

[MJTM 23 (2021–2022)]

#### BOOK REVIEW

Gerald Bray. *Anglicanism: A Reformed Catholic Tradition*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021. 169 pp. Hbk. ISBN 9781683594369. \$23.99.

Gerald Bray is a prominent evangelical Anglican who has made a name for himself through his highly respectable writing and editorial work. In this small introductory book, he addresses the question of what Anglicanism is and, secondarily, what it should be. He begins by appreciating the difficulty of the question and acknowledging the range of contradictory answers. Bray's proposed way past the quagmire is to take a historical approach: "The best we can do is revisit the history, try to understand how we arrived where we are, and ask ourselves whether some theological trajectories are more consistent and more faithful to the ongoing Anglican tradition than others are" (5).

Chapter 1 includes a concise historical overview of the Church of England and Anglicanism. Some will likely be pleased to know that he begins not with the English Reformation but with the Irish and Roman missions to Britain in the sixth century, though he is quick to point out that it was not until the Reformation that "a distinct form of Christianity that might be called Anglican" came into being (5). The survey highlights many important people, ideas, and events, and the overview of the post-Reformation period gives a helpful summary of movements such as latitudinarianism and low-church Anglicanism. From here, Bray moves to an introduction to the Anglican Communion as well as Anglican characteristics and theology. He upholds the historic formularies and especially the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion as an enduring standard of theology, though he disqualifies the Book of Common Prayer (BCP), one of the formularies, from having this function on the grounds that it merely

applies theology it receives from elsewhere; its teaching, he says, should be interpreted in light of its sources, such as the Bible and the Articles. He is therefore left with the Articles, the Ordinal (which provides the liturgy for ordinations), and the two Books of Homilies.

The next four chapters, comprising the majority of the book, are a commentary on the Articles. Here Bray is in familiar territory; he has already written a book-length commentary on them (*The Faith We Confess: An Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles*. London: The Latimer Trust, 2009). Chapter 2, “The Catholicity of Anglicanism,” begins by qualifying Anglicanism’s catholicity with three descriptors—it is Western, Protestant, and Reformed—and then comments on the first eight articles, which Bray seems to understand as expressing catholic doctrine, though not all of their content would be fully accepted by Roman Catholics or Orthodox. Chapter 3 comments on Articles 9 to 33, which the chapter title describes as expressing “The Reformed (Protestant) Character of Anglicanism”; chapter 4 comments on Articles 34 to 37; and chapter 5 comments on the final two. Bray seems to be concerned primarily with what the Articles were meant to convey, and he does not even mention the interpretations that treat the text like a legal document and find liberty in what it does not expressly state. The result is a decidedly Protestant commentary. For example, Bray takes Article 22 as forbidding not just sixteenth-century Roman Catholic teaching concerning images but the veneration of them (and, I think, saints) in general. On the subject of baptism, he states bluntly that Anglicans reject the doctrine of baptismal regeneration and cites the famous Gorham case of the nineteenth century as evidence. Most of the commentary, however, is fairly uncontroversial, and the overall tone is one not of inhouse polemic but of careful instruction, with focus being given to the historical background of the teaching and to the principles this teaching contains.

The book concludes with three short chapters. Chapter 6 gives a very short history of the various versions of the BCP and then gives an overview of the 1662 book’s contents. The next chapter is on Anglican church government, and it addresses matters such as the threefold ministry and the sacraments, which for

Bray are only baptism and the Lord's Supper. There is also a brief section on the Church of England's canon law, a subject that many in other parts of the world will know little about. In the final chapter, Bray describes the current state of Anglicanism, grouping the various Anglican provinces or churches into categories, such as the "settler churches" (162) and the "colonial missionary churches" (163). He ends by stating that the future of Anglicanism remains uncertain, especially in light of the activity of the Global Anglican Future Conference and the Global South Network, both of which are theologically conservative.

Probably the most controversial aspect of this book, and the one that will have the greatest influence on readers' appraisal of it, is Bray's insistence that The Thirty-Nine Articles are an enduring standard for Anglican theology. Some might argue that the overall story of Anglicanism is not favorable to the authority of the Articles, in which case a historical approach to Anglican identity should drop the idea. Bray would surely have a counter-argument, but the debate would go on. This question deserves further attention. Without endeavoring to solve the problem myself, I would like to note that Bray weakens his claim about the Articles's authority when he says that some of Article 39 is no longer in effect. If part of an authoritative standard can be passed over, then the authority of that standard is called into question. A full defense of the Articles needs to address this issue.

Regardless of what one thinks of The Thirty-Nine Articles, there is much to appreciate in this book. Bray clearly knows the subject matter well, and he is able to communicate his ideas concisely and with lucid prose. He is especially to be commended for the historical information he provides, which is almost always fair and enlightening, and which helps the reader grasp the intended meaning of the Articles. Few introductory-level readers, of course, will approach the book knowing what "supererogation" means (see Article 14), so historical background is important. Also laudable is the instructive, almost catechetical tone with which Bray writes. He comes across not as an angry Anglican partisan but as a teacher who wants to use the riches of Anglicanism to form disciples of Christ. This tone helps prevent the conversation about Anglican identity from being divorced from

the ministry of discipleship to which Anglicans are called.

Having said all this, I have five criticisms of the book. The first is that I remain unsatisfied with Bray's description of Anglicanism as Reformed. Anglicanism certainly has been influenced by Reformed theology, but it is much broader and more accepting of Catholic elements than the Reformed tradition is. Perhaps it would be better to follow many others in describing Anglicanism as a distinct kind of Protestantism that is not exactly Reformed or Lutheran. Second, the commentary on Article 25 "Of the Sacraments" asserts Puritan-type beliefs without proper justification. For example, Bray baldly says that "orders [i.e., ordinations] are administrative procedures within the church that do not convey any special grace to those who receive them" (109). Since this idea is rejected by a large proportion of Anglicans, Bray should explain where he gets it from and demonstrate its compatibility with the Ordinal. Third, Bray makes too grand a claim when he says that Augustinian predestination "is clearly taught in the New Testament and has always been officially accepted by both Protestant and Roman Catholic churches" (93).

Fourth, at one point, the book seems to show traces of the disdain for Anglo-Catholicism that evangelical Anglicans have been notorious for. In his introductory description of the movement, he says that Anglo-Catholics "rewrote the history of the Church of England" (29) to present Anglicanism as ancient and independent of the papacy and that historians have "demolished" this interpretation of history (30). This is simply unfair. He also says, "The more extreme (or logical?) Anglo-Catholics tended to convert to Roman Catholicism as they realized that the Church of England was not truly 'Catholic' in the way that they wanted it to be" (29). This backhanded comment is a variation on a tired old evangelical criticism that is ironic in consideration of how many emphatically Protestant people have left the Church of England for one ecclesial body or another (I say this as an Anglican clergyman and an evangelical who shares many of Bray's convictions).

Finally, Bray has not adequately supported his assertion that the BCP must be interpreted not on its own terms but according to other documents, such as the Articles and the Bible. The rela-

tionship of the BCP with the Articles is more complicated than the former simply deriving its ideas from the latter, and I cannot see any good reason why the BCP should not be allowed to have a voice of its own that cannot be explained away. Moreover, it would be strange to determine what the BCP says by appealing ultimately to the Bible. The BCP interprets the Bible, as do the three creeds and the Articles, and the student of these texts should examine how they interpret Scripture instead of expecting their meaning to line up with the student's best interpretation of the Bible. Bray might invoke the methodology behind the famous Gorham judgment here, but the enduring authority of that judgment for Anglicans around the world would need to be demonstrated.

The aforementioned problems, frustrating though they might be, should not disqualify the book from serving as a respected resource on the subject of Anglican identity. Bray, in bringing his vast knowledge to bear on this thorny question, has made a valuable contribution that should earn him gratitude from Anglicans around the world. This book might not be the last word, but it is a word that deserves to be heard.

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