

Thomas Cranmer

[Note: due to technical difficulties, the first two minutes of the lesson did not record. I have provided the transcript below.]

It was a rainy day in London on March 21, 1556, and the Church of England was preparing to burn a heretic. His heresy consisted mainly of two things: first, he had denied that the Pope was the head of the English Church, and second, he had denied the “real presence” of Christ in the Lord’s Supper, the idea that during the Lord’s Supper, the physical body and blood of Christ are actually present.

Now there was nothing unusual in all this. Heretics were burned on a fairly regular basis. But this particular heretic was different in at least two ways.

First, this heretic was none other than the Archbishop of Canterbury, the highest ranking official in the Church of England. Second only to the King or Queen.

His name was Thomas Cranmer. By this time, he was 66 years old and had a long white beard. He was internationally known as the leader of the Reformation in England; as the main author of the Book of Common Prayer and the 42 Articles. He’s a man who has worked closely with two English kings, Henry VIII and Edward VI.

But now he’s about to be burned as a heretic by Queen Mary I, known to history as “Bloody Mary.” Because nearly 300 Protestants were executed during her brief reign.

But the second unusual thing about this heretic is that he was about to be burned despite the fact that he had actually recanted of his heresy. Now normally when a person was charged with heresy, they were given a chance to recant—to take back what they had written or taught. And if they recanted, they were shown mercy.

But not this time. And so as Henry Cole stood that day to preach the sermon at Cranmer’s burning, part of his job was to try to explain why a repentant sinner like Cranmer still had to be burned contrary to custom. But Cole wasn’t the only speaker that day...]

I. Why Should You Know about Thomas Cranmer?

II. What Should You Know about Thomas Cranmer?

III. What Can We Learn from Thomas Cranmer?

Quotations used in the Lesson:

Good people—my dearly beloved brethren in Christ—I beseech you most heartily to pray for me to Almighty God, that He will forgive me all my sins and offenses, which are without number, and great above measure. But yet one thing grieveth my conscience more than all the rest, whereof, God willing, I intend to speak more hereafter...

(<http://www.bartleby.com/268/3/4.html>)

[Cranmer] was at the opposite extreme from Calvin, his younger contemporary, whose mind on everything was perfectly formed by the time he was twenty-five; intellectually as cautious and conservative as he was painstaking and thorough, his convictions ripened only slowly, after long and deliberate study.

-**J. I. Packer**, "Thomas Cranmer's Catholic Theology"

(Not used, but relevant)

"When the Lutheran controversy began in Germany, [Cranmer] decided to make a thorough study of the issues before committing himself. He began by studying Scripture for three years, reading with pen in hand and taking copious notes; then he turned to other authors, both new and old, whose doctrines could throw light on the validity of the Lutheran doctrines. There is a real indication here of Cranmer's character and temperament. While Wolsey and Fisher were intensifying their drive against the growing number of 'Lutherans' who were openly or secretly defying them at the risk of victimization, imprisonment, and burning, Cranmer was spending not months but years in quietly studying both sides of the question."

Jasper Ridley, *Thomas Cranmer*

"This [Cranmer's survival under Henry) is often ascribed to weakness or cowardice, but there is no evidence that Cranmer was a coward...The evidence, on the contrary, proves that he was a brave man...On several occasions, he intervened with Henry for men in disgrace or under sentence of death, and was as fearless in criticizing Henry to his face in private as he was loyal in praising him in public. **Jasper Ridley**, *Thomas Cranmer*

Quotes from Cranmer's *A Defense of the True and Catholic Doctrine of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Savior Christ*

...the true catholic faith grounded upon God's most infallible word teacheth us that our Savior Christ (as concerning his...bodily presence) is gone up into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of his Father, and there shall he tarry until the

world's end, at [which] time he shall come to judge the quick and the dead, as he saith in many Scriptures...

...And St. Paul, speaking of the very sacrament, saith, "As often as you shall eat this bread and drink this cup, you show forth the Lord's death *until he come.*" "*Till he come,*" saith St. Paul, signifying that he is not there corporally present...[For who would say 'Until he come' of someone who was already present?] This is the catholic faith, which we learn from our youth in our common Creed, and which Christ taught, and which the Martyrs confirmed with their blood...

...Thus our Savior Christ, knowing us to be in this world, as it were, but babes and weaklings in faith, hath ordained sensible signs and tokens, whereby to allure and draw us to more strength and more constant faith in him... And the for [reason] our Christ hath not only set forth these things most plainly in his holy word, that we may hear them with our ears; but he hath also ordained one visible sacrament of spiritual regeneration in water, and another visible sacrament of spiritual nourishment in bread and wine, to the intent that as much as is possible for man, we may see Christ with our eyes, smell him at our nose, taste him with our mouths, [touch] him with our hands, and perceive him with all our senses. For as the word of God preached putteth Christ into our ears, so likewise these elements of water, bread, and wine, joined with God's word, do after a sacramental manner put Christ into our eyes, mouths, hands, and all our senses...

[So] let all that love and believe Christ himself...not think that Christ is [physically] in the bread, but let them lift their hearts unto heaven, and worship him sitting there at the right hand of his Father...For Christ offered not the blood of calves, sheep, and goats...but he offered his own blood upon the cross. And he went not into an holy place made [with hands]...but he ascended up into heaven where his Father dwelleth, and before him he maketh continual supplication for the sins of the whole world, presenting his own body, which was torn for us, and his precious blood, which of his most gracious and liberal charity he shed for us on the cross. And that sacrifice was of such force, that [there] is no need to renew it..[for] Christ's sacrifice, once offered, was sufficient for evermore. "

