

Signs Of Gods Promise: Thomas Cranmers Sacramental Theology And The Book Of Common Prayer

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Gordon P. Jeanes, *Signs of God's Promise: Thomas Cranmer's Sacramental Theology and the Book of Common Prayer* (London: Continuum, 2008), pp. 328. ISBN 987 0567 031 891 (pbk).

In 1989, the 500th anniversary of the birth of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury (1533-1553), was celebrated. Actually, the event barely raised a whisper in England, where the good man, who (along with Shakespeare and the translators of the Authorised Version) had done as much as anyone to shape the English language, was denied a commemorative postage stamp!

Cranmer Hall, Durham, however, sponsored a conference of Cranmer luminaries. Scarcely two dozen non-speakers participated, yet its papers are seen by Gordon Jeanes as a turning point in Cranmer studies. This book opens with a first-rate survey of Cranmer's varied appreciation and influence, especially post-Dix, and then takes the reader on a scintillating journey, tracing the development of Cranmer's sacramental theology step-by-step.

Three chapters lay the foundations for the two key chapters in this highly readable work — 'Cranmer's Mature Theology of the Sacraments' and 'The Prayer Books of 1549 and 1552'. Jeanes works very carefully with the pre-Reformation background and the available sources, considering them in broadly chronological order. He is particularly sensitive to the nuances of works intended for popular use, official documents and how they relate to different stages in Henry VIII's reign.

Two features of Jeanes's analysis stood out to this reader. First, he takes with full seriousness Cranmer's developed belief that both sacraments of the Gospel work in similar ways, showing, in particular, the very similar structure between the 'sacramental' sections of the Baptism and Holy Communion rites. To do this, he engages in a full and illuminating discussion of Cranmer's distinctive position on why and how infants should be baptized, over against both Luther and Bucer. The final chapter, 'The Administration of Baptism: A Commentary on the Text of the Service', is a sustained and compelling analysis of Cranmer's two Books in the light of possible sources.

Which leads into the second feature of this work. While recognizing Cranmer's awareness of, and engagement with, the thought and liturgical practice of Continental Reformers and those who came to England, Jeanes is able to sustain a convincing argument that Cranmer was not 'influenced' by them, but sustained an approach that was both distinctive to and appropriate for England.

This is a readable, compelling and thorough review of Cranmer's sacramental theology — whatever position one might like the good Archbishop to have taken. A brief Conclusion points towards what this book might imply for today, and a full Bibliography is included. Mercifully, footnotes are utilized rather than endnotes, especially helpful when reference is made to primary sources.

The back cover cites Diarmaid MacCulloch saying 'this book will be of lasting value'. Brian Spinks adds that 'the time has arrived for a fresh review of Cranmer's

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Early Church Fathers and, not least, the Word of God. . The Book of Common Prayer did little to help, and the revised Prayer Book Christ chose the sacramental bread and wine to represent our spiritual. Signs of God's Promise by Gordon P. Jeanes. Details about Signs of God's Promise: Thomas Cranmer's Sacramental Theology and the Book of Co . Rite () and Cranmer and Common Prayer in the Oxford Guide to the BCP ().

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