

Lecture 10 – “Lighting a Candle”: The English Reformation

“Everyone knows that Richard the Third did away with his two little nephews...had them smothered.”

“Who said they were smothered?”

“My history book at school said it.”

“Yes, but whom was the history book quoting?”

“Quoting? It wasn’t quoting anything. It was just giving facts.”

(*The Daughter of Time*, Josephine Tey)

“Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.” Matthew 5:15

Background Reading

Gonzalez, ch. 8, pp. 70-80

Prayer

From Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury and Editor in Chief of the Book of Common Prayer (See also “A Dialogue on the Lord’s Prayer” by William Tyndale)

“O Lord Jesus Christ, you are the sun of the world, evermore arising, and never going down, which by your most welcome appearing and sight, brings forth, preserves, nourishes, and refreshes all things, as well that are in heaven as also that are on earth; we beg you mercifully and faithfully to shine in our hearts, so that the night and darkness of sins, and the mist of errors on every side may be driven away; with you brightly shining in our hearts we may all our life go without stumbling or offense, and may decently and seemly walk (as in the day time), being pure and clean from the works of darkness, and abounding in all good works which God has prepared us to walk in; you who with the Father and with the Holy Ghost live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.”

“Lighting a Candle”: The English Reformation

I. Kings and Queens

A. Henry VIII

1. Six wives!

- Catherine of Aragon
- Anne Boleyn
- Jane Seymour
- Anne of Cleves
- Catherine Howard
- Catherine Parr

Children:

- Mary
- Elizabeth
- Edward

Fate:

- divorced
- beheaded
- died
- divorced
- beheaded
- survived

2. The divorce issue: in 1527 Henry sought to divorce Catherine

- a. The canonical problem
- b. The political problem

3. The break: In 1534 Henry became “the only supreme head in earth of the Church of England” (The Supremacy Act)

a. Thomas More (1478-1535)

Richard Marius describes “the Thomas More of *A Man for All Seasons* as a Catholic Abraham Lincoln, an icon of purity and principle who provoked reverence and affection.” Unfortunately, in order for playwright Robert Bolt and director Fred Zinneman to make their drama “both a tract for the times and an appealing diversion to audiences” (the film was shot in the wake of the Second Vatican Council that liberalized Roman Catholicism and while the

horrors of Nazi and Communist tyranny loomed large in the western mind), they provided “a More who would have been scarcely recognizable in his own time and perhaps a scandal to More himself” (*Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies*, ed. Mark C. Carnes).

b. Thomas Cromwell

B. Edward VI (1547-53)—Protestant and Reformed movement

C. Lady Jane Gray

D. Mary (1553-58)—Catholic reaction (exiles and martyrs)

Philip E. Hughes on “The Captivity Epistles of the English Reformation”: “No documents of the English Reformation are more moving, or more replete with the spirit of true Christian sanctity.... [These] letters...show [Latimer, Ridley, Cranmer, and their colleagues] to have been more than conquerors through Jesus Christ their Lord; for they are distinguished by a spirit not merely of equanimity but also of joy and wonder that their Master should have honoured them by permitting them to suffer in this way for His cause” (*Theology of the English Reformers*, 103-104).

In his (1516-87) *Book of Martyrs (Acts and Monuments of These Latter and Perilous Dayes, Touching Matters of the Church)*, John Foxe (1516-87) “prays that all ‘true disposed minds’ which shall read his book may by the example of the martyrs’ lives, faith, and doctrine receive “spiritual fruit to their souls.” He exhorts his readers to “draw near to the fire” of the martyrs that “our cold hearts may be warmed thereby.”

E. Elizabeth (1558-1603)—Protestant and Anglican

II. Reformers

A. Early Influences

1. John Wyclif and the “Lollards”

2. Luther’s theology (White Horse Inn in Cambridge)

B. Leaders

1. Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556)

a. Archbishop of Canterbury (from 1533)

b. Creator of the Book of Common Prayer (“Perfect Words for the Contrite Heart”)

1) Loyalty to Scripture—“it is not lawful for the church to ordain anything that is contrary to God’s Word written” (“The Most Healthful Medicine”)

2) Respect for “the scriptural catholicity” of the ancient church and a desire to reinstate the purer order of the past—but only “those ceremonies which do serve to a decent order and godly discipline”

c. Burned at the stake in Oxford in 1556 (despite his recantation)—“When the wood was kindled and the fire began to burn near him, stretching out his arm, he put his right hand into the flame...”

The Four points of Cranmer’s sermon at the stake:

1) Don’t love this world but God and the world to come.

2) Next to God “obey your king and queen willingly and gladly.”

3) Love your fellow-Christians.

4) The rich should give generously to the poor, considering “that which is given to the poor is given to God; whom we have not otherwise present corporally with us, but in the poor.”

2. Hugh Latimer (1485-1555)

a. Great preacher (“Sermon on the Plowers”)

Latimer’s description of the sermon of Jonah to the Ninevites: “This was no great curious sermon, but this was a nipping sermon, a pinching sermon, a biting sermon....I say, Nineveh shall arise against England...because it will

- not believe God, not hear His preachers that cry daily unto them, nor amend their lives, and especially their covetousness.”
- b. Burned at the stake in Oxford in 1555: Latimer to Nicholas Ridley —“Be of good comfort Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle, by God’s grace, in England as I trust shall never be put out.”
3. William Tyndale (1494-1536)
 - a. Tyndale in debate with Catholic clergy: “I defy the pope and all his laws. If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost.” (“The Obedience of a Christian Man”)
 - b. New Testament with preface and notes (“pure Luther”) 1526; completed half of the Old Testament before his martyrdom in 1536
 - c. Tyndale’s dying prayer: “Lord, open the king of England’s eyes.” (See “A Letter from Prison, in Tyndale’s Own Hand”)
 - d. The “Great” Bible of Miles Coverdale (largely Tyndale’s work) put in the churches in 1539 (“The Most Healthful Medicine” by Thomas Cranmer)
 - e. 1611 Authorized Version (King James Version) translated by fifty leading scholars—90% Tyndale
 - f. Why is Tyndale’s translation so good? Creativity, nobility of language, accuracy, rhythm, freshness

Questions from Class

How did England view a ten-year old king?

What was the substance of Cranmer’s recantation?

What was the political context of England at this time?

How was the King James (Authorized) Version accepted in 1611?

Was there persecution of Catholics when the Protestants were in power?

For Further Study

**Theology of the English Reformers* (1965), Philip E. Hughes

Culled from the 50 or so volumes of the Parker Society Edition of the writings of the English Reformers, with excerpts from Thomas Cranmer, John Jewel, Hugh Latimer, William Tyndale, John Bradford, John Hooper, Nicholas Ridley, and others. Chapters on Scripture, Justification, Sanctification, Preaching and Worship, Ministry, Sacraments, Church and State show that the English Reformers were not only Protestant but largely Reformed in their theology.

**William Tyndale: A Biography* (1994), David Daniell

**The Elect Nation: The Meaning and Relevance of Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*, William Haller

**John Foxe and His Book* (1940), J. F. Mozley

The story of how Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* became, for several hundred years, a “second Bible” to the English people. From Mozley’s study, “Foxe emerges, not indeed as a great historian, but as an honest man” (C. S. Lewis).

A. Read the “Sermon on the Plowers” from *Selected Sermons of Hugh Latimer*, ed. Allan G. Chester (Virginia, 1968), 28-49. Hugh Latimer (1492-1555) was Bishop of Worcester under Henry VIII (resigning in 1539 over the approval of the Six Articles) and chaplain to Edward VI. He was the most popular and influential preacher of his day. A graduate of Cambridge, Latimer was ordained in 1515. He remained committed to traditional Catholicism and denounced the “newfangled” study of the Bible until 1524. Then, under the influence of Thomas Bilney of Trinity, Cambridge, he “began to smell the Word of God,” as he put it, “and forsook the school doctors and such fooleries.” His famous “Sermons on the Cards”—illustrated by a pack of playing cards—aroused great opposition to him from the Catholic clergy but brought him to the notice of Henry VIII who arranged for him to have a parish in Wiltshire. Despite illness Latimer continued to

preach during the reigns of Henry, Edward, and Mary. On most Sundays he preached two sermons, and, according to his Swiss friend and servant, Augustine Bernher, “every morning ordinarily, winter and summer, about two of the clock in the morning he was at his book most diligently.” At the accession to the throne of the Catholic Mary Tudor, Latimer did not flee but said, “I doubt not but that God, as He hath made me worthy to preach His word before two excellent princes, so will He enable me to witness the same unto the third, either to her comfort or discomfort eternally.” Latimer was arrested and was burned at the stake in 1555.

Latimer’s sermons lack organization (he had “a darting rather than a logical mind”) but they have “the charm of homely simplicity, of quaintness, and of heartfelt earnestness” (Allan G. Chester). There are touches of wit and humor, telling phrases and illustrations, and occasional introduction of bits of autobiography. Allan Chester writes: “If I were constrained to name the one characteristic that has kept [Latimer’s] sermons alive for four centuries, it would be the feeling for the identity of the man behind the sermons—the reader’s constant awareness of Hugh Latimer, the farm boy who became a bishop and preached before kings, articulate, occasionally raucous, courageous, sometimes foolhardy, sometimes cantankerous, sometimes tender, deeply serious of purpose but not much given to solemnity, a man who set his hand to the plow and in the end did not look back.”

Latimer’s “Sermon on the Plowers” was the last of four Wednesday sermons of January, 1548, all of which were based on the parable of the sower. The people were God’s field, the Word of God was the seed, and the clergy were the sowers, the plowers whose responsibility it was to prepare the field so that the seed would fall upon good ground. Answer the following questions as you read the “Sermon on the Plowers.”

- *What is Latimer’s first point of comparison between the preacher and the plowman?
- *What does Latimer mean when he says that “Scripture called [the preaching of the Word of God] meat, not strawberries”?
- *What verse does he use to emphasize that the preacher must work?
- *What is the point of the “butterfly” illustration?
- *What are Latimer’s complaints against the Roman Catholic prelates?
- *Who, according to Latimer, is “the most diligent bishop and prelate in all England”?
- *Where is a statement of the Protestant “regulative principle” found in the sermon?
- *Why does Latimer know so much about the devil?
- *How does the devil “evacuate the death of Christ”?
- *Who is “that Italian bishop yonder, [the devil’s] chaplain”?
- *Who is the king mentioned at the end of the sermon?
- *How would you summarize the main idea or ideas of Latimer’s sermon?

B. Read the following selection from *Foxe’s Christian Martyrs of the World* by John Foxe (Moody, n. d.), 469-86. One writer evaluates Foxe’s book this way: John Foxe “merges his reformed bias with the facts.” There is no necessary tension between the two, and the result is “a harmonious synthesis of supernatural and human causality” (G. V. Thompson, “Foxe’s Book of Martyrs,” 250-51).

In Foxe’s history, there is set forth dramatically the ongoing conflict between truth and error, good and evil, Christ and Satan, “this world” and “the kingdom of God.” It is not, however, a simple matter of the church versus the world. As Foxe knows all too well (and as we know, too, through our study of church history thus far), the world can appear wearing the face of the church and the church can, all too easily, become worldly. “Now forasmuch as the true church of God goeth not...alone, but is accompanied with some other church or chapel of the devil to deface and malign the same, necessary is it therefore the difference between them to be seen” (1:88). The difference is seen, according to Foxe, by the diligent study of church history—by comparing doctrine and practice, and by observing the moral force of the testimony of the martyrs (“Wherein

is to be noted how mightily the Lord worketh with His grace and fortitude in the hearts of his servants”). For Foxe the blood of the martyrs is not only the seed of the church (who said that?) but also its sign.

Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* (as his book was originally called) not only inspired countless Christians but played a role, according to William Haller, in England’s history. In his *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs and the Elect Nation*, Haller shows how Foxe helped to create a concept of the “election” of England by God to lead the world to righteousness and freedom (a powerful conviction passed on to America, which in a secular form became the doctrine of “manifest destiny”). Certainly nationalism is present in Foxe’s history, but it is clearly subordinate to the universalism of the Gospel which is for all nations. If England (and America) are given special roles in the preservation and propagation of the Gospel, they will be held responsible for their success or failure.

In this selection from his famous book, John Foxe tells the stories of the martyrdom under Queen Mary (“Bloody Mary”) of a woman, a teacher, and two bishops. What is your favorite incident or quotation from these pages?

Near the end of Foxe’s book is the “benediction”: “The grace of the Lord Jesus [be] with you...in all your studious readings...that by reading you may learn daily to know that which may profit your soul, may teach you experience, may arm you with patience, and instruct you in spiritual knowledge more and more to your perpetual comfort and salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord: to whom be glory in all ages. Amen.” This is my regular prayer for the students in this class.