

CRANMER SPEAKS TODAY

On this quincentenary of Cranmer's birth it is good to be reminded of how relevant are many of the things which Cranmer said and wrote to the present times. Here are some extracts from his works and two pieces of poetry which his death inspired.

The Sufficiency of Holy Scripture

Whatsoever the church teacheth you out of the Canonical books of the Bible, believe that; but if they teach you anything beside (I mean, which is not agreeable with the same) believe neither that nor them...cleave ye fast to the sound and certain doctrine of God's infallible word, written in the Canonical books of the New and Old Testament. (*Comfutation of Unwritten Verities*)

Lively Faith

As he that readeth Cesar's Commentaries, believing the same to be true, hath thereby a knowledge of Cesar's life and notable acts, because he believeth the history of Cesar, yet it is not properly said that he believeth in Cesar, of whom he looketh for no help nor benefit; even so he that believeth that all that is spoken of God in the Bible is true, and yet liveth so ungodly that he cannot look to enjoy the promises and benefits of God, although it may be said that such a man hath faith and belief in the words of God, yet it is not properly said that he believeth in God, or hath such faith and trust in God whereby he may surely look for grace, mercy and everlasting life at God's hand. (*Homily of The True, Lively and Christian Faith*)

Scripture – The Food of the Soul

Let us reverently hear and read Holy Scripture, which is the Food of the soul. Let us diligently search for the well of life in the books of the New and Old Testament, and not run to the stinking puddles of men's traditions, devised by men's imaginations, for our justification and salvation. (*Homily on Scripture*).

The Lord's Supper

The true eating and drinking of the said body and blood of Christ is, with a constant and lively faith to believe, that Christ gave his body, and shed his blood upon the cross for us, and that he doth so join and incorporate himself to us, that he is our head, and we his members, and flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bones, having him dwelling in us, and we in him. And herein standeth the whole effect and strength of this sacrament. And this faith God worketh inwardly in our hearts by his holy Spirit, and confirmeth the same outwardly to our ears by hearing of his word, and to our other senses by eating and drinking of the sacramental bread and wine in his holy supper. For figuratively he is in the bread and wine, and spiritually he is in them that worthily eat and drink the bread and wine; but really, carnally, and corporally, he is only in heaven, from whence he shall come to judge the quick and dead.

Christ's Sacrifice

Christ never gave this honour to any creature, that he should make a sacrifice of him, nor did not ordain the sacrament of his holy supper, to the intent that either the priest or the people should sacrifice Christ again, or that the priests should make a sacrifice of him for the people: but his holy supper was ordained for this purpose, that every man, eating and drinking thereof, should remember that Christ died for him, and so should exercise his faith, and comfort himself by the remembrance of Christ's benefits, and so give unto Christ most hearty thanks, and give himself also clearly unto him.

Worthy Reception of the Sacraments

As in baptism those that come feignedly, and those that come unfeignedly, both be washed with the sacramental water, but both be not washed with the Holy Ghost, and clothed with Christ: so in the Lord's supper both eat and drink the sacramental bread and wine, but both eat not Christ himself, and be fed with his flesh and blood, but those only which worthily receive the sacrament. (*The True and Catholick Doctrine of the Lord's Supper*)

Justification

Justification is not the office of man, but of God: for man cannot justify himself by his own good works, neither in part, nor in whole ... So the true understanding of this doctrine, we be justified freely by faith without works, or that we be justified by faith in Christ only, is not, that this our own act to believe in Christ, or this our own faith in Christ, which is within us, doth justify us ... but the true understanding and meaning thereof is, that although we hear God's word and believe it; although we have faith, hope, charity ... we must renounce the merit of all our said virtues....and good deeds which we either have done, shall do, or can do ... and therefore we must trust only in God's mercy, and in that sacrifice which our High Priest and Saviour Christ Jesus, the Son of God, once offered for us upon the cross... (*Homily of Salvation*)

The Mass

But what availeth it to take away beads, pardons, pilgrimages, and such other like popery, so long as the two chief roots remain unpulled up? whereof, so long as they remain, will spring up again all former impediments of the Lord's harvest, and corruption of his flock. The rest is but branches and leaves, the cutting away whereof is but like topping and lopping of a tree, or cutting down of weeds, leaving the body standing and the roots in the ground; but the very body of the tree, or rather the roots of the weeds, is the popish doctrine of transubstantiation, of the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament of the altar (as they call it), and of the sacrifice and oblation of Christ made by the priest, for the salvation of the quick and the dead. Which roots if they be suffered to grow in the Lord's vineyard, they will overspread all the ground again with the old errors and superstitions. (*The True and Catholick Doctrine of the Lord's Supper*)

The Pope

Alas! what hath the pope to do in England? whose jurisdiction is so far different from the jurisdiction of this realm, that it is impossible to be true to the one and true to the other...I will never give my consent to the receiving of him into this Church of England. (*Examination before Brokes*)

The Martyrdom

'Make short! make short!' and so they lit the wood.
Then Cranmer lifted his left hand to heaven,
And thrust his right into the bitter flame;
And crying, in his deep voice, more than once,
'This hand offended - this unworthy hand!'
So held it till it all was burn'd, before
The flame had reach'd his body; I stood near -
Mark'd him - he never uttered moan of pain:
He never stirr'd or writhed, but, like a statue,
Unmoving in the greatness of the flame,
Gave up the ghost; and so past martyr-like.

Tennyson

Sonnet on Cranmer

Outstretching flame-ward his upbraided hand
(O God of mercy, may no earthly seat

Of judgement such presumptuous doom repeat!)
Amid the shuddering throng doth Cranmer stand;
Firm as the stake to which with iron band
His frame is tied; firm from the naked feet
To the bare head, the victory complete;
The shrouded body, to the soul's command,
Answering with more than Indian fortitude,
Through all her nerves with finer sense endued,
Till death departs in blissful aspiration:
Then 'mid the ghastly ruin of the fire,
Behold the unalterable heart entire,
Emblem of faith untouched, miraculous attestation!

Wordsworth