

In Defence of Cranmer

By C. A. F. WARNER

WE shall do well to approach [the Order of 1552] with reverence, to ask *what Cranmer was trying to do*, whether what he was trying to do was good, and how far he was successful in achieving it. Part of the trouble is that hardly anyone now living has ever seen the Communion celebrated as Cranmer intended it to be celebrated . . . the Anglican Communion as a whole still limps a very long way behind its great Archbishop.'

Bishop Stephen Neill, *Anglicanism* pp. 74, 75.

'The Second Prayer Book [of 1552], and above all its Communion Service, have been harshly treated by liturgists. . . . Yet in defence of the Second Book Cranmer would argue that it should be judged in accordance with its success in conforming with an axiom which, upon his view of the matter, should control all liturgical expression. The axiom is that of Scriptural sanction. What cannot plainly be seen to possess Scriptural sanction should not be found in a Prayer Book. . . . *Cranmer's purpose*, in his Second Communion Service, was not to improve or restore to purity the historic Latin liturgy in an English form. His purpose was to give an exact liturgical expression to the fulfilment of the command "Do this in remembrance of me".'

E. C. Ratcliff, *The Liturgical Work of Archbishop Cranmer—Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, October 1956; reprinted in *Thomas Cranmer, Three Commemorative Lectures*, Church Information Office, 1956.

'Compared with the clumsy and formless rites which were evolved abroad, that of 1552 is the masterpiece of an artist. Cranmer gave it a noble form as a superb piece of literature, which no one could say of its companions; but he did more. As a piece of liturgical craftsmanship it is in the first rank—once *its intention* is understood. It is not a disordered attempt at a catholic rite, but the only effective attempt ever made to give liturgical expression to the doctrine of "justification by faith alone".'

Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of Liturgy*, p. 672.

These three quotations address themselves to the liturgical problem at a level which would seem to have been entirely bypassed in the transactions of the present Church of England Liturgical Commission. The writers credit Cranmer with the aim, purpose or intention of communicating through his Communion Service something beyond the mere provision of a suitable liturgy for the Church—something which has made the Church of England Communion Service distinctive among the liturgies of Christendom, so that it constitutes (in its historic 1552-1559-1662 shape) the most priceless treasure which we possess as Churchmen.

These three texts derive from Cranmer's theology and insight no less than from his genius and cannot be long disconnected from them. There could be no clearer illustration of this than the present period of liturgical uncertainty, when the Church has lost the precision of Cranmer's theology and the urgency of his insight into contemporary need. The Church no longer sees God as *the* relevant answer to the nation's need, nor the Lord's Supper as the clearest exposition of that answer. Cranmer, in common with the other Reformers, would have expressed that answer by the word Justification, by which he meant an assurance communicated to man's heart, by faith, of his reconciliation with God. This meaning which he attached to the word Justification can be seen very clearly from the *Thirteen Articles* of 1538, Article 4, in which Cranmer states:

'On Justification, we teach that its proper meaning is remission of sins and *acceptance or reconciliation of us into the grace and favour of God*; that is, true renewal in Christ.'

Cranmer saw that the burden and thrust of the Lord's Supper was Christ's *death*. He realised this both from Scripture, as St. Paul stated it in 1 Corinthians 11: 26—'For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim *the Lord's death* until he comes,' and also from the inseparable connection between the Atonement and Justification. Almost all the modern Communion rites from that of South India onwards seem to have produced some variant on the wording of 1549 (which in its day it had inherited from the Latin Mass):

'hauyng in remembraunce his blessed passion, mightie resurreccyon, and glorious ascencion. . . .'

But the traditional rites and the medieval Mass had at the least been unwise to allow the central emphasis of the Lord's Supper to be obscured, and we would in our day be equally unwise to follow in the path of these rites, however ancient, simply through a kind of liturgical antiquarianism. This would indeed be a strange method of producing a modern service!

It would seem, moreover, that the limitation of the Lord's Supper to being a 'proclaiming of Christ's death' has become even more to the point when even many churchgoers consider the Resurrection and Ascension to belong rather to the realm of mythology not of fact. This scepticism does not, however, apply to Christ's *death*, which thus constitutes a point of contact with those who do not yet believe. Cranmer's concentration on Christ's death, then, is not only scriptural but relevant in the modern situation. His purpose was so to concentrate on Christ's death that people see not only that Christ died, but that Christ died *for them*: and that is Justification.

It is well known that Justification was stated by Luther to be '*the doctrine of a standing or a falling Church*', yet for all that there are those who feel that the Lord's Supper should be essentially an eirenic occasion of fellowship and is no suitable vehicle for any expression of doctrine. In this they are surely mistaken in that the earliest biblical account, given by St. Paul, is precisely this (1 Cor. 11: 26), but they have a right instinct in so far that only such doctrine as the New

Testament associates with the Lord's Supper should have its place there—that is to say the Atonement, of which the manward aspect, the other side of the *same* coin, is Justification. This is its absolute complement, or *received Atonement*. In our day we have known Justification as a 'party' word thought to be divisive; the Reformers knew it as a *Church* word which they were sure was fundamentally unitive. They saw that Justification is an unique doctrine in that it presupposes so many other doctrines: Incarnation, Atonement, Resurrection, Holy Spirit, Regeneration, Conversion, Faith, Sanctification—and yet without it none of the others can come alive in a person's experience. That is why Justification not only may, but should, and should still, dominate and inform the Communion service. The Church of England since Cranmer has been pioneering this concept among the Churches of Christendom, and for their sakes we must continue to hold it in trust, against all persuasions to the contrary, until they also come to see its value and adopt its 'shape'. We must not now falter in our conviction, or fail in our courage, knowing that, being scriptural, it will in the end gain acceptance and may—as Cranmer so clearly thought—yet unite Christ's Church.

Cranmer saw the vital relevance of this to the ordinary worshipper, because he knew that he was communicating divine realities to human souls. Ratcliff calls the service of 1552 'a remarkable creative achievement', 'an instrument of worship which was to ensure to (the Church) a principle of life'; he speaks of 'the skill and felicity with which the rite embodying the conception is constructed', and concludes that Cranmer 'made of English a liturgical language comparable with Latin at its best.'

We must now look separately at the different elements of this cogent schema of Justification, which we have in 1662.

(1) The minister's position at the Table has a liturgical meaning and importance (obscured and prejudiced by legal disputes), since by standing at the side of the Table there is no human agency intervening between the worshippers and the symbolic elements: these represent their Saviour's death which is the source of their own spiritual life. The minister becomes *one of* the faithful by standing out of the line of vision, not even in the position of the host. This symbolises the direct access to spiritual realities which is Justification.

(2) Directly after the opening prayers comes the Divine Law, peculiar to Israel as a national constitution but eternal to humanity as a divine standard. As Dr. Pieters has argued, their shorter form is probably their original form, being common to both Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. It is surely obvious that our Lord's summary of the Law (Mark 12: 30, 31) is no more than just that—a summary of its two main divisions—but it in no sense substitutes for the Ten Commandments as a manifesto of Justification. Bishop Hooper called them an 'abridgment and epitome of the whole Bible, compendiously containing the whole law and the gospel'.⁸ What the Ten Commandments do is to illuminate and condemn man's sinful failure, and at the same time announce the altogether sublime righteousness of the Lord of Glory, the Word made flesh. They witness to Justification for a hopeless humanity through faith in a triumphant Saviour.

(3) A sequence of prayers, Bible readings, Creed, Sermon and Offertory Sentences lead into the Prayer for the Church, *militant here in earth*. The Exhortation introduces the admonition 'Ye that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins. . . .' It is nothing less than astonishing that Series II omits this, and consequently any mention of the gospel summons to 'repent' (Mark 1: 15; Acts 2: 38).

Justification is again announced by the sequence Confession—Absolution—Comfortable (Consoling) Words. The Confession combines a backward look at the 'grievous remembrance of our sins'—for whenever we remember Christ's death we must remember that our sin caused it, and that is grievous—with the prayer that we may 'serve and please God in newness of life'. The Absolution is fully reformed, with its clear emphasis on God's mercy and promise, and man's repentance, faith and turning to God. The strengthening from God's Word for those who thus 'turn unto Him' is a right prelude to the prayer of Consecration.

Here at the opening of the Consecration Prayer we find one of those liturgical gems which express the basis of God's reconciliation through the completeness of Christ's work in His dying on man's behalf:

' . . . Who made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world.'

This is clearly the most theologically effective statement in Cranmer's Holy Communion. It was already part of the 1549 Rite, and has been definitive since then of what the Church of England means by the Holy Communion. It must be restored, and retained in any future revision. The unhappy effect of omitting both the 'Ye that do truly' and the 'Full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice' is that both aspects of Justification—God's provision and man's response—are missing from Series II Communion. What a mutilation of Anglicanism!

(4) A central insight of Cranmer's Lord's Supper is the direct connection between Christ's work on the Cross and man's justification through faith in the Redeemer who died for him. It was for this reason, no less than for the scriptural support he found in 1 Cor. 11: 26, and putting aside the elaborate phraseology inherited through the Mass from early rites, that Cranmer limited the direction of his service solely to 'that his precious death'. What is it that makes us lose something at once so logical and so scriptural? Surely no anthology of patristic liturgies which lack the logic of Cranmer's rite provides any substitute, let alone improvement. Mention of 'glorious resurrection, ascension and coming kingdom' only detracts from the economy and clarity of the service. As Cranmer points out in his 'Defence of the Sacrament' (III/12), Christ Himself referred to the Last Supper as a *passover* (Luke 22: 15), which conclusively delimits the Sacrament to the atonement wrought at Golgotha, just as the Passover signified the deliverance from Egypt (Ex. 13: 14; Deut. 6: 21).

(5) Christ gave His command 'Do this in remembrance of me' (Luke 22: 19; 1 Cor. 11: 24) when he was about to intervene decisively in the story of humanity. Now if an important person happens to rescue someone from drowning, and declining any reward simply says 'Remember me', he does not mean 'Remember that I was a professor,

a company director or a prince', but 'Remember the life drama which linked us together'. Similarly Jesus meant: 'Remember my dying for you'. The fact is that the Lord's Supper is not an offering to God analogous to the 'memorial' offerings of Leviticus (2: 2, 9, 16)—for which the Septuagint uniformly uses the term *μνημοσυνον*—but a reminder to man.^{10 11} It would be foolish for anyone to assume that we have seen the last of the argument engendered by the 1928 Book concerning the use of the term 'memorial' for *αναμνησις*; Series II has again reopened the argument by its use of the term (Series II Communion, p. 9), and the issue is crucial. Unless we think that Christ also was speaking in ambiguities, we are under obligation to determine what he meant. Cranmer came to the opinion that the word 'memory' for *αναμνησις* best communicates to the worshipper that the reality of the living Christ must always be dominant in his mind.

(6) The liturgical insights of the Reformers who were concerned to restore catholicity to the Church have at least as much claim to our respectful attention as those of the sub-apostolic age. It would seem to be Zwingli who first saw the advantage of having the act of communion follow immediately after the narrative of the Institution.¹² Cranmer adopted this insight of great originality in 1552, and it continued in 1662. The Table is spread, access to it is unimpeded, the Heavenly Host has spoken His historic words concerning his redemptive death: what better, what other response for those who know themselves justified than to go spontaneously at His bidding—with no verbiage about the part *we* play, no 'Blessed is he . . .', no 'Cup of Blessing . . .', no 'O Lamb of God . . .', not even the 'Our Father', to inhibit our eager response to His call, 'Come unto me . . . I . . . give you rest'.

(7) The Communion shared, Cranmer then followed it with the prayer of Oblation—formerly the third section of the Canon—to alternate with a prayer of thanksgiving, and ended his service with a triumphant note of praise in the Gloria. No need to stress the significance of the prayer of Oblation coming after the Communion, for the offering of our lives in service is the consequence of being right with God. It is the result, not the price, of Justification. On page 9 of Series II words echoing part of the Prayer of Oblation of 1549 occur which re-introduce the God-directed word 'memorial'—as if anyone could imagine that *God* needs to be reminded of what He has wrought for man! A long interval is now also re-introduced, during which may be said four other prayers between the concluding Dominical words "Do this . . . in remembrance of me" and the actual taking of Communion. Cranmer purposely gave us forms of administration which include the same phrase 'in remembrance', and as Dr. Mitchell has said¹³ '. . . it is impossible not to admire the neatness of the arrangement by which these forms followed immediately upon a prayer which ended with the words "in remembrance of me"! Bishop Neill likewise is struck by this notable liturgical arrangement when he remarks that some have even called Christ's words of 'institution' *'words of distribution'*, and comments: 'The Lord's Supper was given for Communion; it is only in the complex act of consecration and communion together that the nature of the presence and the self-giving of Christ in His Church can

be understood.'¹⁴ In similar vein the report of the Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon *Principles of Prayer Book Revision* speaks of Cranmer's 'identification of the making of remembrance with the act of Communion'.¹⁶ It is clear that for Cranmer the anamnesis *was* the Communion, and in the light of modern research who shall say that he was wrong? We must indeed pray that we shall see this wonderful insight restored.

(8) Cranmer now found a more fitting position for the Gloria than its (till then) customary position early in the Service. It is true that it had never before his time had a satisfactory function since it is half praise ('Glory be to God . . .') and half penitence ('Thou that takest away the sins of the world . . .'). Was it composed as a brief Confession or as a short Te Deum? Cranmer saw it as praise, but he also knew that the Christian is 'simul justus et peccator' and hence that penitence is rightly part of Christian praise. When we grant this we too shall wish to preserve this stroke of liturgical genius which brings to a triumphant climax his Liturgy of Justification.

The Church is already launched on the revision of its Communion Service. We are now within the period allowed for the *experimental* services. We should note that this does not mean the sanctioning of multiple variants of the Communion Service which would effectively turn the Church of England into a 'Congregationalist' Church. Our present revisers need all the prayer and thought the Church can give as they treat of great matters which will affect the quality of faith of the ordinary worshipper for generations to come.

How does one revise a service, and what constitutes revision? Among those who are cautious and conservative at heart there exists a section who will simply wish to modernise language, and to 'translate' Cranmer's text as it stands into 'modern English'. Others again will come to see that they are in total disagreement with Cranmer and will wish to adandon his forms altogether. For the sake of such it has been the purpose of this essay to display what Cranmer's aims were, and to argue their continuing excellence. But there are also those who, while agreeing with Cranmer's principles and insights, feel the need to produce a service specifically adapted to modern needs and conditions. In attempting this it is important to note that the more intensely we agree with Cranmer's diagnosis of man's basic and abiding need to receive, remember and confess Christ, the freer in fact shall we be to produce a service which is truly new and able to speak to the contemporary world.

Thus, if we are to develop Cranmer's work we need to be in convinced agreement with his aims. He was not afraid to drive his coach and horses through the traditional forms, but he did this creatively, never as an iconoclast. That is, Cranmer was not really a reviser, but a *creator*. At the present time there are three things which we may do in the matter of liturgy if we are set on changing it. We may either *revise* conservatively, or we may *revert* anachronistically—presumably to sub-apostolic forms—or we may *create* inspirationally. The services of the Irish Prayer Books of 1878 and 1926, and of the

Canadian Prayer Book of 1918 were revisions, Series II and most of the modern rites are reversions, liturgical works such as *Eucharist for the Seventies*¹⁶ are creations. We must be clear about which of these we are undertaking to do, for if it is the third and most taxing one, we should remember that creation requires the inspiration of the artist combined with the conceptual vision of the architect. Our aim must be as biblical and our enthusiasm for that aim must be as Spirit-given as Cranmer's was, when he set his eyes on the guiding star of Justification.

¹ *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI*, (Everyman), p. 223.

² E. C. Ratcliff, *The Liturgical Work of Thomas Cranmer*, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, October, 1956. Reprinted in *Thomas Cranmer, 1489-1556*, Church Information Board, p. 41.

³ op. cit., p. 44.

⁴ op. cit., p. 41.

⁵ op. cit., p. 44.

⁶ Bishop Neill, *Anglicanism*, pp. 74.

⁷ P. Pieters, *Notes on Old Testament History*, Eerdmans, pp. 50-57.

⁸ G. J. Cuming, *A History of Anglican Liturgy*, (Macmillan, 1969), p. 106.

⁹ Edited by G. E. Duffield, *The Work of Thomas Cranmer* (Courtenay Reformation Classics), p. 166, 167.

¹⁰ Neil and Willoughby, *The Tutorial Prayer Book* (Church Book Room Press), p. 216.

¹¹ Bishop Gore, *The Body of Christ*, p. 318.

¹² G. J. Cuming, op. cit., p. 105.

¹³ G. A. Mitchell, *Landmarks in the Liturgy*, (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961), p. 187.

¹⁴ Bishop Neill, *Anglicanism*, p. 73.

¹⁵ *Principles of Prayer Book Revision*, Report of a Select Committee of the Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon, p. 34.

¹⁶ Edited by C. Byworth and T. Lloyd, *Eucharist for the Seventies*, Northwood Christian Book Centre, 2s. 6d.