the civil sword the stubborn and evildoers". The Bible has something to say in civil and criminal matters, as well as religious.

The legacy of the Protestant Reformation began to dissipate. The rise of Laudianism in the Established Church, and of Unitarianism particularly among English Presbyterians, and the general threat of Arminianism in all denominations had detrimental effects on the evangelical theology and faithful life of the churches. The acceptance of Unitarianism, which is Arianism by another name, by such intellectuals as Sir Isaac Newton, showed the way the wind was blowing. A new

movement was at hand, one that would cause much damage to the authority of the Bible. That movement is known as The Enlightenment.

Isaac Newton made a major contribution to theological thinking in his day. He is quoted as having said, "I have a fundamental belief in the Bible as the Word of God, written by those who were inspired. I study the Bible daily". The underlying concept, though, was not of the sovereign God who acts, but of an ordered and dynamically informed universe governed by regular laws. It could only be understood by active reason, rather than by faith. This 'mechanical philosophy' received a cautious welcome from some who saw it as the answer both to the growing pantheism of some, and the 'enthusiasm' of others. With Robert Boyle, Newton laid the foundations for the concept of a God who, having created the world, plays no active part in its day-to-day operation. All things are governed by sacrosanct laws, therefore all life is regulated and predictable. Miracles cannot occur, for they require the breaking of the laws of the universe. What was left, then, was a natural religion, where metaphysics, emotion and superstition played no part. These belonged to the old, mystical religion, that existed before the Enlightenment.

The effect of Newton's and Boyle's writings was profound. Newton's quoted claim to have a "fundamental belief in the Bible as the Word of God, written by those who were inspired", can be seen for what it is, an attempt to hold to an outward orthodoxy while creating room for a novel understanding of "inspired". The only arbiter between the two potential definitions of this word is reason. This was the great aim of the Enlightenment, to enthrone reason as the final authority in all matters of faith, of science, of political and educational theory, and indeed in every area of human endeavour and existence.

Consequently this was also the time of the French Revolution, of the open atheism of Thomas Paine, of Edmund Burke the pragmatist and David Hume the skeptic. It was also the time of Edward Gibbon, author of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. He demonstrates the effect of the mechanical philosophy on the historian, a creature who surely deals with facts, and is at the mercy of events, rather than being one who deals with fantasy, imagination, or invention of any description. In Book 15, on the rise of Christianity within the Roman Empire, Gibbon comments on the darkness that covered the earth at the time of our Lord's crucifixion. He writes,

Under the reign of Tiberius, the whole earth, or at least a celebrated province of the Roman Empire, was involved in a preternatural darkness of three hours. Even this miraculous event, which ought to have excited the wonder, the curiosity, and the devotion of mankind, passed without notice in an age of science and history. It happened during the lifetime of Seneca and the elder Pliny... Both...have omitted to mention the greatest phenomenon to which the mortal eye has been witness since the creation of the globe.

His aim is clear. For him the classical authors are to be taken as more reliable than the sacred. What the classical authors omit is of more interest to him than what the inspired authors include. In short, he is casting doubt on, indeed openly denying, the phenomenon of darkness recorded in the Gospels because there is no independent evidence for it. Unless the testimony of Scripture can be corroborated by another source it is not to be trusted. Reason has the last word, and Scripture must submit itself to reason's rule.

Thus the Enlightenment saw great advances in human knowledge, as Newton and others began to understand something of the governing principles of the universe. However, their inability to do this within the framework of the divine revelation meant that their work became a means of attacking the authority of the Bible. All this, though, would pale in comparison with the greatest threat that was about to be unleashed.

## **Darwin and the mind of man**

Charles Darwin and his contribution to science is sufficiently well-known today. His examination of isolated species in the Galapagos islands led him to certain conclusions which struck at the very foundation of the Christian faith. His great work, *On the Origin of Species by the Means of Natural Selection, or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, was, among other things, a flat denial of the biblical account of creation. If, as Darwin maintained, man was descended from an earlier ancestral form, and if, as he and some contemporary geologists were saying, the world was indeed much older than previously thought, then the Genesis account could not be factual.

It is not the purpose of this article to advance evidence in favour of the Bible's account. There are books and organisations around that do this very well, and some information is provided at the end. It is the purpose of this article, however, to consider something of the mindset of those who accept Darwin's conclusions, albeit in the somewhat modified form in which they exist today.

Darwin introduced into popular thinking the concept of 'natural selection'. Those who reject the concept do not instead hold to a theory of 'unnatural selection' but to supernatural selection, or divine creation. The choice is between accepting that God made each life-form "after his kind" as stated several times in Genesis 1, or that God played no part in the development, the evolution, of the species. The so-called intermediate position of theistic evolution is not an option. This states that God created the building blocks of life, the amino acids, the proteins or whatever, and the basic conditions, and left it all to sort itself out. But what sort of a God does that make him? Whatever sort of deity he may be, he is not the God of the Bible, the God who said, "Let there be... and there was...". The Bible teaches creation *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, Hebrews 11:3. Science cannot explain the origin of matter. In

every case, it begins with pre-existent matter, and believes it has been able to formulate a reasonably convincing theory of how that matter developed into the life-forms and environments we see and experience today.

The effect of all this is to convince the evolutionary scientific community that the Bible is not to be trusted in matters of history or science. Religion is left as the field of metaphysics, emotion and feelings. A person may hold to the evolutionary position regarding the origin of the life, while claiming faith in God and in Jesus Christ, because to do so answers a felt need within that individual. The fact that, by their own admission, that individual is claiming faith in a God he deems to be a liar in one very important area is not seen as any obstacle.

The effect of Darwin's thinking on biblical scholarship is far-ranging. He published his major work in 1859. The very next year, F J A Hort wrote to B F Westcott in these words,

Have you read Darwin? How I should like to talk with you about it! In spite of the difficulties I am inclined to think it unanswerable. In any case, it is a treat to read such a book. (Quoted by M J Roberts in "Why has Covenant Theology been Neglected?" published in *The Covenant of Grace*, Harrison Trust, 1992).

Twenty years later the New Testament scholar Stewart Headlam said in a sermon, "Thank God the scientific men have...shattered the idol of an infallible book!" (*ibid*).

The willingness of such men to accept the conclusions of Darwin's theory testifies to the readiness of some to deny the authority of the Bible. They already had doubts, and were looking for an intellectually and socially acceptable ground on which to do so. They found it in Darwin. Here was someone who was prepared to say the unsayable, to put into print what was at heart an attack upon the Bible, and so upon the Church. Gibbon had fought shy of open warfare, though he sniped from the sidelines. Darwin struck at the very foundations of the Christian faith, in spite of his reported statement that the faith of none should be overthrown by his writing.

The choice, then is between accepting the Bible as the final authority and accepting the mind of man as the final authority. A quick survey of where these two diametrically-opposed choices lead is instructive.

### **The Way Ahead—blind alley or final destination?**

Those within the Church in positions of influence who accept the Darwinian model are those who are willing to introduce new practices into the Church. This is because religion, being the realm now of emotion, feelings and metaphysics, cannot deny its participants anything that panders to their emotions, or excites their metaphysical fancies. Thus the wholesale surrender of large parts of the Church to

either the modern Charismatic movement or to the neo-traditionalism of ‘bells and smells’—or, in a number of cases, both of these together—is indicative of the new authority. ‘If it feels good, it must be right’ is the eternal maxim of many. The impartial authority of the divine declaration and revelation, the Bible, is set aside in favour of anything that fosters the conditions that satisfy the felt needs of individuals. Thus for some the highest authority now is their own desire. For many in positions of leadership the supreme authority is reason. Reason dictates that, since women are given an equal place in society generally, at least in the liberal West, it follows that they should be given the same position in the Church. The fact that the Bible forbids this is not seen as an issue, because reason dictates that the Bible is unreasonable in this assertion. By extension of the same argument, the biblical prohibition on homosexual practice is seen as irrelevant, because homosexual people are the consequence of natural selection, of the genetic code over which we have no say, or, according to the latest study, simply the consequence of their mother having given birth to too many boys ahead of them! Sin plays no part in the matter, because it is science that tells us about sexual orientation, not depravity. It is emotion that dictates what makes a person happy, not the divine decree of the holy God.

Using the same logic the themes of sin, of the righteousness of God, of repentance and sorrow for sin, and of amendment of life have all been discredited because they do not build self-esteem, they make nobody happy, and they are a denial of the lifestyle choices of so many individuals. Since religion has been excluded from speaking in matters of science and history, the former condemnation of certain practices is not relevant, and the biblical account of the origin and purpose of man is overlooked. The Church is now subject to the dictates of people who have no interest in religion, of people who believe that religion is, at best, a tool to be used for the furtherance of social aims. Once the proscriptive element has been excised from religion then at last man can learn to live in peace and harmony. Militant Islam merely serves as a warning of the dangers of unrestrained religious enthusiasm, and as a spur to some to reform the Christian religion lest it too make strong demands of them.

Which brings us to consider the claims of Christianity. Does it matter, some will say, whether God made the world in six days out of nothing, or whether that was merely a convenient literary device to convey the idea of order, of divine control, or to answer some liturgical need in the Jewish temple ritual?

This depends on whether we understand Genesis 1-2 as being foundational for explaining who man is, and what the world is, or not. If God did not speak the plain truth about the origin of the universe, why not? Was it, as someone suggested recently, because there was at that time nobody who could understand quantum physics and astrophysics? This view is born of the assumption that the explanation to which man has arrived today is better at understanding the origin of the universe than the biblical account itself. It presumes that man’s reason has at last been able to

unlock the mystery of time, of light, of matter. Yet this is the same basic human intellect that once believed that horses exist in this world because somewhere in a parallel universe or world the perfection of horse exists. So with love, and flowers, and peace, and anything else. But nobody follows Plato in this today. Why should man assume in his arrogant way that he has explained the previously inexplicable? Why cannot he accept that the true and living God has revealed the true state of things in the Bible, and we are called to accept his revelation, not to question it?

For if we question this, that God made the world out of nothing in six days, what is to stop us questioning the account of the Fall? Is man really degenerate by nature through that one historical act of rebellion? And what of the Flood? Did God really destroy all living in one cataclysmic act of destruction? Science denies this, on the ground that it has found no evidence to support this 'myth'. In fact, the evidence is everywhere, only sinful man does not have the eyes to see it, or the will to be shown it.

And why stop there? Why not go on to question the Bible's claims about salvation in Jesus Christ? Why not deny the human hope, in whatever modified form it exists today? If the authority of the Bible is found wanting at the very beginning, why trust it elsewhere? The only possible answer is that the rest of the Bible, and in particular the New Testament, is thought to appeal to the felt needs of some, who desire something better than the present existence, and whose emotions and aspirations are met, at least in part, by the Gospel claims.

However, those who take such a line are making a God in their own image. They are picking and choosing what they believe is acceptable from the authoritative Word of God. They have subjected God and his revelation to their own intellect, to their own reasoning abilities, impoverished though they are.

Ultimately it is only those who recognise and stand upon the final authority of the Bible who have a coherent and intellectually defensible faith. Those who have cut themselves off from the authority of the Bible, who have perhaps replaced it with tradition, are only next in line to fall to the atheistic reasoning mindset that holds sway in liberal churches. After all, the liberals were once traditionalists who rejected the validity of the tradition. But they cannot reject the validity of our faith, because it is rooted and grounded, not on our opinion, but on what God has made known. They may not like it, but they cannot break it down. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

*If you would like help and information on scientific answers to the claims of evolution contact:*

Creation Research, P.O. Box 1 Ashton under Lyne Lancs. OL6 9WW. [www.creationresearch.net](http://www.creationresearch.net)  
Answers in Genesis, P.O. Box 8078 Leicester LE21 9AJ. [www.answersingenesis.org](http://www.answersingenesis.org)

**Books:** *Bones of Contention* by Marvin Lubenow, Baker Books, ISBN 0-8010-6523-2

*Darwin on Trial* by Phillip E Johnson, IVP, ISBN 0-8308-1324-1

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AND *INTERCESSIONS* BY SEPTEMBER 15th 2006, PLEASE**

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**Nuffield Congregation** meeting with Nuffield Parish Church, near Henley-on-Thames Sunday Services: 11.00 am Morning Prayer, 6.30 pm Evening Prayer. Lord's Supper 6.30 pm third Sunday. Bible Study Wednesday 8.00 pm.

**St. John's Church, South London.** Meeting at the Shaftesbury Home, Trellis House, Mill Road (off Merton High Street), Colliers Wood, SW19, for 11.00 am Morning Prayer and 6.30 pm Evening Prayer. Midweek as intimated. *Enquiries* Rev Peter Ratcliff, 020 8417 0875.

**St. Mary's Castle Street, Reading.** Sunday Services: 11.00 am Morning Prayer (first Sunday Lord's Supper), 6.30 pm Evening Prayer (third Sunday Lord's Supper). Tuesday 8.00 pm Bible Study. *Enquiries* Rev EJ Malcolm 0118 959 5131.

**St. Silas, Wolverhampton,** meeting in St. John's Cloisters Chapel, St. John's Square. 11.00 am Morning Prayer (1st Sunday Holy Communion); 6.00 pm BST Evening Prayer (4.00 pm GMT) (3rd Sunday Holy Communion). Tuesdays in term time 7.00 pm Bible Study; 7.45 pm Prayer Meeting. On-street parking. *Enquiries* Rt Rev E Malcolm 01547 528815. Hon Curate Rev IR Budgen, 01902 656514.

**Holy Trinity Church, Frinton-on-Sea.** Sunday 11 a.m. Morning Prayer The Frinton Community Centre, Soken House, The Triangle, Frinton-on-Sea, Essex. Sunday 6.30 p.m. Evening Prayer, Tuesday 8.00 p.m. Bible Study and Prayer Meeting 1, Chaplins, Frinton-on-Sea, Essex. For more information please contact Mr Philip Lievesley Tel: 01255 679572. [www.holytrinityfrinton.org.uk](http://www.holytrinityfrinton.org.uk)

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