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# Thomas Cranmer: A Life – Two Reviews

*It does not often happen that a book appears of the significance of Diarmaid MacCulloch's biography of Thomas Cranmer (London: Yale University Press 1996 692 pp £29.95 hb ISBN 0-300-06688-0). Working in exhaustive detail from primary sources, Dr MacCulloch has reconstructed the life of the first non-Roman Archbishop of Canterbury in a way which not only makes him come alive for a new generation, but which also restores the portrait of Cranmer as a leading Evangelical, looking for a middle way, not between Rome and Protestantism, but between Wittenberg and Geneva! In view of the importance of this work, Churchman has decided to commission two Review Articles by leading scholars of the sixteenth century. The first, by Dr Rudolph Heinze, concentrates on the historical aspect of the book, including the debates of Reformation theology. The second, by Professor Arthur Pollard, pays more attention to the literary side and the theological implications which the book has for current questions of Anglican identity. Both are full of praise for what is a truly magnificent achievement.*

## **Review by Dr Rudolph Heinze**

The English Reformation has been the subject of much scholarly debate and a good deal of new research in the past two decades. However, Thomas Cranmer, despite his pivotal role, has received relatively little attention. Even the Cranmer quincentenary in 1989 did not produce a major new biography.<sup>1</sup> Jasper Ridley's somewhat limited study, first published in 1962, remained the last major biography until the publication of Diarmaid MacCulloch's long awaited study. It is the product of almost a decade of research and the thoroughness of his work is truly impressive. In addition to his massive original research, MacCulloch is thoroughly familiar with the secondary literature including unpublished works. In a refreshing contrast to some of the acrimonious debates among historians, MacCulloch shows great respect for the work of other historians. His comments on Jasper Ridley's work are kind and fair even when he

<sup>1</sup> Peter Newman Brooks' very useful *Cranmer in Context* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press 1989) which was the only major work published during the quincentenary is not a full scale biography. It contains a brief survey of his life and career with extracts from his writings. A number of works containing papers presented during the commemorative year were published after 1989: *Thomas Cranmer* Margot Johnson ed (Durham: Turnstone 1990); *Thomas Cranmer: Churchman and Scholar* Paul Ayris and David Selwyn edd (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press 1993). *Churchman* (vol 109/1-4 1995) has published a useful series of articles by Maurice Elliott.

disagrees with him or questions his analysis.

MacCulloch is also fair in his assessment of Cranmer. Too often writers have portrayed him as either a hero or a villain depending on their preconceived bias. The review of MacCulloch's book in *The Times* began with the statement: 'Thomas Cranmer is nobody's hero'.<sup>2</sup> That is clearly not MacCulloch's conclusion. After weighing the evidence, he maintains 'those who have told the hero narrative generally distorted fewer elements of the evidence than those who told the villain narrative' (p 3). Cranmer's personal story is difficult to tell, because he was a very private man and revealed his inner self only to his closest friends. Consequently, we must learn to know Cranmer largely through his public acts and it is sometimes difficult to unravel the real motivation behind these. While not ignoring or excusing Cranmer's weakness, MacCulloch presents Cranmer as a sincere and admirable person whose very human weaknesses make him a more believable and attractive personality.

Although MacCulloch's study contains little new information about Cranmer's early life and education, his research has led to a number of discoveries which have altered the traditional view of Cranmer's theological development and his early contacts with Henry VIII. He maintains that while Cranmer was at Cambridge his theology was very conservative. Rather than being associated with the admirers of Luther who met at the White Horse Inn, the marginalia in his copy of John Fisher's *Assertionis Lutheranae Confutatio* reveal that he was consistently critical of Luther and especially Luther's attitudes towards Councils. Although he was a humanist with a deep attachment to the Bible 'his admiration was reserved for Erasmus and not for Luther' (p 33). In addition, two letters discovered in the Czartoryski Library in Cracow reveal that he entered the King's service earlier than normally thought, and that he had an interview with the King before becoming involved in the King's effort to annul his first marriage. Consequently, when Cranmer made the suggestion about soliciting university opinion on the King's marriage, he was already known to the King.

Cranmer's transition to Evangelicalism (MacCulloch rightly avoids the use of the word Protestant or Lutheran since the former term was not used till the reign of Mary and the latter is too limited) is difficult to trace. He dates the break in 1531 and argues it was the result of Cranmer's scholarship in defending the King's position and his contact with Osiander and other Continental Reformers. His marriage to Osiander's niece in 1532 suggests that his experiences in Lutheran Nuremberg or 'the future Mrs Margaret Cranmer' made such an impression on him that he was willing to take what was clearly a 'drastic step' for a clergyman in the service of

2 Peter Ackroyd 'He followed the King's devices and desires' *The Times* 23 May 1996 p 38

Henry VIII. After he had 'launched out on the uncharted waters of clerical matrimony', his appointment as Archbishop of Canterbury a little later 'was no doubt an unpleasant shock' (p 77). It meant he had to give up his scholarship, and keep quiet about his new bride, as he returned to England to take up the leadership of the English church.

MacCulloch devotes six chapters and over 300 pages to Cranmer's career during the reign of Henry VIII. Cranmer's story during that period provides a good deal of evidence for his detractors as his behaviour is not always easy to defend. His reputation suffers from his association with the atrocities of Henry VIII. MacCulloch does not try to excuse Cranmer's behaviour, but he does point out that, in contrast to others in the King's service, Cranmer made an effort to aid some of the best known victims of Henry's wrath. MacCulloch believes that Cranmer was truthful when he stated that he had opposed More's execution, and we know that he advocated offering More and Fisher a form of the oath to the succession which would not compromise their consciences. The destruction of Anne Boleyn, who had done so much to further the evangelical cause, was a bitter blow to Cranmer and, alone among those in high position, he made an effort to intervene on her behalf. When everyone was abandoning Anne, Cranmer wrote to the King extolling her virtues. In the end he bowed to the inevitable when evidence of her guilt was presented to him. Nevertheless, he still sent the letter.

The central motive for Cranmer's behaviour throughout Henry's reign was the preservation and furtherance of the evangelical cause. In this effort he worked closely with Thomas Cromwell. Although Cromwell clearly was the dominant partner, MacCulloch maintains 'the two men valued each other's skills and recognised how their talents could be complementary in striving for common evangelical goals' (p 135). Cromwell's disgrace and execution was another blow to Cranmer, and once again he wrote the King a letter praising Cromwell and expressing his concern for the King in the loss of such a brilliant adviser. After writing the letter, he again accepted what he could not change and 'dutifully voted through Cromwell's attainder' in the House of Lords (p 270). Although Cranmer did what he could to help some who were executed in Henry's reign, he was also guilty of participating in the brutality of the age and he must bear some responsibility for the execution of the Observant Friar, John Forest, and the evangelical John Lambert. During Edward VI's reign he also supported the burning of the Anabaptist, Joan Bocher. Although Cranmer tried first to persuade heretics to change their views, when that failed, he was quite ready to apply the ultimate penalty. According to MacCulloch he considered 'erring evangelicals as far worse than papists' (p 476) and he was particularly harsh towards Anabaptists.

During the 1530s Cranmer and Cromwell had some success in their efforts to incorporate evangelical beliefs and practices into the English religious settlement. One of their major achievements was the 1538 injunction which ordered that an English Bible be placed in every parish church. However, in the following year the direction of the government's religious policy changed with the passage of the Six Articles. Cranmer now found himself in a difficult position. Other Evangelicals resigned their sees or left the country, but, although he urged others to flee, Cranmer remained. MacCulloch believes he did so out of loyalty to Henry VIII. Furthermore, Cranmer's Eucharistic theology, which was still Lutheran, could, to some degree, be reconciled with the Six Articles.

During the remainder of Henry VIII's reign, Cranmer was in danger from the plots of his conservative enemies, and it was only his relationship with the King which preserved him. The so-called Prebendaries' Plot in 1543 posed the greatest threat. Utilising the extensive records which survive in Cranmer's personal papers, MacCulloch's account supplements the useful studies of Zell and Redworth.<sup>3</sup> He emphasises the seriousness of the threat Cranmer faced as the conservative gentry and clergy in Kent combined with members of the Council, led by Stephen Gardiner, to bring charges against him. This occurred at the same time that Cranmer was losing the battle to preserve the evangelical doctrine of justification when the so-called King's Book was published. The effort to destroy Cranmer did not succeed, because the King, after some delay, finally supported his Archbishop.

One of the important contributions of MacCulloch's study is a clarification of Cranmer's theology on justification. Citing Ashley Null's research in Cranmer's notebooks,<sup>4</sup> he maintains Null has effectively refuted the arguments of scholars who question whether Cranmer held the full Reformation doctrine of forensic justification.<sup>5</sup> He points out that Cranmer clearly stated that 'to justify' means 'to pronounce, declare or exhibit as just' rather than 'to make just' (p 345). Cranmer had long sought to convince the King to adopt this understanding of justification, but without success. He had one last opportunity, when he was summoned to the dying King's bedside. Cranmer exhorted Henry to put his full trust in Christ, and asked him to give him some indication if he had done so. Henry responded by squeezing his hand. MacCulloch believes this last scene has profound significance:

Quietly playing out his calling as royal chaplain, Cranmer had won a

3 M L Zell 'The Prebendaries' Plot of 1543: A Reconsideration' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 27 1976 pp 241-53 ; G Redworth *In Defense of the Church Catholic: The Life of Stephen Gardiner* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1990)

4 A Null 'Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance' (PhD thesis Cambridge 1994)

5 A McGrath *Justitia Dei* 2 vols (Cambridge: CUP 1986)

final victory in his years of argument with the King on justification. No last rites for Henry, no extreme unction: just an evangelical statement of faith in a grip of the hand. Thus ended the most long-lasting relationship of love which either man had known. (p 361)

Cranmer began Edward's reign by urging the new King to be 'a second Josiah' and he proceeded in the years that followed to carry out 'a religious revolution of ruthless thoroughness' (p 366). The changes were planned from the beginning. Cranmer was responsible for those plans, although the pace of change was decided by the 'secular politicians' (p 366). MacCulloch agrees with Colin Buchanan<sup>6</sup> that the 1549 Prayer Book was only an intermediate step towards a more radical and thoroughly evangelical revision of the liturgy. He points out that the 1549 book was a prime example of Cranmer's approach. He was prepared 'to make haste slowly' because he was sensitive to the 'prejudices of those Christians' who were not yet ready for a more radical step, while never abandoning 'the eventual goal of reform' (p 411). MacCulloch questions what he considers to be the misuse of the 1549 Prayer Book maintaining Cranmer 'would have not have approved of Anglo-Catholic use of his 1549 rite as a safe haven from the implications of his 1552 rite and indeed one can only understand the substitutions of 1552 as designed to end precisely this sort of misuse of his first Eucharistic essay' (p 412).

Cranmer's slow but persistent approach to reform came into conflict with the very different approach of Hooper and Laski, who were impatient in their desire for an immediate and thorough reform of the church following the pattern of the evangelical churches in Switzerland. Although Cranmer did not disagree with the content of their programme, his approach to achieving those goals was quite different. Reform would be carried out in a systematic way using the authority of the Crown and Parliament. This was the strategy which Cranmer pursued throughout the reign of Edward VI and in order to secure 'the maximum possible degree of popular consent' he was 'prepared to see paradise postponed' (p 483).

Paradise was not only postponed, but almost destroyed with Edward's death. In his penultimate chapter MacCulloch traces the well known story of Cranmer's martyrdom in Mary's reign. Once again his thorough and careful research has led to some new discoveries. For example, he is able to determine specifically the dates of Cranmer's confinement in the Bocardo through the financial accounts of the bailiffs who had the responsibility of housing and feeding him. MacCulloch's account of

6 C Buchanan *What did Cranmer think he was doing?* (Bramcote: Grove Liturgical Study 7 1976)

Cranmer's trials, his recantations, his last minute change of heart and his final courageous death is largely in accord with earlier studies.<sup>7</sup> Although most of his account is convincing, his dating of Cranmer's last letter to Peter Martyr and the resulting interpretation of that letter does not, in my opinion, offer a satisfactory explanation of the letter.<sup>8</sup> Despite his numerous recantations, in the end Cranmer died a courageous martyr. MacCulloch maintains that a visit from Cranmer's Protestant sister was the critical factor leading to his change of mind. Cranmer also had a sister who was a Catholic nun, and in his final hours on this earth it was the Protestant sister who won the day.

Cranmer needed another form of forgiveness, which would make sense of his public career and rebuild his personal integrity...he knew at the last that the battle for his soul was indeed being waged among his own flesh and blood, between his two sisters. He chose to give the victory to the Protestant sister, and to leave the Catholic without her triumph. (p 605)

MacCulloch's final chapter seems unnecessarily long and would have been improved with some judicious pruning. For example, his questionable discussion of what might have happened if Mary had not been successful in defeating Lady Jane Grey's claim to the throne detracts from the very valuable concluding summary and the perceptive modern applications. MacCulloch correctly recognises that Cranmer would not have felt comfortable with modern Anglicanism with its distorted concept of a *via media*, because Cranmer would have rejected an understanding of the *via media* as being between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. The middle ground he sought was one which would unite Protestants in opposition to the definitions which eventually emerged from the Council of Trent. He maintains that Cranmer can be understood as a reformed Catholic only in the context that he sought to reform the Catholic Church on the 'foundations of Bible, creeds and the great councils of the early Church' (p 617).

MacCulloch's Cranmer will not be attractive to all. Anglo-Catholics will no longer be able to claim him as their own, and Cranmer's detractors will find some of their standard arguments have been undermined by MacCulloch's thorough scholarship. Evangelicals will certainly welcome the fact that many of their beliefs about Cranmer have been verified by solid historical research. However, we too need to reassess our understanding of Cranmer. He was in the final analysis a scholar who could clearly see both sides of an argument. MacCulloch points out that

7 D M Loades *The Oxford Martyrs* (Batsford 1970); Rudolph Heinze 'I pray God to grant that I may endure to the end: A new look at the martyrdom of Thomas Cranmer' *Thomas Cranmer: Churchman and Scholar* Paul Ayris and David Selwyn edd (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press 1993) pp 261-81

8 For an alternative interpretation see Heinze p 277

throughout his life ‘Cranmer was either blessed or cursed with the ability to see his opponent’s point of view, an attribute rare enough in any age, but in particularly short supply during the Reformation’ (p 54). It was this attribute which made it difficult for him to stand firm under the type of brain-washing he experienced at the end of his life. However, when, in the end, he remained true to the cause which had motivated his actions for the last two decades of his life, his stance is all the more impressive because he understood his opponent’s point of view. Cranmer is in that respect an ideal hero for our modern age. In a concluding application of his excellent study MacCulloch states:

In an ecumenical age, and in a Western culture which honours honest doubt and hesitancy as a lesser evil than clear-eyed ideological certainty, Cranmer may win admirers and sympathisers, and take his due place in the history of Anglicanism. He would not have known what Anglicanism meant, and he would probably not have approved if the meaning had been explained to him, but without his contribution the unending dialogue of Protestantism and Catholicism which forms the Anglican identity would not have been possible. (p 629)

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### **Review by Professor Arthur Pollard**

Cranmer has been well served by his biographers in this century, first Pollard in 1904, then Smyth in 1926 and finally Jasper Ridley in 1962. Now we welcome Diarmaid MacCulloch’s massive new study, up-to-date with recent (and not least revisionist) scholarship, more detailed than any of its predecessors, using new material and containing new insights, and altogether providing a balanced and sympathetic estimate of its subject. This last is worth especial mention in contrast with the ‘wildly polarised comment’ that has often been made about an admittedly very controversial figure so central to such a controversial event as the English Reformation.

Yet commentators are agreed that Cranmer was a very unlikely figure to be found at the centre of such a historically traumatic era. Indeed, MacCulloch aptly cites as his epigraph some lines from Eliot’s poem about his futile and indecisive character, J Alfred Prufrock, part of which reads:

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;  
Am an attendant lord, one that will do  
[T’]Advise the prince; no doubt an easy tool,  
Deferential, glad to be of use...

I do not think that it was necessary, however, to go on to:

At times, indeed, almost ridiculous -  
Almost, at times, the Fool.

Cranmer was complicated, and so too were the events themselves, beginning with the King's Great Matter, his divorce, an action which, as MacCulloch reminds us, drew in one hundred and sixty scholars and twenty-three universities and which was to 'affect the theory and law of marriage in the western European tradition for centuries to come'. Moreover, contrary to much simplistic popular belief, Henry was not just keen to be rid of the old wife in order to marry the new. He was, of course, attracted by Anne Boleyn, but he was anxious also that the ending of his marriage to Catherine should be lawfully sealed with the consent of the Church. MacCulloch traces in detail the contribution which Cranmer made both by diplomacy and scholarship. He shows also how by his research and by his contacts with Continental Reformers Cranmer gives 'the first positive indications of a change away from his previous conventional humanist Catholicism towards a more radically reformist stance' (p 59). At the same time he makes it clear that Cranmer, typically, did not move very far or very fast from the traditional faith.

There is some piquant irony in Cranmer's relationship with the King at this time, not least in his call to become Archbishop of Canterbury, for as the priest, supposed to be celibate, was negotiating the end of his monarch's marriage, he had, to what would have been the King's wrath, just contracted a secret marriage himself. In the next two decades the niece of the reformer Osiander, who had become Mrs Cranmer, would have to live a largely invisible existence, whilst her husband coped with the tides and counter-tides of religious change.

With Anne Boleyn as Queen and Cranmer enjoying the patronage of her family and with Thomas Cromwell also as Lord Chancellor the years of influence began. Cranmer was oft in danger, but he never lost the confidence of the King nor did Henry ever lose the loyalty of his Primate. The Archbishop had succeeded to many of the roles of the papacy and the King had assumed many of its former powers. MacCulloch notes that 'Jasper Ridley has seen Cranmer's devotion to the Royal Supremacy as the key to his thinking during his mature career'. I think Ridley was right, but at the same time I would acknowledge the somewhat different emphasis of MacCulloch when he writes: 'It may be that this is seeing the problem the wrong way round: Cranmer came to hate the papacy, and therefore he needed the Royal Supremacy to fill the chasm of authority which had opened up in his thinking as a result' (p 151). Why not something of both, that is, loyalty and necessity?

Cranmer's loyalty involved him in equivocation and worse, and nowhere worse than in his part in the condemnation of Anne Boleyn, what MacCulloch calls 'the unacceptable face of his loyalty to the Supreme Head'. He was deeply troubled by what was happening, but surely in our own century of violence and the testing of consciences we can perhaps more readily understand his attitude than was the case in more liberal preceding times. The question is always: When do I protest, refuse or resign – and what will it cost, not so much for myself as for the cause I have espoused? The decade from the death of Anne to that of Henry would see reform and reaction, advance and retreat, in the fortunes of the cause which Cranmer, alongside Cromwell, had now espoused. He was set on the Protestant path (though MacCulloch refuses to accept Protestantism before the reign of Mary and prefers 'evangelical', adding that this is a word that has been appropriated 'to describe a party within Protestantism and within the Church of England', an acknowledgment, it appears to me but which he would not admit, of the centrality of Protestant Evangelicalism in the Church of England).

1536 was a crucial year. The reactionaries thought that the execution of Anne Boleyn might be their opportunity, but, in fact, it was followed by the first stage in the dissolution of the monasteries, which itself provoked the Pilgrimage of Grace. Cranmer remembered the Peasants' War in Germany a decade before. MacCulloch remarks: 'He saw the Pilgrimage as a turning-point in the English Reformation' (p 179). If that formed the basic socio-political motivation behind Cranmer, the Ten Articles, also originating from 1536, provide a parallel theological impetus. They were, as much else at that time, an obvious compromise between the contending parties, but they show, nonetheless, a clear diminution of such Catholic dogmas as purgatory and some non-dominical sacraments, together also with the acceptance of the Augsburg Confession's doctrine of justification, namely, that the 'only sufficient and worthy causes' are 'the only mercy and grace of the Father, promised freely unto us for his Son's sake, Jesu Christ, and the merits of his blood and passion'.

In a penetrating insight MacCulloch comments: 'Behind this doctrine of the all-sufficiency of Christ's mercy for salvation lurked a still larger issue: the all-powerful role of God in salvation', going on to claim that 'the mature Cranmer was a predestinarian... [He] may not have talked much about predestination, for the reason which he embodied in what became the Thirty-Nine Articles; it was not a subject about which one should become obsessed. Yet the margins of his books testify to his deep interest in predestination' (p 211). What better argument for equating Protestant Evangelicalism with the central orthodoxy of the Church of England? Cranmer, however, made little progress with Henry in this regard, but lack of acceptance did not bring him to a standstill, and notable amongst his

activities in the late thirties are the beginnings of his work in liturgical reform which would reach its completion in *The Book of Common Prayer*.

Much, however, was to happen before that – with Henry in his latter years becoming ever more unwilling to countenance reform, a stance in which he was actively seconded by Cranmer's main antagonist, Gardiner, whose biographer, Redworth, has in MacCulloch's words 'cautioned against accepting too readily the evangelical historiography which made [him] the arch-villain in a cosmic struggle for the soul of Tudor England'. Nevertheless, I am unable to read MacCulloch's next sentence as anything other than a polite put-down: 'This is a healthy warning, but it can hardly be coincidence that for the three years that he was in France, the progress of evangelical change never suffered a major reversal' (p 230; cf p 297).

There followed what MacCulloch describes as 'a series of bewildering seesaw reversals of fortune' (p 235) to the end of Henry's life. Thus the Great Bible appeared in 1539, but the sympathetic Cromwell shortly thereafter fell from power. The Catholic Howards replaced him and work began on the reactionary Six Articles which appeared in 1539 and were then further refined in the King's Book (1543). MacCulloch follows in detail the prolonged and acrimonious negotiations which among other things brought the re-assertion of clerical celibacy (and, necessarily, the departure overseas of Mrs Cranmer). Most important, however, was the pronouncement on the eucharist. The word 'transubstantiation' did not appear, but the real presence was aggressively affirmed, something nonetheless with which Cranmer was able to live in his accommodating way.

These were indeed his years of survival amid more of the King's marital adventures, of political uncertainties and complications and, most dangerous of all for Cranmer, of ecclesiastical conspiracy, notably in the Prebendaries' Plot in which Gardiner played a predictable part. MacCulloch tells the story in all its complex detail and sinister ramifications – with Cranmer saved at the end, in the moment of his enemies' anticipated triumph, only by his possession of the King's ring which Henry had given to him. All this time Cranmer was steadily going forward with liturgical revision and changes in church government. The new cathedrals, established after the final dissolution of the monasteries, received their royal statutes; and the new Primer in English appeared with the texts of the canticles and the Lord's Prayer which have been used ever since.

In these final years of Henry's reign something else happened. Cranmer definitely rejected any idea of the real presence in the sacrament. MacCulloch calls it 'the final element to be put into place in his mature theology' and says it is 'frustratingly difficult to date', adding: 'We know that the agent of this change was his friend and chaplain Nicholas Ridley,

because Cranmer himself said so at his trial in September 1555' (pp 354-5). None can deny this, but whether Ridley was the only-begetter is another matter. Bucer has been credited with some influence; and, as in what MacCulloch calls an 'extraordinary mood-swing' Henry shifted in a few short weeks from attempting a rapprochement with the papacy to a possible alliance with France and the Schmalkaldic League which would have included changing the Mass in both England and France into 'a communion (as we now use it)' (Cranmer's words in 1547), the Archbishop may have been influenced by the demands of political loyalty also (p 358).

Moving to the new reign, MacCulloch immediately declares (and in my judgment, accurately): 'It will be a central theme of my study of Cranmer's part in the regime of Edward VI that this evangelical establishment grouping knew from the start in 1537 exactly what reformation it wanted' (p 365). First came the Homilies, in Ashley Null's words, 'the mature public expression of his Protestant Augustinianism' (quoted p 374). Then came the 1549 Prayer Book with 'Holy Communion' replacing the Mass, with the 'clear purpose...to attack the notion of real presence' (p 386). MacCulloch's account, analysis and conclusions here are masterly. He decides that Cranmer 'would not have approved of Anglo-Catholic use of his 1549 rite as a safe haven from the implications of his 1552 rite.... The very great liturgist F E Brightman did his Anglo-Catholic best to misunderstand Cranmer's outlook in general, and in particular his intentions in 1549; it has taken the work of Geoffrey Cuming [in *Godly Order* pp 91-107] and others to disentangle subsequent confusion' (p 412). He later calls Gardiner's use of 1549 against Cranmer 'theological fools' gold for those Anglo-Catholics' (p 486), who have tried this same casuistry.

Inevitably Cranmer encountered religious opposition and political uncertainty. There was the Western Rebellion against the new faith and Somerset was overthrown by Northumberland, but the Archbishop proceeded steadily on his course. He published his *Defence of the true and Catholic doctrine of the sacrament of the body and blood of our Saviour Christ* (1550) and his *Answer to Gardiner* (1551). Whilst he resisted this opponent at one extreme, he opposed another, the radical reformer, Hooper, at the other. Meanwhile, liturgical reform continued apace, culminating in the 1552 Prayer Book and most notably in the revised Communion service, about which MacCulloch quotes Colin Buchanan reminding us that 'the only "moment" is reception – and the only point where the bread and wine signify the body and blood is at reception' (*What did Cranmer think he was doing?* p 23 – quoted p 507).

But was 1552 the culmination or would Cranmer have gone further? Did

he object to what Hooper wanted or merely to the pace at which he wanted to go? MacCulloch is worth citing at some length on this: 'From the moment of old King Henry's death, the evangelical establishment of Edward's England had known precisely what it wanted: a future of root-and-branch reform, set out with stark lack of compromise in the preface to Cranmer's *Defence*. However, that vision was to be accomplished in a strictly regulated series of steps... The aim of this graduated progress was change accomplished with decency, order and the maximum possible degree of popular consent... In the name of decency and order they were prepared to see paradise postponed' (p 486). The king's premature death made it look as though it was paradise lost.

There followed Cranmer's imprisonment, examination, confessions, 'trial' and final suffering, all traced by MacCulloch in full and pathetic detail – the old man, faced sometimes with severe interrogation, at others left alone, all the subtleties of what we so often mistakenly think of as modern psychological torture deployed against him. Then came the matchless bravery of his final defiance. Interestingly MacCulloch links Cranmer's return to and then rejection of the Roman obedience with his conflicting allegiance to his Catholic and Protestant sisters – 'He knew at the last that the battle for his soul was indeed being waged among his own flesh and blood, between his two sisters. He chose to give victory to the Protestant sister, and to leave the Catholic without her triumph' (p 605).

MacCulloch finally reminds us that 'Standing as he did in the developing reformed tradition of Europe in the 1550s, Cranmer's conception of a "middle way" or *via media* was quite different from that of later Anglicanism [ie not between Protestantism and Popery, as the Anglican Newman thought]. Cranmer would have utterly rejected such a notion: how could one have a middle way between truth and Antichrist? The middle way which he sought was the same as Bucer's: an agreement between Wittenburg and Zurich.... To define Cranmer as a reformed Catholic is to define all the great Continental Reformers in the same way: for they too sought to build up the Catholic Church anew on the same foundations of Bible, creeds and the great councils of the early Church' (p 617). This is so accurate. It shows how much we owe to Cranmer and it shows too that Evangelicals are not just a party, but that we are at the centre of the Church of England. We must be grateful for this new biography. It is an example of historical scholarship at its best.

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