

# Cranmer

If you have not heard of Cranmer then you really ought to check him out.

I do not mean Thomas Cranmer, the sixteenth century English politician and Archbishop of Canterbury who did Henry VIII's bidding and was largely responsible for the process of transforming England from a Catholic into a Protestant country. You might say he campaigned for the power of State over Religion.

In fact, he is an interesting character study. Priests, in that pre-Protestant era were not allowed to marry. Of course many of them got up to "monkey business", including popes with their batteries of "nephews"! But Cranmer actually married, although he had to keep it a secret for 14 years. By all accounts he was very devoted to his wife and she to him.

Cranmer paid for his support of Protestantism with his life. When Henry VIII's Catholic daughter, Mary Tudor, "Bloody Mary", came to the throne, she tried to reverse the reforms and Cranmer was put on trial. To try to save his life he recanted. Something Jews, too, often had to do in those religiously barbaric days. It didn't help. As he was about to be executed, he defiantly recanted his recantation. So I guess whether he is a hero or not depends, as always, on whose side you are on.

If you have seen the television series The Tudors, you saw him portrayed as a weasel, a toady, a snake. I guess the writers had an agenda. But to many he represents that long and slow move towards Anglican openness and tolerance that many admire.

Nowadays the Anglican Church gets a bad rap for being so open-minded that it hardly stands for anything (as Cole Porter put it, "anything goes"). And I have to admit that I have often written negative pieces about the moral relativism of its archbishops, its tendency to face all directions simultaneously, and the intellectual indefensibility of its divines sitting in the parliamentary House of Lords and voting on matters they ought, by rights, not to.

Their lily-livered cowardice in refusing to stand up and protest Islamic attempts to roll back freedom of conscience and practice in the UK is one of the reasons why the fight for European cultural integrity has all but been abandoned. Nothing typifies the weakness of a liberal, middle-of-the-road position more than Anglicanism does, which, in part, is why more extreme sectors like the African Anglicans are breaking away to move closer to their Charismatic rivals and why charismatic churches in the UK are doing so much better than the Anglican establishment. Yet for all that, as the church fragments and Anglicans and Episcopalians slide gently towards irrelevance, I have to say I regret the loss.

As demonic, defiant, religious banshees scream and howl for their gods to punish nonbelievers, it is such a shame that the old tolerant C of E is

nowhere to be seen. I recall the good old days of the CND marches fifty years ago, which were civilized, gentlemanly demonstrations. Vicarly marches from Aldermaston to Trafalgar Square, where children were able to amble alongside adults with not a fear in the world. Nowadays you would have to be a child abuser to take one along to demonstrations of the aggressive savages who now typically posture and threaten for the right to oppress others.

Do not be misled into thinking that all C of E vicars were all tolerant, ineffectual, bumbling nonentities like the ones Jane Austen likes to describe. In 1754 when Parliament passed the Jew Bill, giving Jews equal rights, it was the Clerics of the C of E who led the opposition, with silly charges that Jews would insist that all Englishmen get circumcised and be forced to give up pork, that led to the bill being repealed and another hundred years wait until equality was achieved, at least on paper. In 1975 I was invited to 'say grace' at a meeting of top English headmasters and five Anglicans headmasters walked out in protest at what they perceived as a threat to the religious integrity of their organization. So the fact is that the Church of England's record is hardly perfect. But there have been, as indeed there are everywhere, some very significant exceptions; during the Second World War, Anglican archbishops were amongst the only churchmen to publicly take a stand against the extermination of the Jews.

I have gone into this long, apparently irrelevant excursion because of another Cranmer. He of the blog.

Because if you want to see why, despite everything I have written, I have a very soft spot for the C of E, it is because of men like him. Read what he writes. You will not find a more balanced, sensitive, and open Christian view of the world than his. And when the Talmud talks about the Pious of the Nations having a place in the World to Come, I reckon he'll be right up there with the other least expected candidates for our version of sainthood.