

Book Reviews

Gerald Bray. *Anglicanism: A Reformed Catholic Tradition*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021.

“What is Anglicanism?” I asked a bishop of the Church of England recently. His answer was “A hodgepodge” (whatever that is!). A curious mix maybe? A strange animal? A set of practices that can flex to accommodate many different styles and perspectives? In the minds of its critics and friends, the very breadth of Anglicanism creates a permissive environment within which to explore. A broad church functions best by being intentionally fuzzy, but this is not a tightly knit community with disciplined discipleship; rather, it is a polity that will not be overly prescriptive. The result is a very messy Anglican style. Formerly a Catholic church in the creedal sense of being “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic,” Anglicans will usually adopt a small “C” as its catholicity is not defined as being in communion with Rome.

The adherents of Anglicanism might stress different things, as could observers, whether friendly or skeptically hostile to its ambiguity. Some will experience Anglicanism as a set of often inspiring buildings. Some will stress the set prayers and liturgy that provides vectors of collective worship. Others will emphasize the approach to church government that helps to contain and manage situations that could otherwise get out of control but that can also be maddeningly slow and very far from nimble when needed. To its critics, what is distinctive is its curious history, especially surrounding its political birth. Churches that are more defined and disciplined will thrive better.

For Gerald Bray, the Anglican Church is a Protestant church with distinctive characteristics. And what provides that distinctiveness is a combination of these factors, but especially doctrine. That will not be the first thing many will think of when celebrated instances come to mind of bishops

who deny the literal resurrection of Jesus or vicars who refuse to preach on the virgin birth. Bray seems quite insistent that the set of standards in the Thirty-Nine Articles of Anglicanism, which he then proceeds to expound, provide guidelines for faith that are thoroughly biblical. He does not deny that they are also set in particular historical contexts that have to be understood and worked with. Trajectories of doctrinal development might well be possible: there may well be more light that can break forth from God's Word. But the Thirty-Nine Articles do provide a resource and doctrinal foundation within which that development might take place.

Bray is a reliable guide to the exposition of Anglicanism as a major grouping in contemporary Christianity that is both Reformed and catholic. Advocates of a Reformed position will find much to celebrate and agree with here, maybe as a reminder of how the Church of England went its own way five hundred years ago and the commitments that justified the break with Rome under Henry VIII.

It was not immediately apparent to this reviewer who the target audience is. Missing in Bray's admirably concise guide is a scholarly style replete with references. If it is for a general (though serious) reader, all well and good. For a more serious reader, Bray would need to develop his otherwise perfectly "safe" comments to show that the species of church that is Anglican or Episcopalian is compatible with confessions of faith, such as Heidelberg, that stood tall in subsequent centuries.

Bray does not begin to engage with the very real and often deeply perplexing debates that have arisen in a secular age and how the Reformed Articles might have something to say to them. That is understandable within a short summary that this book clearly is, but it is also frustrating. "Yes, but ..." one might want to exclaim. Has Anglicanism anything to say to the troubles of our times, with its baffling theories of the self, endemic violence, and environmental degradation?

The real question with Bray's admirable summary is not whether it is a workmanlike summary of the Thirty-Nine Articles and their relevance for today but whether anyone is listening. Most would not, one suspects, think of doctrinal clarity in the same sentence as Anglicanism. In contradistinction from, say, Bishop John Charles Ryle, the celebrated Victorian theologian Frederick D. Maurice was attracted by the broad, inclusive nature of Anglicanism. King's College London was not going to set out to uphold the Reformed basis of the Church of England. The Thirty-Nine Articles represented a historical document, certainly not a regulatory framework. Anglican thinkers since have not felt themselves constrained. The doctrinal and Evangelical element, in addition to the sacramental and episcopal

aspects, was clearly vital to the founders of the Church of England. They were on the same page as many of the continental Reformers.

Upholding the standards of contemporary Anglicanism is not so much about adherence to a basis of faith as faithfulness to a practice, a way of being church, of which doctrine is but one factor. There are, in Christian history, various collections of sources for authority when it comes to faith and reliable knowledge. In, for example, the Lambeth Quadrilateral, four points that are important as markers of Anglican identity are acceptance of Holy Scripture as the rule of faith, the Apostles' and the Nicene creeds, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the historic episcopate as representing that faith and providing a source of contact. It is not clear what role the doctrinal standards of the Thirty-Nine Articles have in depicting the shape of the contemporary church, which is given to what used to be termed "latitudinarian indifference to truth." Nevertheless, the reality that most Anglicans would probably not understand the Thirty-Nine Articles as a basis of faith does not detract from their continuing relevance as setting forth an expression of biblical Christianity. Bray is to be commended in putting a summary in our hands. The original theology of Anglicanism will continue to have an afterlife.

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James I. Packer. *The Heritage of Anglican Theology*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021.

This book began as a course on Anglican history and theology that Dr. James I. Packer taught over a number of years at Regent College in Vancouver. The lectures given in 1996 and those given in 2010 were transcribed, and an editor, Thomas Womack, merged the two sets of lectures into one volume. An external reader then read and commented on the manuscript. Next, Donald Lewis of Regent College edited the complete volume. Packer then read it over and made some comments and changes. Finally, the whole volume was read to Packer by his wife Kit (to whom the book is dedicated), and further edits and changes were made.

It is important to know this history for two reasons. First, Packer's previous books did not go through such a complex editorial process, with contributions from a number of scholars and editors, and that does make a difference. Second, this book is not in the style of Packer's earlier books, the language being more spoken English than written English, as one