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THE NEGLECTED CRAFT: PRUDENCE IN REFORMED POLITICAL THOUGHT

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Craftsmen. Some elicit our wonder with their artistry. Others go unnoticed, their work blending seamlessly into the landscape of our lives. We need both, of course. While the former add beauty to our world, those latter, ignored artisans help make living possible, forming many of the structures and items we depend on daily.

Aristotle described politics as involving art or craft (*techne*). It, too, requires skill. It, too, can produce excellent, even wondrous edifices: regimes. It, too, aids in living and in living well. Once upon a time, the Reformed tradition saw politics in the same manner. Althusius, for example, spoke of "the art of governing."[1] Joseph Caryl, a Westminster Divine, described rulers as engaging in an "art" or a "craft." These thinkers, moreover, developed this understanding of politics-as-artistry, doing so consciously within a Reformed framework.

However, by the twentieth century, political craftsmanship had descended into the dilettantish. Twentieth-century Protestants certainly participated in politics; the Social Gospel movement and the Religious Right bookended the period, each involved in electioneering and policy advocacy. Yet, for much of this period, American Protestantism largely ignored the foundations its efforts either violated or presupposed. We might passionately call for "family values" legislation. We might go door-to-door for candidates. But we read precious little Plato or Nietzsche. We thought and wrote sparingly on the fundamental questions of nature, law, and justice that ground, consciously or unconsciously, all political deeds. We failed even to acknowledge, much less to cultivate, our craft.

One could fill a book investigating why twentieth-century Protestantism took this route. It would tell familiar tales, tracing the rise of Modernism and the reactions to it in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. It would discuss the American Mainline's cultural dominance and the implications of that hegemony's decline.

Instead of telling that story, this essay explores recovery from it. That recovery began a few decades ago in a small but vibrant retrieval of Reformed natural law. In particular, scholars have focused on how natural law reveals the virtue of justice. A lingering effect of the reaction against Modernism has been to think that *sola scriptura* necessitates rejecting any useful natural knowledge of this virtue. A budding line of work has shown that logic's fallaciousness. Reformed theology possessed a wide consensus regarding natural law's existence and how it manifests to us principles of right and wrong.[2]

1. Johannes Althusius, *Politica,* trans. Frederick S. Carney (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1995), 136.

2. An early contribution was Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006).

As I shall show, re-establishing natural knowledge of justice contributes mightily to recovering the political art. But, while necessary, knowing these principles is insufficient. This recovery requires the retrieval of political practice as well. That task demands that we reacquaint ourselves with another virtue: prudence.

For Reformed theology past, prudence comprised the lynchpin of the magistrate's craft. Scottish theologian George Buchannan described prudence as the "Civil Art or science."[3] Althusius, too, summed up what he called "the art of governing" as the exercise of this virtue.[4] Good rule, he said, must "consist in political prudence, in which no administration of a magistrate ought to be lacking."[5] Regarding "the preservation of polities," Danish theologian Niels Hemmingsen followed Plato in describing prudence as the commanding virtue. He claimed that in political life the other three—temperance, courage, and justice—are ordered by it.[6]

What, though, is this ruling virtue? Sometimes also called "wisdom," prudence concerns actions rightly applying principle to practice. Lazurus Seaman, a member of the Westminster Assembly, described prudence as "*An ability of the mind whereby we know what is fit to be done, all circumstances considered, and are inclined to doe accordingly*."[7] This definition readily points to political life. Politics itself consists of deeds—Aristotle would say of acts of ruling and of being ruled in turn. Political prudence, then, involves rightly-ordered acts of rule.

Prudence culminates in action, but it does not begin there. Wise political deeds require right knowledge. For to do rightly, we must know rightly. The knowledge prudent action utilizes, then, is two-fold: universal and particular.

First, prudent action draws on universal knowledge. The political art requires knowledge of the standard of right, "the rule of living and administering."[8] The Reformed saw this rule encapsulated in the natural law. Althusius called it the "[c]ommon law (*lex communis*)."[9] Westminster Divine George Gillespie defined this "Law of Nature" as "both the common principles of good and evill, vertue and vice, right and wrong, things beseeming and things not beseeming; and likewise the generall conclusions which by necessary consequences are drawen from the said principles."[10] Its commonality entailed its universality. Althusius noted that the knowledge of this law "has been naturally implanted by God in all men."[11] No one could claim ignorance of it as an excuse. Furthermore, this universally known law also commonly obligated human beings to obey its standard. John Lightfoot, another Westminster Divine, stated that "[t]he moral law concerns the whole world; and it was given in sight of the whole world, on the top of a mountain; and must endure as long, as any mountain standeth."[12] The Westminster Confession itself echoes this position, stating that "[t]he moral law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof."[13] This law declares the content of justice. It describes the obligations of man as man.

Reformed thinkers saw this law's content summed up in the moral law or the Ten Commandments. Scottish theologian John Weemes, for instance, declared that "the law which he [God] gave to all Nations, was the law of Nature manifested to *Adam* before the fall" and that "the Lord renued this same Law againe upon Mount *Sinai,* to all Nations."[14] Francis Turretin also connected the Decalogue-summarized moral law and the natural law, declaring that they agree "as to substance and with regard to principles."[15] In this law, restated on Mount Sinai, we know our universal, perpetual obligations to God and to our neighbor.

THE POLITICAL ART REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE OF THE STANDARD OF RIGHT, "THE RULE OF LIVING AND ADMINISTERING." THE REFORMED SAW THIS RULE ENCAPSULATED IN THE NATURAL LAW.

In addition to universal knowledge of the right, political prudence requires an understanding of universal human nature. Althusius noted that a ruler must "understand the nature, character, tendencies, and propensity of people in general."[16] Humans, like justice, possess common traits. These commonalities include a soul endowed with reason and will. In speaking of man's creation in God's image, Turretin spoke of the human soul possessing "faculties," namely "the intellect and the will."[17] Calvin, too, affirmed that "the human soul consists of two faculties, understanding and will."[18] By these means, men might know the difference between virtue and vice as well as desire one or the other. Humans, moreover, possess inherent social qualities that drive them to society. Citing Aristotle, Samuel Rutherford concluded that "God hath made man a sociall creature," which then naturally leads to his participation in political life.[19] Finally, humanity inherited indwelling sinfulness that corrupted both man's reason and his will. Interestingly, this point showed an important reason why prudence necessitated knowledge of human nature as a companion to the natural law. Calvin noted that "the depravity and malice…of man…[does] not spring from nature, but rather from the corruption of nature" in the Fall.[20] Man's perfection and man's reality diverged fundamentally after Genesis 3. He no longer had his original clarity of mind or freedom of will. Christopher Goodman repre-

3. George Buchannan, *De Jure Regni Apud Scotos,* trans. Philalethes (London: 1680 [1579]), 21-22.

4. Althusius, *Politica,* 137.

5. Althusius, *Politica*, 136.

6. Neils Hemmingsen, *On the Law of Nature: A Demonstrative Method,* trans. Eric J. Hutchinson (Grand Rapids: CLP Academic, 2018), 80.

7. Lazarus Seaman, "Solomon's Choice" (London: E.G., 1644), 35.

8. Althusius, *Politica,* 139.

9. Althusius, *Politica,* 18.

10. George Gillespie, *A Dispute Against the English-Popish Ceremonies* (Leiden: W. Christiaens, 1637), 198-199.

11. Althusius, *Politica,* 139.

12. John Lightfoot, *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Lightfoot, Vol. IV,* ed. Rev. John Rogers Pittman (London: J.F. Dove, 1822), 79.

13. *Westminster Confession of Faith,* 19.5.

14. John Weemes, *An Exposition of the Second Table of the Morall Law* (London: T.C., 1632), 1.

15. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1994), 2: 6.

16. Althusius, *Politica,* 152.

17. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* I: 466.

18. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 194.

19. Samuel Rutherford, *Lex, Rex* (London: For John Field, 1644), 2.

20. Calvin, *Institutes,* 163.

sented the consensus view when he spoke of "vile man, replenished with pride, vain glory, and gross ignorance" who "must prefer his own decrees, fantasies, and ordinances" to true justice.[21] The prudent must know humanity's standard as found in the natural law and its fallen nature as seen in human conduct.

Second, beyond the universal, political rule requires particular knowledge. These particulars arise from the diversity of human life. Althusius noted that differences existed regarding the "kinds of individuals…involved."[22] Human nature, though possessing unified qualities, also shows varieties of character. These differences pertain to persons as well as to peoples. Local, regional, and national political communities develop distinct tendencies and characteristics. A ruler must know them, discerning the "character, customs, nature, attitude, and viewpoint of the people."[23] He must observe the same in neighboring peoples as well when conducting foreign policy. Moreover, Althusius noted distinctions between polities and their circumstances. Circumstances include terrain, economy, and a variety of other factors, not least of which how the general depravity of humanity manifests itself in particular places. These all, too, a ruler must recognize. Otherwise, magistrates lack important knowledge of the peoples they govern, for these particulars form an integral part of each polity.

ASSERTION OF LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE BY THE INDEPENDENTS OF THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY OF DIVINES, 1644

Together, these two kinds of knowledge—universal and particular—constitute the bases of wise action. Like Aristotle, Edward Leigh distinguished "speculative wisdom," or contemplative knowledge, from "Prudence, the ability to of managing affairs discreetly."[24] One must not merely think prudently; one must also act prudently in the political realm. This wise action seeks not the absolute best, but the best possible at a given time. Thus, as Samuel Rutherford summed up the matter: "prudence is a virtue" involving twin requirements. Yes, "there be rules here which standeth always," namely the natural or moral law. However, "*a wise man observes times,* and so will he observe all other circumstances."[25]

Having defined prudence, I now turn to two categories of political action wherein Reformed thought concerning prudence manifested. Girolamo Zanchi stated that "the duty of every free magistrate is to have a diligent care both in making laws, in giving judgment, and also in punishing offenses."[26] Along these lines, we will examine the making of human law and judgment and punishment under the law's execution.

LEGISLATION

To begin, magistrates exercise prudence in composing human laws. Human laws apply the precepts of universal knowledge to the circumstances of particular reality. Universal knowledge alone leaves the ruling art lacking. Zanchi noted that "natural law, although it has been written on hearts, only remains in the aforementioned general principles."[27] As universal, natural law can account for what man was commonly obliged to do. However, as stated above, persons and peoples possess an expansive variety of differences in character and in circumstance. These differences entail a gap between natural law's universals and the particulars of time and place. Althusius stated that "[b]ecause the condition and nature of all these things is various, diverse, inconsistent, and changeable, one cannot assert that the application of common law is one and the same in every matter and situation."[28] The universal must be applied. And that application requires bridging the gap between natural law and the situation in view.

This task falls to the legislator using the means of human laws. Althusius explained that "proper law (*jus proprium*) is nothing other than the practice of this common natural law (*jus naturale*) as adapted to a particular polity."[29] Zanchi explained why this adaptation was needed. "Human laws," he wrote, "are enacted for circumstances of place, time, and personality."[30] They take the universal principles found in the natural law and apply them to specific occasions. One may know from the natural law that theft is wrong. However, stealing might manifest differently in an agricultural society than in an urban one, differently in a desert than on the seas.

The Reformed saw this great legislative task as necessitating art or skill. Zanchi noted that "not all people excel in ingenuity so that they can make particular conclusions and laws from these principles."[31] Discerning the line between murder and self-defense, for example,

21. Christopher Goodman, *How Superior Powers Ought to Be Obeyed By Their Subjects* (Geneva: John Crispin, 1558), 10.

22. Althusius, *On Law and Power,* trans. Jeffrey J. Veenstra (Grand Rapids: CLP, 2013), I.14.8. Kindle Edition.

23. Althusius, *Politica,* 149.

24. Edward Leigh, *A System or Body of Divinity* (London: A.M, 1654), 590.

25. Samuel Rutherford, *Divine Right of Church Government* (London: John Field, 1646), 82.

26. Girolamo Zanchi, *De Religione Christiana Fides,* ed. Luca Baschera and Christian Moser (Boston: Brill, 2007[1599]), 481.

27. Girolamo Zanchi, *On the Law in General,* trans. Jeffrey J. Veenstra (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 2013), 28.

28. Althusius, *On Law and Power*, I.14.8.

29. Althusius, *Politica,* 144.

30. Zanchi, *On the Law in General*, 38.

31. Zanchi, *On the Law in General,* 28.

might require wise distinctions regarding situations and persons involved. The Fall exacerbates this problem. The *Leiden Synopsis* (1625), written by Dutch theologians, made this point. While the "primary" first principles of natural law remain knowable to man even after sin, their particular applications "stagger with wretched hesitation whenever one goes from general things to particular ones."[32] Our sin grossly distorts attempts to perceive and thus to apply the natural law. Zanchi therefore noted that "there is a need that wise and thoughtful people be stirred by God even within the nations themselves, who clearly explain their laws from natural law for the well-being and protection of their State."[33] In other words, every polity needs legislators skilled in the political art of prudence.

Reformed political theologians saw a ready example of legislative prudence: the judicial laws of Moses. Distinct from the Ten Commandments and the ceremonial laws, the judicial law consisted of the Hebrews' political statutes found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Reformed understood the relationship between the moral law and the judicial as that of the natural to the human. English Puritan Francis Roberts, for example, declared the moral law "the base and foundation" for the judicial law.[34] William Gouge, a Westminster Divine, noted the "branches of the judicial law which…were means of keeping the moral law."[35]

LAWMAKERS SHOULD NOT COPY AND PASTE THE JUDICIAL LAWS INTO THEIR OWN STATUTE-BOOKS, FOR THEIR LETTER HOLDS NO AUTHORITY OVER ANY EXISTING POLITY.

For these men, the judicial law gave more than *an* example of how to apply the natural law. It was the example *par excellence*. This point stemmed, of course, from the fact that God was its Author. That authorship pointed to those laws' intrinsic worth, a perfect reflection of a perfect Composer. Roberts declared of the judicial law that God "gave them [Israel] the best political laws that ever any commonwealth had."[36] Junius asserted that "the examples set forth in the law of Moses occurred in the mode of perfection, which people at that time could comprehend, and for this reason the law of Moses is not only an example of those laws, but we most piously affirm that they are a perfect example of law."[37]

But these men were careful in delineating the judicial law's exemplary role. The Westminster Confession declared that these statutes' binding aspect "expired together with the State of that [the Hebrew] people."[38] Westminster was far from alone on this score. Henry Bullinger, for instance, stated that "the judicial laws do seem to be abrogated in this sense…no Christian commonweal, no city or kingdom, is compelled to be bound and to receive those very same laws."[39] Many rightly marshal texts like these against Theonomist tendencies; lawmakers should not copy and paste the judicial laws into their own statute-books, for their letter holds no authority over any existing polity.

Still, Westminster did say that these laws retained a role in political affairs. It noted that these statutes still possessed a "binding aspect" to the extent "the general equity thereof may require."[40] By "general equity," the Divines meant the principles of the natural or moral law. The judicial law thus sought to do what all merely human laws must pursue: bring the moral law to bear on the character and conditions of a particular political community. Junius said that God "adapted each and every one of his laws not merely by a common plan to the race of the Jews…considered as human beings according to their nature, but truly he most providentially accommodated all things in a certain, unique way to their persons, affairs, and circumstances."[41]

Those conditions, that community, no longer existed. But a ruler could and should examine how the Judicial laws accounted for that polity's particulars to inform how he should approach the same task. This required careful parsing of particular Hebrew statutes, seeking the kernel of natural law as well as the conditions accounted for in those statutes.

This translation of the moral law to the Israelite people certainly included circumstances such as its agricultural economy and neighboring hostilities. Perhaps the exact issue of goring oxen does not translate to our own time. But the considerations of property rights might. Interestingly, this parsing also meant taking account of the particular ways sin manifested itself in the Israelite people. Consider John Calvin's discussion of Exodus 21:7-11. This passage gives laws governing how a father could sell his daughter into slavery. Calvin wrote that "[i]t was altogether an act of barbarism that fathers should sell their children for the relief of their poverty."[42] Yet this law, given directly by God, permitted the practice. What would explain this seemingly clear violation by God of His own moral law? Calvin explained it by pointing to the Israelite's character. He declared that "from this passage, as well as other similar ones, it plainly appears how many vices were of necessity tolerated in this people."[43] Yes, selling one's flesh and blood into slavery is "barbarism." Yes, the law should seek to mirror and enforce justice contrary to such barbarism. However, prudence must account for the universal of justice in relation to the other kinds of knowledge. First, it must recognize the universal sinfulness of human-

32. *Disputatio XVIII: De Lege Dei* in *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae,* trans. Reimer Faber (Boston: Brill, 2015[1625]), 1: 437.

33. Zanchi, *On the Law in General,* 28.

34. Francis Roberts, *Mystery and Marrow of the Bible: God's Covenants With Man* (London: R.W., 1657), 662.

35. William Gouge, *A Commentary on the Whole Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1866), 2: 123

36. Roberts, *Mystery and Marrow of the Bible,* 674.

37. Franciscus Junius, *The Mosaic Polity,* ed. Andrew M. McGinnis, trans. Todd M. Rester (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 2015), 63.

38. WCF, 19.4.

39. Bullinger, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger, The Third Decade,* trans. H.I., ed. Thomas Harding (Cambridge University, 1850), 280.

40. Bullinger, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger, The Third Decade,* 280.

41. Junius, *The Mosaic Polity,* 8.

42. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses,* trans. Charles William Bingham (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1854), 3: 80.

43. Calvin, *Commentaries,* 80.

ity and the truth which is entailed by it: the law might help mitigate but cannot eliminate such sin. Second, it must account for how sin might manifest itself in particular ways among persons and peoples. Selfishness may be common. The particular manifestations of murder, theft, and kidnapping by which it is acted out could vary across and within political communities. Calvin then concluded that some level of toleration was necessary because the sin "could not be corrected as might have been hoped."[44] Taken together, there are limits to what law can accomplish. For law, natural and positive, exists in the tension created by the Fall, the tension between what we should be and what we are.

John Weemes took a similar perspective on the judicial law. He noted that the wisdom of this tolerance came in part in weighing the possible alternatives. "Humane Lawes giue way and permit something," he reasoned, "for the eschewing of greater evill."[45] He pointed to the judicial laws allowing for divorce as an example. These laws would seem in violation of the commandment proscribing adultery. Weemes reasoned, however, that "this Law permitted divorcement for the hardnesse of the peoples hearts, and for the eschewing of greater inconvenience, least hardhearted men should haue killed their wiues."[46] Laws must consider persons' and peoples' fallenness. That does not mean these statutes contradicted the natural law. They sought it to the extent possible given particular circumstances. So should all subsequent legislators.

ANONYMOUS PAINTING OF WILLIAM PERKINS, 1602

In the judicial laws, Reformed thinkers saw a school for this task of prudential legislating. No regime's laws would be the same. Weemes said that even laws which "are most perfect…cannot be fitted to every Nation, no more than a shooe of one measure can serue for every foote."[47] Still, Francis Roberts said the judicial laws could serve as a guide. Good laws' "wisdom and equity…will notably appear by comparing them in some due analogy with these of God Himself, which were the most wise, full and righteous political laws that ever were contrived."[48]

EXECUTION OF THE LAW

In addition to legislation, political prudence includes wise execution. Reformed thinkers often tied this ability to the concept of judgment. Judgement includes the capacity to rightly apply the law by perceiving its violation or adherence in particular circumstances.

Joseph Caryl, for example, defined judgment both as "an ability to governe, or for the rule of Governement."[49] The rule of government was the law. Caryl explained that "[t]he foundation of every judgement is in the Law" and "[t]hat people is most happy, whose Prince is a breathing Law."[50] But though law was the foundation, it needed enforcement to truly accomplish its purpose. To that end, rulers must possess wisdom in applying law to particular circumstances, doing so by knowing the intent of the lawmaker in relation to justice. The "ability to governe" included that capacity. One thereby would not give "his owne glosses or expositions" of the law but truly "discerne betweene good and evill, how to distinguish betweene right and wrong, true and falfe."[51]

Solomon's prayer in I Kings 3 presented one example. Lazarus Seaman, in a sermon to Parliament, praised Solomon's prayer for wisdom "to discern between good and bad" (I Kings 3:9), calling it in his subtitle a "president [precedent] for kings and princes, and all who are in authority." Solomon's request, he continued, "relates both to *persons*, and *things*. Different things, and different persons, require different administrations."[52] In other words, Solomon sought prudent judgment rightly to apply the laws to particular instances. He took the generalities of that law to act justly in cases presented to him.

Moreover, prudent application for some Reformed thinkers introduced the Aristotelian concept of equity. This concept showed an additional, important role for prudence in applying the law. The English Puritan William Perkins wrote an entire work on the nature and practice of this quality. Perkins defined equity as "*a rare and excellent vertue, whereby men vse a true meane, and an equall moderation, in all their affaires and dealings with men, for the maintaining of iustice and preseruation of peace.*"[53] For Perkins, the essence of equity lay in the virtue of moderation. However, the need for and practice of equity pointed to the exercise of prudence.

Perkins distinguished between private and public equity. Public equity, practiced by magistrates, consisted of "the right and conuenient, and the moderate and discrete *execution of the lawes of men.*"[54] He echoed the Reformed consensus that good human laws are grounded in God's

44. Calvin, *Commentaries,* 81.

45. Weemes, *An Explication of the Judicial Law of Moses* (London: John Dawson, 1632), 3.

46. This reasoning also points to Jesus' discussion of divorce in the Mosaic law in Matthew 19:8.

47. Weemes, *An Explication of the Judicial Law of Moses*, 2

48. Roberts, *Mystery and Marrow of the Bible,* 674.

49. Joseph Caryl, "David's Prayer for Solomon." A Sermon at Christ Church, London (London: G.M., 1643), 3.

50. Caryl, 10-11.

51. Caryl, 4.

52. Seaman, "Solomon's Choice," 10.

53. William Perkins, *Hepieikeia: or, a treatise of Christian equitie and moderation* (London: University of Cambridge, 1604), 3-4.

54. Caryl, 6.

laws. These natural-law-informed human statutes are the "bones and sinewes to hold together, proppes and pillers, to vphold the commonwealth, and all societies."[55] In some cases, executing these laws only requires following its exact terms, which Perkins called the "justice of the law."[56] That process would pertain to what we have already discussed in judgment.

However, Perkins argued that in some circumstances, the "extremitie" of the law resulted in "extreme iniurie," that then "the name of iustice" became "a couer for crueltie."[57] To make this claim requires admitting some inadequacy in the human law the magistrate applies. This inadequacy is different than intentional, sin-infected injustice. Instead, it points to the finitude both of lawmaker and of law. Perkins declared that "lawe makers beeing men," they could not "foresee, or set downe, all cases that may fall out."[58] As noted above, laws seek to define, to categorize in order to prohibit, permit, and require. In doing so, laws often recognize exceptions to the general rule which necessarily arise from the variety of human experience. Humans can never anticipate every contingency. We can never account for every circumstance to which a law might apply. Categories, as universals, are much more easily and fully articulated than instances, which partake of the seemingly countless variety of particulars.

RULERS MUST INTERPRET AND APPLY HUMAN LAWS IN LIGHT OF THE ULTIMATE SOURCE FOR THEIR AUTHORITY, "THE LAWE OF NATURE" AND "THE MORALL LAWE."

These human problems then extend to human laws. Perkins argued that instances would arise where "the lawe speakes not directly, nor the law-maker did purposely aime at."[59] They did not apply here because they could not. Perkins said that equity existed to address these situations. "Therefore," he declared, "when the case altereth, then must the discretion of the lawemaker shew it selfe, and doe that, which the law cannot doe." The magistrate should and would modify the law's letter to conform application to its spirit.

Perkins gave several examples of such instances. First, in another work, Perkins presented a scenario wherein a city at war ordered its gates closed to all persons. But what if citizens already outside the gates then sought refuge from a pursuing enemy? Perkins said that opening the gates for such persons would be no sin. He also heavily implied the magistrate should not treat it as violating the law, for that act "did not hinder the ende of the law, but rather [did] further it."[60] Second, he gave the instance of England's laws demanding the death penalty for theft. He gave what we might call the *Les Miserables* case, wherein a poverty-stricken "young boy" stole food due to intense hunger. Perkins argued that the law's intense punishment did not have this circumstance in view. Unlike the other instance, he did not say the magistrate should forego all punishment. Instead, he argued for a more lenient sentence.

To impose the law strictly or even at all to such circumstances risks violating that law's connection to natural justice. Instead, Perkins said that rulers must interpret and apply human laws in light of the ultimate source for their authority, "the lawe of nature" and "the morall lawe."[61] Where mitigating the letter conforms practice to these standards, the magistrate should so do.

Perkins said that rightly enforcing the letter and mitigation "together make the lawe perfect."[62] Equity sought to do this, to adhere to the rule of law while addressing the law's own inadequacies. Perkins called it "the glory of judges and magistrates" and its practice "so excellent, as the carefull practise thereof, is the marrow and strength of a common weale."[63] This glory points to what the task requires: the political art of prudence.

CONCLUSION

So great is the task of rule that Calvin called it "the most sacred and by far the most honorable of all callings in the whole of life mortal men."[64] So difficult is the task that Reformed thinkers regularly claimed that only a work of God in magistrates could make it succeed. In the preceding, we can see something of the Reformed understanding of the prudence this great task requires. We see something of their great contributions, ones that present resources to a recovered, revived, even renewed Reformed political thought.

What, then, remains for us? Much indeed. Let us recover the great inheritance our spiritual forefathers bountifully bestowed but which we have lately neglected. We cannot and should not do so by merely mimicking their particular conclusions any more than they did the judicial law. Instead, as with natural law, let us re-enter their school. Let us formulate for ourselves a political thought built in conversation with our forebears. George Buchannan declared that an artist "acquired that faculty by constant practice."[65] Let us learn this art. Let us develop this vital and beautiful craft.

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55. Perkins, *Equitie,* 6.
56. Perkins, *Equitie*, 9.
57. Perkins, *Equitie,* 9.
58. Perkins, *Equitie,* 10.
59. Perkins, *Equitie,* 10.
60. Perkins, *A Discourse of Conscience* (London: University of Cambridge, 1596), 65.
61. Perkins, *Equitie,* 11.
62. Perkins, *Equitie,* 11.
63. Perkins, *Equitie*, 2.
64. Calvin, *Institutes,* 1490.
65. Buchannan, *De Jure,* 21.

THE ART OF PROTESTANT LEARNING

ROBERTA BAYER

One of the misguided but persistent assumptions about English reformers in the sixteenth century is that they rejected the study of ancient languages, rhetoric, grammar, philosophy, and poetry in their efforts to defend the supremacy of Scripture. The Roman Catholic humanist and statesman Thomas More is rightly admired for his classical learning and for teaching his children classical languages and literature. Yet More's family was less novel than is often thought. As Roger Ascham (1515-1568), classical scholar and near contemporary of More, wrote to his fellow humanist educator Johannes Sturm: there "are now many honourable ladies who surpass the daughters of Thomas More in all kinds of learning; but among them all the most shining star, not so much for the clarity of her mind as for the splendor of her virtue and her letters, is my mistress, Elizabeth, sister of our King."[1]

A MAP OF GREECE IN *GEOGRAPHIA* BY FRANCESCO BERLINGHIERI

As sixteenth-century divines recognized, it is proper that a child not be left in ignorance. Education is a means to free a child from error and to instill a desire to live well, to seek virtue more than money or glory, to freely follow the will of God, or, as stated in the Collect for Peace of the Book of Common Prayer, to serve God in "perfect freedom." God is Wisdom itself, and the liberal arts free the child to serve Christ wisely. Among Christian humanists it became a special task to instruct parents and teachers on how to educate their children, for the good of the soul of the child and for the good of the Christian commonwealth.

Ascham held that the arts of reading Greek and Latin, of rhetoric, and a thorough knowledge of ancient philosophy, history, and poetry were necessary to those who were to govern a Christian commonwealth. This ideal was common to humanists on both sides of the religious divide; men and women, all agreed, should be classically educated. The ideal "noble ruler" should manifest a "learned piety" (*pietas litterata*)[2] and exhibit wisdom, learning, and virtue.[3] He must be eloquent; therefore, the art of rhetoric is important to public life. History teaches virtues to be imitated and vices to be avoided through example, poetry idealizes examples of the same, and moral philosophy teaches the principles of good character.[4] This education was intended as a preparation for public life, and more importantly, private virtue, so that nobles would make proper use of leisure time, as Christian gentlemen and gentlewomen should.

When Roger Ascham entered Cambridge in his youth, he chose to study Greek. Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) observed in his *Life of Ascham* that, "as he became a Grecian, [he] became a protestant."[5] After obtaining his baccalaureate degree, his antipapal views nearly jeopardized his chances to remain at St John's College, but remain he did, due to the kindness of the Master of the College who overrode the concerns of the Catholic faculty.[6] Ascham rode out the religious tensions in England safely. His career was one of both scholarship and public service; he served as Queen Mary's Latin Secretary, "despite his undissimulated Protestantism," and then as Latin Secretary to her half-sister, Queen Elizabeth, whose love of learning continued (encouraged by Ascham) unabated through her life.[7] She translated ancient texts into her old age.[8]

Ascham's Protestant connections included Martin Bucer, and through Bucer, he became a lifelong friend with the Lutheran educator Johannes Sturm, whose epistolatory correspondence gives further evidence of his views on education.[9]

Ascham tells this story of how he came to write a book on education. In 1563, as Latin Secretary to Elizabeth, during a great plague in

1. "Roger Ascham to Johannes Sturm, April 4, 1550," in Richard M. Gamble, ed., *The Great Tradition: Classic Readings on What it Means to Be an Educated Human Being* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Press, 2007), 432-440.

2. Roger Ascham, *The Schoolmaster (1570),* ed. Lawrence V. Ryan (Charlottesville, VA: The Folger Shakespeare Library, University of Virginia Press, 1967), xxxii.

3. *The Schoolmaster,* xxiv.

4. *The Schoolmaster,* xxv.

5. Dr. Johnson, "The Life of Ascham," from *Oxford Works,* http://www.jacklynch.net/Texts/ascham.html.

6. *The Schoolmaster,* 133-135; Johnson, "Life of Ascham."

7. *The Schoolmaster,* xx.

8. Elizabeth I translated a number of works from Boethius, Cicero and Seneca. Recently, it has been established that she also translated the first book of Tacitus' *Annales.* The manuscript has been preserved since the seventeenth century in Lambeth Palace. (The Times of London [November 29, 2019]). https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/elizabeth-i-queen-who-conquered-the-romans-5xcq68jfg

9. Lewis W. Spitz and Barbara Sher Tinsley, *Johann Sturm on Education, The Reformation and Humanist Learning* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1995).

London, he sat at dinner with the Queen and her principal secretary, Sir William Cecil, as well as various members of Privy Council. At one point in the course of dinner Cecil remarked that there had been strange news out of Eton: a number of scholars had run away from school for fear of a beating. Perhaps, he mused, the schoolmasters were lacking "in discretion"; by beating young men for slowness in learning, they might teach them only to forsake books, thus depriving them of any means to learn the art of governance apart from raw experience. A discussion followed as to whether or not Plato was correct to observe, in the *Republic,* that children are more apt to learn by play than compulsion.[10] Ascham's vigorous defense of the Platonic opinion, based upon his own experience as a schoolmaster, led those present to request he set down his thoughts.

Ascham's work would be different from that of Thomas Elyot, contemporary of Thomas More, who had already addressed the topic of education in *The Boke of the Governor* (1531). Works on education were multiplying in this period. The earliest humanist tracts on the subject were those of Pier Paolo Vergio (1370-1444), who wrote *The Character and Studies Befitting a Free-Born Youth*, and Pope Pius II (1405-1464), who wrote *The Education of Boys.* Erasmus of Rotterdam wrote *The Education of a Christian Prince* (1516), and even Martin Luther showed a concern with education in a letter "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany," instructing them to ensure that all children be educated in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.[11] Ascham's friend and correspondent, the reformer Johannes Sturm, wrote numerous works and letters on the topic, not least *De institutione Principis* to the Duke of Cleves.[12]

CHILDREN ARE MORE APT TO LEARN BY PLAY THAN COMPULSION.

The list of classical works read by the humanists is far longer than can be listed here. Ascham particularly admired Homer, Pindar, Virgil, Horace, Aristotle, Plato, Isocrates, Quintilian, and Xenophon. Greek was learned by reading the New Testament and the Greek Fathers. On a typical day, as Ascham described it, while under his tutelage, Princess Elizabeth would read the New Testament in the morning followed by a sermon of St. Cyprian. St. Chrysostom's sermons were also read for theological instruction and for rhetorical style. Ascham's friend and fellow Cambridge humanist Sir John Cheke said, first "God's holy Bible, and then join with it Tully in Latin, Plato, Aristotle, Xenophon, Isocrates, and Demosthenes in Greek"; to dwell with these books would prove a man excellent.[13] Historians were also to read Livy, as well as Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Polybius, and Thucydides.[14] In Latin, Cicero was valued above all others because of his eloquence and political wisdom. The effect of reading so much Cicero on the development of republican ideas over the next two centuries would not be insignificant.

Ascham held that this reading was a better teacher than experience. "Erasmus, the honor of learning of our time, said wisely that experience is the common schoolhouse of fools and ill men; men of wit and honest by otherwise instructed."[15] One contrasts this with Aristotle's statement that the prudence necessary to just rule is only attained through maturity, knowledge of particular facts, and life experience.[16] In Renaissance Europe, princes had to ascend the throne very young, so they could never obtain wisdom through their own experience. Furthermore, as Christians, Protestants held that the Scriptures read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested, as Cranmer's Collect for the second Sunday in Advent states, made experience the less certain means to virtue.

Ascham's method of teaching languages has been called double translation—translating from Latin into English, and then taking an English translation of the same, and translating it back again, taking care to imitate not only the grammar but the style. He also encouraged the young to teach each other, so that when a pupil had obtained proficiency in Greek, he would be asked to instruct other boys who were desirous of instruction; by teaching, one learns. Ascham himself was a gifted lecturer. A contemporary is reported to have remarked that he learned more from hearing Ascham explain one of Aesop's fables to a boy than by hearing a Homeric poem explained by another.[17]

The technique of imitation and memorization is explained in the second part of his book. The arts of teaching are: *Translatio linguarum, Paraphrasis, Metaphrasis, Epitome, Imitatio,* and *Declamatio.* The presupposition behind all this practice at imitative writing and paraphrasing was that "man is a creature whose information comes first through his senses and who learns by imitating what is in the world around him."[18] In his chapter on the "Ready Way with the Latin Tongue," Ascham gives numerous examples of striking and memorable passages that were imitated over and again through the centuries; for example, Homeric passages paraphrased in later works of Greek and Latin authors. Thus, the repetition, paraphrasing, and imitation of the style of Cicero or Sallust places the pupil within a tradition of learning, and past wisdom becomes part of the thinking of the present. One is reminded of the great Renaissance painting *The School of Athens* by Raphael, in which Plato and Aristotle walk together and the other "schools" are represented all around on what appears to be a portico, under cover of a decorated classical arch, which itself echoes the classical structure of the room in which it is painted. The past and the present merge.

Gentleness is necessary to teaching. Quintilian (35-100) had criticized those who thought that a child will become more avid about his studies after a beating or flogging.[19] Beatings only make a child sick of school. Some children are slower to learn than others, but that is not a cause for punishment. Ascham said of a child who is silent and still, and who may appear a "hard wit" (slow learner): "monish him gently," for "gentleness is better than a beating to bring up a child rightly."[20] Patiently draw him back to his work with kind words. Never reward the child who is a quick learner—that simply rewards

10. A reference to Plato, *Republic*, VII.537a; *The Schoolmaster,* 6.

11. *The Great Tradition.* Edited by Richard Gamble, this book contains selections of writings from this period.

12. Spitz and Tinsley, *Johann Sturm on Education,* 177-185.

13. *The Schoolmaster,* 128.

14. *The Schoolmaster*, 129-130.

15. *The Schoolmaster,* 51.

16. *Nicomachean Ethics,* VI, 1142a12 – 18.

17. Johnson, "Life of Ascham."

18. *The Schoolmaster,* xxxiv.

19. Quintillian, "From the Institutes, Book I", *The Great Tradition,* 117.

20. *The Schoolmaster,* 20.

nature; consider the disposition of the child. "For this I know, not only by the reading of books in my study, but also by experience of life abroad 'in the world,' that those who be commonly the wisest and the best man, when they are old, were never commonly the quickest of wit when they were young."[21] Seek, therefore, for the good of the commonwealth, not those who will be the "wisest men."[22]

Some people think that schoolwork is always wearisome, but Ascham disagrees. All children desire to learn. "For the matter lieth not so much in the disposition of them that be young as in the order and manner of bringing-up by them that be old, nor yet in the difference of learning and pastime. For beat a child if he dance not well and cherish him though he learn not well, ye shall have him unwilling to go to the dance and glad to go to his book."[23] He reminisced about the unjustly executed Lady Jane Grey, who, like her cousin Elizabeth, showed great promise as a scholar. One day he found her reading Plato's *Phaedo* instead of playing or dancing as most young girls would. She remarked to him that the "greatest benefit that ever God gave me is that he sent me so sharp and secure parents and so gentle a schoolmaster."[24] "For the pure clean wit of sweet young babe is, like the newest wax, most able to receive the best and fairest printing, and like a new bright silver dish never occupied, to receive and keep clean any good thing that is put into it."[25] "Therefore, if to goodness of nature be joined the wisdom of the teacher in learning young wits into a right and plain way for learning, surely children, kept up in God's fear and governed by his grace, may most easily be brought well to serve God and country both by virtue and wisdom."[26]

FLORENCE, ITALY

The wanton behavior of nobles who had too much liberty, and too few tools to use it well, drew Ascham's particular ire. He warned of sending young men to Italy on their European tours, because it exposes them to vain pleasures and factions. All goodness and all learning would be soon forgotten, he said, for which the only remedy was the medicine given and taught by God.[27] Ascham had travelled on the continent when, during the final three years of the reign of King Edward IV, he acted as secretary to Richard Morison, the King's ambassador to the court of the Emperor Charles V.

Always the Christian humanist, Ascham lamented the disorders of the day, the dangers of the court where "everywhere innocency is gone, bashfulness is banished," and, in short, "disobedience doth overflow the banks of disorder."[28] These are "God's just plagues" for our sins and for "shrinking from his word."[29] He wrote: "God keep us in his fear; God graft in us the true knowledge of his word, with a forward will to follow it, and so to bring forth the sweet fruits of it, and then shall he preserve us by his grace from all manner of terrible days."[30]

Dr. Johnson remarked that his own age owed much to forgotten benefactors such as Ascham, who lived when learning was "prosecuted with that eagerness and perseverance, which, in this age of indifference and dissipation, it is not easy to conceive."[31]

This is still true. Although great advances in science appear more distantly related to the recovery of ancient letters than politics, law, and letters, the English-speaking world up to and including the time of the American Framers continued teach students Latin and Greek, ancient literature, ancient poetry and history, for the same reasons that Ascham taught. The steady decline in literacy, and the success of new theories of education based upon technique and socialization, has undermined our understanding of this literature. Forgotten is that truism that, if the "liberal" arts are called "liberal" because they inform our use of freedom, they should be part of our leisure. Regular study habituates the will to moderation and temperance; the content of the books instructs us in virtue, satisfying that human desire to know and instilling a love of truth.

Ascham's charming prose style and common sense advice makes *The Schoolmaster* a useful as well as pleasant read. His gentle personality and scholarly wisdom echo down through the centuries. As Dr. Johnson remarked at the conclusion of his *Life of Ascham,* the fact that his "English works have been so long neglected is a proof of the uncertainty of literary fame." Dr. Johnson's thoughts are mine: it is time to allot Ascham the "reputation due to his knowledge and his eloquence."[32]

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21. *The Schoolmaster,* 21.
22. *The Schoolmaster,* 25.
23. *The Schoolmaster,* 34.
24. *The Schoolmaster,* 36.
25. *The Schoolmaster,* 36.
26. *The Schoolmaster,* 35.
27. *The Schoolmaster,* 65.
28. *The Schoolmaster,* 44.
29. *The Schoolmaster,* 44.
30. *The Schoolmaster,* 45.
31. Johnson, "Life of Ascham."
32. Johnson, "Life of Ascham."

THE SHAPE FALLACY: THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER AS TEXT

SAMUEL L. BRAY

The Reformers were concerned not only with theology but also with its expression in worship. Many liturgies were produced in the churches of the magisterial Reformation in Germany, England, Switzerland, and elsewhere.[2] As the Reformers revised the mass and daily offices, they invariably pulled away from notions of eucharistic sacrifice and purgatorial respite, pruned luxuriant ceremonies, and placed new emphasis on the reading and preaching of the Scriptures. In the English-speaking world, the most widely used of these Reformation liturgies is the Book of Common Prayer (BCP).

FRONT COVER AND SPINE OF *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* (BOUND WITH GOATSKIN) PRINTED BY THOMAS BUCK AND ROGER DANIEL, 1638

There have been many revisions of and variations in the BCP. But from the final edition of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in 1552 to the culminating edition in 1662, the revisions were modest. No structural changes, subtle but not radical shifts in theology, generally a little taking in here and a little letting out there.[3] Apart from state occasions, such as the commemoration of the Gunpowder Plot, only two services were added to the BCP in those 110 years: a form of baptism for adults and forms of prayer to be used by the royal navy. Even these services were not creative exercises by liturgical commissions but were instead responses to the threatened depredations, respectively, of Anabaptist preachers and Spanish pirates.

After 1662, the revisions actually enacted were more modest still. For over two hundred years there would be changes in the names of the monarch and royal family, but little else.

Outside of England, the various national Anglican churches began producing their own BCPs, beginning with Scotland in 1637 and the United States in 1789, but picking up steam in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet there was still remarkable continuity. These books were recognizable as developments from the classic BCP. But today that is no longer true of the prayer books in use around the Anglican world.

One aspect of this transformation is the subject of this essay: the shift from thinking of the BCP as a text to thinking of it as a "shape," especially with respect to the Communion service. Central to this shift was Dom Gregory Dix, whose hugely influential work *The Shape of the Liturgy* was published in 1945.[4] Dix claimed to have identified a fourfold action that he called the "standard structure"—it was, he said, the invariable pattern in the primitive eucharistic liturgies. He thought that it was a very early compression of an original sevenfold action, and that it consisted of: (1) taking, (2) giving thanks, (3) breaking, and (4) distributing. Critically, what Dix found to be common in these ancient liturgies was their structure, not their words. The locus of unity was shape, not text. And that unity of primitive shape was then taken, at least by others, to be the aim for liturgical revision, including revision of the Book of Common Prayer.

Dix's work has not stood up to scholarly scrutiny. His idea of an invariable shape to the primitive eucharist and his treatment of the *Apostolic Tradition*—a document that he said expressed "the mind and practice not of St. Hippolytus only but of the whole Catholic Church of the second century"[5]—have been demolished by a number of litur-

1. This essay is based on a lecture entitled *The Shape Fallacy: Reconsidering the Book of Common Prayer as Text*, which was delivered at the annual conference of the Prayer Book Society (U.S.), October 2019, in Savannah, Georgia.

2. A recent collection is Jonathan Gibson and Mark Earngey, *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2017).

3. Relative to the BCP 1552, the Communion service in the BCP 1662 comports more easily with symbolic instrumentalism because of its greater emphasis on consecration.

4. Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: A. & C. Black, 1945).

5. Gregory Dix, *The Treatise on The Apostolic Tradition of St Hippolytus of Rome* (London: Routledge, 1992) (reissued with corrections preface and bibliography by Henry Chadwick): xliv.

gical scholars who are far more careful and less tendentious.[6] Not only was Dix wrong about his central claims, but he seems to have had a penchant for shading or even making up evidence.[7]

But a misstatement about liturgical history, like any other misstatement, "can travel halfway around the world while the truth is still putting on its shoes." Before the debunking of Dix's work was accomplished, it had already helped to reshape how millions of Christians worship all over the world. Its effect on Anglican worship was especially decisive. As one Anglican commentator has said, "Despite the now dubious historical basis of Dix's most famous claim about the four-fold shape, most 20th-century revisions of eucharistic liturgies followed Dix's claim about this basic shape, including the 1979 Book of Common Prayer."[8]

Not only did the liturgists follow Dix's claims about history, they also followed his fundamental shift in orientation, thinking of a liturgy primarily in terms of its shape.

As an illustration of this shift, consider the respected and influential International Anglican Liturgical Consultation (IALC). In 1989, it expressed doubt about "attempts to identify Anglicanism, whether locally or world-wide, through any *common liturgical texts*, ethos or style."[9] Six years later, meeting in Dublin, the Consultation said: "In the future, Anglican unity will find its liturgical expression not so much in uniform texts as in *a common approach* to eucharistic celebration and *a structure* which will ensure a balance of word, prayer, and sacrament, and which bears witness to the catholic calling of the Anglican communion."[10] That is the Dixian position with a vengeance—the unity of Anglican worship is not in texts as much as in *approach* and *structure*.[11]

GREGORY DIX

This was not inevitable. Even though Dix's scholarship was simply wrong at critical points, one could have accepted his claims and then discovered that the BCP 1662 actually did, after a fashion, have all of these: a taking, a recollecting of our Lord's thanksgiving, a breaking, and a distributing. The prayer book could have been weighed in the Dixian balances and found not wanting.

And even if the liturgists had naively accepted Dix's claims about the fourfold action, they might still have kept the prayer book service of Holy Communion essentially intact.[12] And they could certainly have left the rest of the prayer book intact. But that didn't happen. Dix's fundamental claim, after all, was not really a historical one—the now thoroughly debunked claim about a universal shape of the primitive eucharist—but a claim about the kind of thing the liturgy is: that it is centrally about a certain set of actions, not a text.[13]

Dix's idea that liturgy is about a sequence of actions is fundamentally foreign to the prayer book tradition. The BCP 1662 does prescribe some actions—kneeling for Communion, for example, or making the sign of the cross in baptism. But despite the current fad of praising "embodied" worship and the mania for finding meaning in every gesture or ritual act, that is not the general tendency of the prayer book. Compared to what we might expect if we're thinking in line with *The Shape of the Liturgy*, the BCP 1662 has relatively few stage directions. What it mostly gives is text.

By contrast, we could think of an ideal Dixian liturgy (not what the man Gregory Dix actually wanted, but rather a logical development of the liturgy-as-shape idea).[14] That ideal might be all stage directions, with the words themselves being left to the players' improvisation.

6. E.g., John F. Baldovin, S.J., "Hippolytus and the *Apostolic Tradition*: Recent Research and Commentary," *Theological Studies* vol. 64 (2003): 520-542; Paul F. Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins* (London: SPCK, 2004), especially id. at vi-ix; Maxwell E. Johnson, "The Development of the 'Apostolic Tradition' in Early Christian Worship," in *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Bryan D. Spinks, "Mis-shapen. Gregory Dix and the Four-Action Shape of the Liturgy," *Lutheran Quarterly* vol. 4 (1990): 161-177. In a recent assessment, Spinks concludes that "[t]he state of liturgical scholarship at present suggests that this is in fact a pseudo-document, representing no single tradition, certainly not all things Roman circa 215, and having no real authority other than that which anyone would like to give it," Bryan D. Spinks, "The Apostolic Tradition and Liturgical Revision," in Robert W. Prichard, ed., *Prayer Book Revision: Volume 1* (New York: Church Publishing, 2018): 203-212, 210.

7. "Dix wrote movingly, sometimes with no relation to the facts, occasionally drawing from sources which, as far as other scholars could tell, did not exist." Urban T. Holmes, "Education for Liturgy: An Unfinished Symphony in Four Movements," in Malcolm C. Burson, ed., *Worship Points the Way: A Celebration of the Life and Work of Massey Hamilton Shepherd, Jr.* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981): 116-141, 129. See also Kenneth W. Stevenson, *Gregory Dix—Twenty-Five Years On* (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1977): 9-10, 38. Dix's shadings of the evidence consistently aligned with his own theological commitments, which were quite clear: "his chapter on the English Reformation and Cranmer's Prayer Books in *The Shape of the Liturgy* is sweepingly opposed to everything Cranmer stood for doctrinally, whilst greatly admiring of his ability to write brilliant liturgical prose in (as Dix sees it) a theologically bad cause." Colin Buchanan, "Gregory Dix—The Liturgical Bequest," *Churchman* vol. 114 (2000): 262-276, 269.

8. Matthew S. C. Olver, "No End to Sacrifice: The Legacy of Gregory Dix," *The Living Church* (Feb. 2, 2017). See also Alan L. Hayes, "Tradition in the Anglican Liturgical Movement 1945–1989," *Anglican and Episcopal History* vol. 69 (2000): 22-43, 30 (describing *The Shape of the Liturgy* as having "established the fundamental program for Anglican liturgical revision for the next forty years").

9. IALC, *"Down to Earth Worship": Liturgical Inculturation and the Anglican Communion* (York, 1989) (emphasis added).

10. IALC, *Renewing the Anglican Eucharist* (Dublin, 1995) (emphases added).

11. A decade later the Consultation issued a statement listing the characteristics "[w]e value . . . in our rites." The first was "Shape"; the twelfth, "Common prayers." IALC, *Liturgy and Anglican Identity* (Prague: 2005).

12. Bryan Spinks observes that with Dix's fourfold shape, "consciously or unconsciously, he was only rediscovering what a number of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century divines had taught. The difference was that Dix believed that the Book of Common Prayer had departed from the clarity of this four-action shape, whereas his Anglican precursors found it quite clearly expressed in the Book of Common Prayer. Part of the difference is to be explained by Dix's own dislike of the Reformation and the Cranmerian liturgy." Bryan D. Spinks, "Gregory Dix and the Reformation Liturgy," in Roberta Bayer, ed., *Reformed and Catholic: Essays in Honor of Peter Toon* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012): 90-99, 96.

13. Gordon Jeanes, "Liturgy and Ceremonial," in Paul Bradshaw and Bryan Spinks, eds., *Liturgy in Dialogue: Essays in Memory of Ronald Jasper* (London: SPCK, 1993): 9-27, 10-11.

14. Dix's Anglican Benedictine community used the "Latin Mass and offices from the Roman Missal and Breviary," Simon Jones, "Introduction," in Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2005): xii-xxx, xiv. For Dix, "the legal requirement to use rites 'authorized or allowed by Canon' or questions of liturgical preference, were always going to be trumped by the Roman Mass, whatever its deficiencies, as the only rite which truly expressed and embodied the full communion with the Pope and, thereby, the Universal Church, for which Dix and his community longed." Jones, "Introduction," xiv.

To be sure, there are merits, or at least attractions, to thinking of the liturgy in terms of shape. The main one is that it allows liturgical contextualization. That aim has the strongest possible support in the Anglican tradition. The Thirty-Nine Articles assert that traditions and ceremonies can be determined by "every particular or national church" (Article XXIV). And a preface to the BCP ("Of Ceremonies"), written by Archbishop Cranmer, says: "For we think it convenient that every country should use such ceremonies as they shall think best to the setting forth of God's honour and glory and to the reducing of the people to a most perfect and godly living, without error or superstition."

Thinking of the BCP not as a text but as a shape allows that contextualization to occur. The shape of the Communion service could remain the same, even as the words within that structure are amended and contextualized. The words could be constantly remade to be, in the cliché of the moment, "missional."

Yet it is worth noting who Gregory Dix really persuaded. It was not primarily the person in the pew or the parish priest. He persuaded the professional liturgists (also clergy), who were members of liturgical commissions all over the world. This is the decisive attraction of the Dixian turn to shape—its appeal to the professional liturgist.

In one of P.G. Wodehouse's novels, the Rev. Harold "Stinker" Pinker is described by his fiancée, who is trying to secure for him a paternal blessing: "Up till now, Harold has been working under wraps. As a curate, he has had no scope. But slip him a vicarage, and watch him let himself out. There is literally no eminence to which that boy will not rise, once he spits on his hands and starts in."[15] For professional liturgists, sticking to the classic BCP does not afford much room for creativity. They have no scope.

This is not to say that liturgists think this way strictly out of self-interest. There is a sense of professional *raison d'etre*. Arborists think you should plant new trees, not because they will benefit, but because they believe in trees. Liturgists think you should make new liturgies, not because they will benefit, but because they believe in them.

But if you believe in new liturgies, and you want to persuade people to adopt them, how do you do that? You need to say the new liturgy is new, and you need to say the new liturgy is old. How do you do both? Here is where the turn to shape is so incredibly useful for the rhetoric of prayer book adoption. It pairs a claim of innovation with a claim of continuity. Here we have this undeniably new book, but fear not, for it's the same shape as the old one.

For an example of the rhetorical impulse at work, one need only look at the preface to the Anglican Church of North America's 2019 prayer book. Its preface uses *shape* or a cognate five times, once per page. In one especially ungainly sentence we are told: "At the beginning of the 21st century, global reassessment of the Book of Common Prayer of 1662 as 'the standard for doctrine, discipline, and worship' shapes the present volume, now presented on the bedrock of its predecessors." The idea that is struggling to break through this opaque sentence is quite simple: "the classic prayer book shapes the new prayer book." It is meant as a reassurance.

These, then, are some of the attractions of the Dixian turn. It allows contextualization. It keeps the liturgists in business. And it is rhetorically invaluable if you are trying to encourage a church to accept a new prayer book that is a major departure from the classic BCP.

But what have we lost by thinking of Anglican worship in terms of shape and structure? Another way to put this is to ask, what are the virtues of the BCP as text?

The first loss is paradoxical: the move to a focus on liturgical shape winds up forfeiting even the shape of the prayer book services. Many examples could be given. Consider two from the Communion service.

THE MOVE TO A FOCUS ON LITURGICAL SHAPE WINDS UP FORFEITING EVEN THE SHAPE OF THE PRAYER BOOK SERVICES.

Near the start of the service in the BCP 1662, there is a progression from the Decalogue, with its specificity of social concerns, to the immediately following state collect. That connection emphasizes the first use of the law, complementing the people's responses to each commandment (which in turn emphasizes the second and third uses of the law). This is a sophisticated and theologically-informed shape, yet it is lost when the state prayer and Decalogue are excised or replaced.

Another aspect of the shape of the Communion service is an ascent to and descent from the divine presence in heaven. In Archbishop Cranmer's design, we lift up our hearts to heaven (*Sursum corda*); we enter, as it were, the divine throne room (*Sanctus*); in awe of God's presence we respond as the prophet Isaiah did (Prayer of Humble Access); we partake of the bread and wine; and we descend with a song of the angels on our lips (*Gloria*). Yet this structure is invariably lost in the versions of the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The heavenly focus of the *Sanctus* is confused by interpolating the cry of Palm Sunday ("Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord"), and the Prayer of Humble Access and the *Gloria* are omitted or moved to other places in the service where they no longer serve these functions.[16]

It is of course true that they are not the only ways to order a Communion service. There are other rationales, some theologically rich and pastorally sensitive, at work in more recent liturgies. But the point is simply that once the turn is made to thinking of liturgy in terms of shape, one of the first things lost is the shape in the BCP. The macro- and micro-structures of the BCP Communion service, like the ones just noted, tend to be razed in liturgical revision, sometimes without any appreciation for why they were there in the first place.

A second loss with a turn from text to shape is the linguistic excellence of the BCP, and not just in the Communion service. The rhythms and

15. P. G. Wodehouse, *The Code of the Woosters* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 198.

16. For analyses of this and other structures in the BCP 1662, see Gavin Dunbar, "Like Eagles in this Life: A Theological Reflection on 'The Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion' in the Prayer Books of 1559 and 1662," in Prudence Dailey, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer: Past, Present and Future* (London: Continuum, 2011), 85-105; J. I. Packer, *The Gospel in the Prayer Book* (undated).

images of Coverdale's Psalter, the measured pace and homely vigor of Cranmer's collects—these are virtues of the text as text.

In principle, these could be reproduced. We could follow the shape of the BCP, change the text, and write texts with the same strength of language as the BCP. This has been tried. Many times. Some great poets have been involved in revising the prayer book Psalter. T.S. Eliot was on the committee in the 1950s that developed the Church of England's Revised Psalter. W.H. Auden assisted with the Psalter in the current prayer book of The Episcopal Church (BCP 1979). Yet perhaps surprisingly, these great poets have invariably seen their role in the revision process not as creative but as conservative, resisting nearly all change. Like the Spartans at Thermopylae, they tried to bar the pass.

PHOTOGRAPH OF T.S. ELIOT, TAKEN BY LADY OTTOLINE MORRELL, 1934

PORTRAIT OF W.H. AUDEN, TAKEN BY CARL VAN VECHTEN, 1939

Now the language of the classic prayer book is certainly hard to equal. And this language is no mere ornament. It is critical to how the prayer book works. In what remains the leading work on the language of the prayer book, Stella Brook suggested that its secret is being formed at a time when oral and written English were closer together.[17] But whatever the theory about *why* its language is unsurpassed, the point is simply that the widely praised language of the prayer book is in the text, not in the shape.

One reason language matters is that it can demarcate an activity. Baseball might be unfamiliar to you, but when you go to a baseball game, you'll quickly notice that everyone else knows what to say and what to do. They stand at the seventh-inning stretch and sing "Take me out to the ballgame." They say things that would be wrong everywhere else, like "he flied out to center field." Not *flew out*, but *flied out*. There is nothing intrinsic to baseball about this verb form. We could play the same game and say "flew out." It seems quite arbitrary. And it *is* arbitrary that this particular verb form is a marker of differentiation.

What is not arbitrary is that there *are* markers of differentiation. This demarcation of activities is something we as human beings do in countless ways, for any activity we consider important; it is certainly pervasive in worship (and not merely Christian worship).[18]

Of course, different kinds of churches have different ways of doing this, different ways of showing that "the worshipper [is] crossing a liturgical threshold where the world of human experience meets the Kingdom."[19] Anglican worship does it in various ways (e.g., vestments). But the main way, the defining way, that Anglican worship has traditionally indicated the liturgical threshold—whether in a Gothic cathedral or a small rural parish—is with the words of the BCP. And this can be lost when we move from text to shape. We are at risk of losing the distinctive Anglican method of demarcating the world of worship.

A third loss is the stability of the text. A prayer or canticle repeated for decades can work deep grooves into the soul and remain in one's memory when all else is forgotten. This stability is also critical for the intergenerational community formed by the Book of Common Prayer tradition. The Scriptures are replete with commands to teach one's children the faith, so they teach their children, who teach their children, and so on (e.g., Psalm 78, Deuteronomy 6, Proverbs *passim*). That religio-cultural and catechetical transmission can happen in various ways, including with memorized Psalms and set prayers—but only if there is a substantial continuity in these Psalms and prayers from one generation to the next. All of these benefits are derived from the text. If the text is constantly changing, stability and continuity will prove elusive.

Fourth, the laity lose protection. A fixed liturgy is not at the whim of the minister, and it is therefore an immense protection against clerical experimentation. "Feed my sheep," not "experiment on my guinea pigs," as the saying goes.[20]

Fifth, there was once a large body of prayer book manuals, commentaries, and sermons built up over the centuries. These include commentaries on the prayer book by John Boys, Anthony Sparrow, Hamon L'Estrange, Charles Wheatly, and Richard Blakeney, as well as many sermons, not least those of Charles Simeon on "the excellence of the liturgy." These are deeply worthwhile, and were once widely read by ministers and also by some lay people. But they seem to have faded away. Perhaps The Episcopal Church's BCP 1979 will be the last text to receive the commentary treatment.[21] More recent liturgies are either massive multi-volume compilations (e.g., the Church of England's Common Worship), or lack the craftsmanship and coherence that would ensure long use (e.g., the Anglican Church in North America's BCP 2019). Who will go to the trouble

17. Stella Brook, *The Language of the Book of Common Prayer* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1965), 218-219. See also Drew Nathaniel Keane, "An Examination of the Book of Common Prayer as Technical Writing for an Oral-Aural Culture," *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* vol. 50 (2020): 3-34. Rowan Williams has observed that "the Reformed Church of England . . . develops in tandem with a fantastically inventive period in the use of the English language, producing both a profusion of metaphor and a quick, critical sense of the possibilities and dangers of rhetoric; it discovers both a language for Scripture and a Scripture that shapes secular language, so that its biblical fidelity is deeply bound up with a feel for the riches and traps of speech." Rowan Williams, *Anglican Identities* (Lanham: Cowley, 2003): 7.

18. Catherine Pickstock, "Liturgy and Language: The Sacred Polis," in *Liturgy in Dialogue*, 115-137, 123 ("Nearly all the world religions have been marked by a deliberate separation from the 'drift' of secular language by means of the use of archaic and ritual registers or even foreign languages . . . .").

19. Gordon Jeanes, Review of Bridget Nichols's *Liturgical Hermeneutics*, *Literature & Theology* vol. 11 (1997): 226-227, 226.

20. For development of this line of thought by Alfred Mahan, the American naval historian and Episcopalian layman, see Suzanne Geissler, "The Admiral versus the Rector: A Naval Historian Speaks Out on Prayer Book Revision," *Anglican and Episcopal History* vol. 82 (2013): 166-179, 173.

21. Marion J. Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981).

of writing a detailed manual when the target won't stay put? No one is going to write a commentary that explores the biblical and patristic roots of this week's projector slides. Again, the benefits of this tradition of commentary are tied to the text.

Sixth, a text, but not a shape, can give Anglicanism a settled center. The text of the BCP offers a basis for unity for different kinds of churchmanship, a center for reformed catholicism. But a shape cannot do this. Knowing that a service includes taking, giving thanks, breaking, and distributing doesn't tell one anything, really, about what is happening. Unity of worship is made possible by the very rigidity of a text. Not, to be clear, an infallible text or a text that cannot change, but a relatively stable text, a text that stays put.

The prayer book cannot, of course, serve this centering function by itself. For Anglicans, it must work alongside the 39 Articles and the Ordinal, with the homilies and the canons. But the shift to shape has made it harder for worship to tie together the fracturing and fissiparous churches of the Anglican Communion.[22]

Thus, there are gains from the move to shape: contextualization and the full employment of professional liturgists. One could add that it allows freedom for creativity in prayer and opens new possibilities in metaphor, diction, and aural effects, much like the freedom a poet has in a devotional text, or a homilist has in a sermon.

And there are costs: the loss of the structures of the prayer book, the loss of the language of the prayer book, the erosion of stability, the loss of protection for the laity, the extinction of the tradition of prayer book commentary, and the greater vulnerability to ecclesial fragmentation.

FOR A LITURGIST, THE *BENEFITS* FROM MOVING TO SHAPE ARE HUGE...BUT THE *COSTS* ARE BORNE LARGELY BY THE SHEEP.

The attentive reader will notice in these costs and benefits an asymmetry. Economists like to refer to costs that other people bear as "externalities." For a liturgist, the *benefits* from moving to shape are huge—"But slip him a vicarage, and watch him let himself out." But the *costs* are borne largely by the sheep. They are the people incapable of saying any form of the Apostles' Creed by heart because they have been subjected to so many different versions of it. They are the people given flat, unrhythmic prose that does not work its way into their affections. As the Irish bishop Harold Miller put it: "The creative juices of liturgists, with their endless pursuit of new liturgies—many of which only they themselves are seeking—need to be restrained when developing what is the common private and public prayer of the people of God."[23]

That is the first asymmetry in the costs and benefits—the same people do not bear both, and in particular the people who make the decisions are often not those who bear the costs.

The second asymmetry is about time. The benefits of the move to shape, such as they are, are front-loaded. The gains can be immediate: the aptness for the immediate and ever-changing context, the attention-grabbing novelty. But what is lost—the communal and individual benefits of stability, the deep theological structures in the prayer book services, its resistance of centrifugal forces, its commentary tradition—takes time to notice. Different people will place different values on these costs and benefits. But it is hard to deny that there is a temporal asymmetry, with front-loaded benefits and back-loaded costs.

Many have noted that we are living in a fraught time for the Anglican world, a time when bonds of ecclesial unity are disintegrating, and for many Anglicans it is a time of catastrophic failure in formation and catechesis. This is not a surprise. This is exactly what one would expect from the asymmetric structure of the costs and benefits of a century of liturgical innovation.

So what do we make of all this? Brian Cummings was not wrong when he called Dix "the most interesting modern enemy of the Book of Common Prayer."[24] Nor was the English bishop wrong who said that Dix was "a beacon which has led a whole fleet astray."[25] Our task, he said, is "both to adjust the beacon and also to recover the fleet."[26]

Which brings us to the question of cure. What should those worshipping in the Anglican tradition do now? How *do* we adjust the beacon and recover the fleet? The answer proposed is a turn, or a return, to the BCP as a text.

What would that return look like? Already the BCP 1662 is widely used in the Evensong services of English and American cathedrals; already it is widely used throughout Africa;[27] already it is praised by the Global South;[28] already it is the focus of renewed interest among young Anglicans and Episcopalians in North America.[29] But to serve the purposes of formation and unity, it needs to be taken off the shelf by more individuals and parishes. It needs to be read and inwardly digested.

Any suggestion that there is still life in the Book of Common Prayer is likely to be met with certain objections, though. Consider two.

22. For recognition that the BCP 1662 once served this role, see Paul Avis, "Prayer Book Use and Conformity," in Mark Chapman, Sathianathan Clarke, and Martyn Percy, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Anglican Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 125-138, 125-126.

23. Harold Miller, "The Making of the Church of Ireland *Book of Common Prayer* 2004," *Yale Institute of Sacred Music Colloquium* vol. 3 (2006): 75-84, 79.

24. Brian Cummings, *The Book of Common Prayer: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018): 116.

25. Colin Buchanan, "The End of the Offertory," in *An Evangelical Among the Anglican Liturgists* (London: SPCK, 2009): 114-147, 139.

26. Id. For an alternative view, see Maxwell E. Johnson, "Imagining Early Christian Liturgy: The *Traditio apostolica*—A Case Study," in Teresa Berger and Bryan Spinks, eds., *Liturgy's Imagined Pasts: Methodologies and Materials in the Writing of Liturgical History Today* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2016): 93-120. Johnson recognizes "that the *Apostolic Tradition* represents the creation of a fictional document on which many people imagined or projected a fictional past to which we gave normative status for determining our liturgical present" (Johnson at 100), yet also finds real value in the liturgical results.

27. Esther Mombo, "Anglican Liturgies in Eastern Africa," in Charles Hefling and Cynthia Shattuck, eds, *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 277-286, 282.

28. E.g., *A Proposal on the Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches Structure* (October 11, 2019): 4.

29. E.g., Ben Crosby, "A Defense of Cranmer's Office," *The Hour: A Magazine of Criticism* (Nativity 2019): 24-30.

One objection is that we should go forward, not backward.[30] But renewal in the life of the church is almost invariably connected with retrieval. Monasticism revives when monks turn back to the Benedictine Rule. The Reformers did not see their brief as moving ever upward and onward—they wanted to go back to what they saw as the purer water upstream. If you think you've made a wrong turn, there is nothing reactionary, nothing antiquarian, about wanting to go back to the spot where you made it.

Another objection has more merit. It is the objection that the language of the BCP 1662 is obsolete: whatever its beauties, whatever its rhythms and pacing and sturdy vigor, it is simply out of reach for a congregation today. To understand this objection, though, it needs to be broken down into two quite different objections. One is that the language is too hard to understand; the other is that the language can be understood, but it is not how we speak at Starbucks.

To a word like *propitiation*, which appears in the Comfortable Words in the Communion service, the objection is that most people do not understand its meaning. But that is not the objection to "O Lord, make haste to help us." No one can struggle to understand "make haste"—the objection has to be that it is a phrase that is not contemporary. Let's distinguish, then, these two forms of the language objection: one is about comprehension, the other about currency.

The comprehension form of the objection has to be taken seriously. St. Paul says that we are to "pray with the understanding" (1 Cor. 14:15). But there is a characteristic Christian way of dealing with this concern: it is with teaching. Otherwise this objection would knock out huge swathes not only of Christian liturgy but also of all Christian theology. We use words like *propitiation*, *atonement*, *justification*, *sanctification*, and *Trinity* because we need them. Baseball needs the term *home run*, and there's no reason to require it to be replaced with a Basic English equivalent like "where a person hits a ball and it goes over the fence, and he or she runs around the field, putting his or her feet on each of the four white flat things in the field."

There is surprisingly little in the Book of Common Prayer that is vulnerable to the comprehension objection, at least in comparison to in any decent translation of the Bible. True, there are a few obsolete words such as *prevent* (in the sense of "precede"). But there are only a few—it is nothing like Shakespeare.

The real objection is the currency objection, namely, that the language of the BCP is not how we talk. This objection runs much deeper, but it is less sound. It raises questions that cannot be fully answered here, but it is worth noting how novel this concern is in the great sweep of Christian history. In the first several centuries of the Church, Christians used Greek translations of the Old Testament that predated the life of Christ and were decidedly not in some kind of current marketplace speech.[31] For early Christians who spoke and read Hebrew, their Torah was in a classical Hebrew that was not what they spoke at home. There are different styles in the New Testament, but the beginning of Luke is not how anyone talked; the never-ending sentence in Ephesians 1 is not casual; the Book of Hebrews is full of rhetorical artifice and formality.

My argument is not that it must be so in religious speech, but that it may be so. Indeed, for most of Christian history, liturgical and biblical texts have tended to be read in a decidedly older version of the language—whether the Greek of the Septuagint, the Old Latin, the Vulgate in the centuries after Jerome, the King James Version, or the Liturgies of St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom in the churches of the East. Some liturgical and biblical texts were old-fashioned on the day they were born, such as the King James Version. Others became so through the passage of time.

FOR MOST OF CHRISTIAN HISTORY, LITURGICAL AND BIBLICAL TEXTS HAVE TENDED TO BE READ IN A DECIDEDLY OLDER VERSION OF THE LANGUAGE.

The text is not static. Language changes; adjustments are made. *Unperfect* becomes *imperfect*, and no one bats an eye.[32] But the idea that the Scriptures and the liturgy need to be kept in contemporary diction and syntax seems to be an idea that was not widespread before the last century. The comprehension objection does have a long history in Christian thought (not least in William Tyndale and Martin Luther). But the currency objection is more newfangled, and it rests on highly contestable premises about language, effort, and worship.

Not everyone will resolve in the same way the tradeoffs involved in liturgical language. But it is easier to see these tradeoffs, and to think clearly about the currency objection, once we recover the idea of the BCP as a text. The Dixian turn to thinking of liturgy in terms of shape was a mistake. It was also momentous, for it has strongly influenced every subsequent prayer book revision, including the BCP 1979 of The Episcopal Church and more recently the BCP 2019 of the Anglican Church in North America.[33]

The turn to shape was not inevitable. It need not be permanent.

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30. Ron Dowling, "Text, Shape, and Communion: What Unites Us When Nothing's the Same Anymore?", *Anglican Theological Review* vol. 95 (2013): 435-446, 446 ("There is no going back, even if this were preferable.").

31. Some of the translation units contained in the Septuagint are in a higher register and more elaborate Greek; others may have been deliberately less idiomatic and more word-for-word as in the Pentateuch (a story of textual and cultural tradition in which every word counts, not of mimicking the marketplace). All show interference from the Hebrew source text. See Marieke Dhont, "Towards a Comprehensive Explanation for Stylistic Diversity of the Septuagint Corpus," *Vetus Testamentum* vol. 69 (2019): 388-407. For a classic study, see James Barr, *The Typology of Literalism in Ancient Biblical Translations* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1979) (Mitteilungen des Septuaginta-Unternehmens 15).

32. Frank Streatfeild, *The State Prayers and Other Variations in the Book of Common Prayer* (London: Mowbray, 1950): 52-53.

33. The BCP 2019 has two eucharistic services. Neither resembles the BCP 1662, but one draws its eucharistic prayer from the *Apostolic Tradition*.

RETRIEVING JOHN DONNE: POETIC COMPANION FOR CONFLICTED PROTESTANTS

RHYS LAVERTY

INTRODUCTION

Many Protestants today are *conflicted* Protestants. Here we stand, we can do no other—yet we feel adrift of the church's historical doctrine and worship. We are dogged by the feeling that at least *some* of the theological and liturgical family silver got left behind in Rome and Constantinople.

However, in spite of an alleged exodus from our ranks into Catholicism and Orthodoxy, we remain convinced of Protestantism—even if, at times, we struggle to make the case for it to ourselves. To invert G.K. Chesterton, the difficulty of explaining why we are Protestants is that there are ten thousand reasons all amounting to one reason: that Protestantism is true.[1]

This is why the current wave of Protestant retrieval and renewed emphasis on Reformed catholicity is so vital.[2] Those recovering Protestantism's own riches, and demonstrating its continuity with the medieval and ancient church, are providing key resources for us conflicted worshipers. A revived intellectual defence is being built, refuting afresh the accusation that to be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant.

JOHN DONNE, BY ISAAC OLIVER, 1616

Yet being intellectually convinced of Protestantism is one thing. Being emotionally convinced is another.

Protestant retrieval must ensure it is recovering works of literature to counsel the soul as well as works of theology to strengthen the mind. Of course, some say that to be deep in literature is to cease to be Protestant as well. Peter Leithart has claimed (in a self-confessed "gleeful fit of reductionism") that Protestants can't write, and Zwingli is to blame; a few modern exceptions aside, those who can are able do so because they have Prayer Books, or because (in the case of the Elizabethans) they weren't quite Protestant.[3]

Yet the current retrieval movement makes even Leithart's tongue-in-cheek proposal hard to sustain. If we agree that there is nothing un-Protestant about Prayer Books, and that deciding "who is a Protestant?" isn't up to modern evangelicals, then a host of literary figures disqualified by Leithart's criteria are opened up to us.

John Donne is one of them.

RETRIEVING JOHN DONNE

John Donne (1572-1631) hardly seems like a figure who needs to be "retrieved" from obscurity. He is an unavoidable poet in English literary history, with a bust outside St. Paul's Cathedral and an effigy within. He coined the phrase "no man is an island" and taught us not to ask "for whom the bell tolls." He remains a staple on university syllabi, ranking Britain's second favourite poet in a 2009 BBC poll.[4] But his reputation as a literary figure and sometime-national-treasure elides the fact that Donne deserves recognition from Protestants as a Protestant.

Donne was a pastor as well as poet. His gifts for the ministry were so evident that James I & VI repeatedly pressured him to take up holy orders, and he eventually became Dean of St. Paul's.[5] His sermons are

1. Chesterton, of course, said the same of Catholicism. G.K. Chesterton, "Why I Am A Catholic," *Chesterton,* https://www.chesterton.org/why-i-am-a-catholic/.

2. For a brief summary of this renewed emphasis, see Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 12-15.

3. Peter Leithart, "Why Protestants Can't Write, I," Jan 28, 2016 https://www.patheos.com/blogs/leithart/2016/01/why-protestants-cant-write-i/?permalink=blogs&blog=leithart&year=2016&month=01&entry_permalink=why-protestants-cant-write-i.

4. "The Nation's Favourite Poet Result," BBC, accessed Jan 8, 2020, http://www.bbc.co.uk/poetryseason/vote_results.shtml.

5. John Stubbs, *Donne: The Reformed Soul* (London: Penguin, 2007), 255, 300.

as robust an account of the Reformed faith as one could hope to find from an Anglican at the time.[6]

Before making the case for Donne as a companion for conflicted Protestants, we should consider why he has been overlooked by them. Two reasons can be briefly suggested: his early eroticism, and his Catholic background.

Regarding the first: Donne is famed for the erotic poetry of his youth. His philandering has long invited comparisons with Augustine, but the latter had the decency not to versify his exploits.[7] Even more scandalously, scholars have also long alleged erotic undertones in Donne's later religious verse.[8]

Regarding the second reason: Donne was born into Catholic aristocracy—great-great-nephew of Thomas More no less (a tooth rescued from More's severed head allegedly became a miraculous family relic).[9] He is therefore often regarded as a reluctant Anglican, even a closet Papist. He was certainly no Puritan.

This combination of Donne's eroticism and Catholicism, and the belief that he covertly indulged both in his religious verse, have pushed Donne closer to the academy and British popular culture than the Reformed Protestants who share his religious heritage.

However, unsurprisingly, Donne has fallen victim to a cynicism unable to reckon with the idea that a man may experience a *sincere* religious conversion.[10] This is not to say that Donne doesn't remain in constant dialogue with his eroticism and Catholicism, but critical commentary on this often amounts to little more than literary conspiracy theories.

If we lay conspiracy aside, and assume sincerity in Donne's eventual Protestantism, we will find new treasures to add to our contemporary trove of retrieval.

Donne's suitability to address the emotional needs of today's conflicted Protestants can be demonstrated by tracing the theological development of his writing. His early verse reveals a crisis over the nature of true religion and the church; his Holy Sonnets (long assumed to have been written post-ordination, but now dated several years prior) demonstrate a lively piety still dogged with doubts on such questions; his preaching and later verse evidence an eventual embrace of Reformed Anglicanism as continuous with the catholic faith, although not without marks of his Roman upbringing.[11]

The remainder of this essay will be a close reading of Donne's "Satire III." Although not classified as a "divine poem," the work was written during Donne's spiritual crisis, detailing problems instantly recognisable to conflicted evangelicals. Such a vivid account can comfort and nourish our souls, and prompt us to follow Donne beyond this poem as he journeyed toward Reformed Protestantism. Specifically, we will focus on two areas of mutual struggle: disappointing our fathers in the faith, and the difficult necessity of embracing a denominational identity.

"EASIE WAYES AND NEARE": DISAPPOINTING OUR FATHERS

Composed in Donne's early twenties (c.1593),[12] "Satire III" is described by literary critic John Carey as "the great, crucial poem of [his] early manhood," evidence of his "searching for God among the wrangling theologians."[13] Preceding Donne's "apostasy" from Catholicism, and more than twenty years before his ordination, it does not represent his final word on religion. However, powerful currents drive the poem, currents which would later be refined.

HIS TORMENT OVER "FAIRE RELIGION" WAS NOT SIMPLY AN INTELLECTUAL MATTER BUT DEEPLY PERSONAL, FRAUGHT WITH FAMILY TIES AND TRADITION. HIS FEAR IS NOT OF GOD'S JUDGEMENT, BUT HIS FATHER'S.

Donne begins not knowing whether to laugh or cry, calming himself from "railing" in search of "our Mistresse faire Religion." He then tortures himself with the anxiety that his late Catholic father (who died when Donne was four) will be in heaven, whilst Donne ends up in hell for renouncing the faith. Addressing himself, he wonders:

> "and shall thy fathers spirit
> Meete blinde Philosophers in heaven, whose merit
> Of strict life may be imputed faith, and heare
> Thee, whom hee taught so easie wayes and neare
> To follow, damn'd?"[14]

Laying aside Donne's speculation as to whether his father would meet classical philosophers in heaven, it is immediately evident that his torment over "faire Religion" was not simply an intellectual matter but deeply personal, fraught with family ties and tradition.[15] His fear is not of God's judgement, but his father's.

6. See Peter Adam, "To Bring Men to Heaven By Preaching: John Donne's Evangelistic Sermons" (London: The Latimer Trust, 2011).

7. From a 1640 biography: "Now the English Church had gained a second St. Austin; for I think none was so like him before his conversion, none so like St. Ambrose after it: and if his youth had the infirmities of the one, his age had, the excellencies of the other; the learning and holiness of both," in Izaak Walton, *The Life of Dr John Donne,* accessed Jan 9, 2020, http://anglicanhistory.org/walton/donne.html.

8. For a good example in relation to Holy Sonnet XIV, see the overview in John Donne, "The Variorum Edition of The Poetry of John Donne: Volume 7, Part 1: The Holy Sonnets," ed. Gary A. Stringer and Paul A. Parrish (Bloomington & Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press), 239-254.

9. Stubbs, *Donne: The Reformed Soul,* 12.

10. See John Carey, "Apostasy," in *Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (London: Faber & Faber, 1981), 15-36 for a prime example.

11. See John Donne, *The Divine Poems,* ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

12. Donne, *The Collected Poems of John Donne,* ed. Roy Booth (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2002), xxii.

13. Carey, *Donne,* 26.

14. Donne, *Collected Poems,* 111-113.

15. Zwingli believed this confidently (*A Short and Clear Exposition of the Christian Faith,* 10), following Justin Martyr (*First Apology* 46), Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* 1.4-5), and Chrysostom (*Sermon 36, Homilies on Matthew*).

If we consider Donne's family, this is understandable—their status and survival were hard-won. His father was a successful ironmonger, balancing Catholic fidelity with providing for his family; Donne's mother, Elizabeth, came from the aristocratic Catholic Heywood family.[16] By the time of Donne's conversion (possibly by 1594, but definitely by 1597, when he would likely have sworn the Oath of Supremacy as secretary to Lord Keeper Thomas Egerton)[17] the Elizabethan Religious Settlement had been in place nearly forty years, and English Catholic aristocrats had settled into some form of survival.[18]

Yet the Heywoods' survival was not without cost. We have already mentioned maternal great-great-uncle Thomas More. Elizabeth Donne's brother, Jasper Heywood, was an exiled Jesuit priest. Her father John conspired to assassinate Thomas Cranmer in 1542; he was kindly reprieved by Henry VIII, but still underwent humiliating public penance.[19] Most significantly, Donne's brother Henry died of plague in 1593 whilst in prison for harbouring a Jesuit priest.[20]

Many speculate that these family tragedies contributed to a frustration of Donne's with the recusants' apparent gluttony for punishment, and that his brother's death in particular served to catalyse Donne's conversion.[21] Doubtless they played their role, but "Satire III" makes evident that his family heritage was also one of conversion's chief hurdles. Who was he to forsake the "easie wayes and neare" for which his family had sacrificed so much?

LAKEWOOD CHURCH WORSHIP, IN 2013

Although coming from the tradition opposite to Donne, many conflicted evangelicals pursuing Reformed catholicity today do so by working through similar familial problems. We have inherited "easie wayes and neare" from our fathers in the faith—forms of worship, devotion, and teaching which were imparted with sincerity, love, and self-sacrifice. Yet we find these harder to reconcile with the great Christian tradition. When we begin to step outside our denominational (or anti-denominational!) upbringing, we soon find we share Donne's anxiety that we may suffer the eternal disapproval of our parents or Sunday school teachers.

As a Catholic, Donne doubtless wrestled with apparently abandoning the "ancient" for the novel in conversion to Protestantism; yet it is not their antiquity which gives his religious traditions weight, but their familial associations. Evangelicals fear abandoning a "contemporary" faith for something dead and ancient. And yet, similarly, it is not this fear itself which makes embracing a more historic faith difficult; rather, it is how our traditions (though we may have been loathe to call them that) are bound up with family and upbringing.

Donne and today's conflicted evangelicals share the same dilemma: our immediate traditions seem to conflict with *the* Tradition. In a recent piece for *Mere Orthodoxy,* Cameron Shaffer summed up the problem well: "We are told to honor our father and mother, but what happens when what we want to retrieve is their own inheritance, which they first dishonored? What are we to do when honoring our forefathers in the faith requires rejecting the faith and practice of our fathers?"[22]

Donne fears his pilgrimage will become a failed *Aeneid,* ending not with tearful reunion in Elysium, but with separation and damnation. And yet, Donne embraces this fear as a form of courage: "O if thou dar'st, feare this;/This fear great courage, and high valour is." He then considers fighting for the Dutch, exotic travels, and duelling for mistresses, but declares them "courage of straw!" compared to pursuing true religion whilst fearing eternal familial reprisal.

Donne's "easie wayes and neare" would have differed greatly from those of contemporary evangelical Protestants. And, it must be said, no one has recently been martyred by fellow-Christians for his worship practices. Yet, whether Roman relics or megachurch light shows, the religious rituals of our upbringing are hard to shake. In a later letter, Donne described a man who changes religion as like a coin filed down in order to receive a new print—even if the later print is superior, the coin remains "awry and squint."[23]

Yet, in "Satire III," Donne finds the courage to contemplate such a change. He is ready to leave his father and mother and cleave to "Mistresse faire religion." This is a courage which should hearten conflicted Protestants wrestling with the same issue today.

"DOUBT WISELY": EMBRACING ECCLESIAL IDENTITY

Having established the costly nature of his quest in the poem's opening, Donne uses the central section to introduce five characters satirising those who claim to have found "faire Religion," but have simply made her in their own image.

First is Mirreus, who "Seekes her at Rome, there, because hee doth know/That she was there a thousand yeares agoe." Next comes Crantz,

16. Stubbs, Reformed Soul, xvi-xvii.

17. Carey, *Donne,* 30-31.

18. Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society Under the Tudors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 199), 252-257.

19. Stubbs, *Reformed Soul,* 10-11.

20. Stubbs, *Reformed Soul,* 44.

21. Stubbs, *Reformed Soul,* 92; Carey, *Donne,* 31-33.

22. Cameron Shaffer, "Our Fathers Left Us Evangelicalism," Mere Orthodoxy, Jan 6, 2020, https://mereorthodoxy.com/fathers-left-us-evangelicalism/.

23. Edmund Gosse, *The Life and Letters of John Donne Vol. 2* (London: William Heinemann, 1899), 78.

who "loves her onely, who at Geneva is call'd/Religion, plain, simple, sullen, young." Third is Graius, who "stayes still at home here [i.e. Canterbury]" believing "that shee/Which dwels with us, is onely perfect." We then meet "Carelesse Phrygus," and he "doth abhorre/All, because all cannot be good, as one/Knowing some women whores, dares marry none." Finally, we have Graccus, who "loves all as one" because all "are still one kinde."

These five are obviously satirical extremes of Catholics, Calvinists, Anglicans, Anabaptists, and liberal relativists. They are criticisms not of their respective churches (or lack thereof), but of those churches' most uncritical and vociferous adherents, "fools who choose their religious positions for the same irrational reasons that others choose (or refuse to choose) wives."[24]

Anyone who has begun to ask serious questions about his denominational upbringing (or lack thereof) can empathise with Donne's assessment of the ecclesial landscape. Whilst he earnestly seeks true religion at great cost, others seem content with shallow imitations which merely mask prejudice and preference.

Donne tired of Mirreus' thin appeal to Rome's history. Readers from different Protestant backgrounds will likely feel similar frustration when they see their own traditions represented: Crantz's Presbyterianism, appealing to Genevan austerity; Graius' Anglicanism, appealing to state endorsement; Phrygus' anabaptism, appealing to distrust of establishment; Graccus' liberalism, appealing to a whitewashing ecumenism.

Many evangelical Protestants today have grown tired of the blinkered worst of our traditions, which seem intent on strawmanning themselves and others. We long for an identity based on something more substantial: more than a shallow namecheck of Geneva for Presbyterians; more than state religion for Anglicans; more than suspicion for Baptists; more than thin ecumenism for mainliners. And it is sadly not as easy as changing denominations. Donne makes clear that every group in Christendom has its tribalists.

Yet Donne does not give up on finding true religion. He resolves to seek her, but only after thoughtful inquiry, abjuring both factionalism and indifference:

> "Be busie to seek her, beleeve mee this,
> Hee's not of none, nor worst, that seekes the best.
> To adore, or scorne an image, or protest,
> May all be bad; doubt wisely; in strange way
> To stand inquiring right, is not to stray;
> To sleep, or runne wrong, is."

Donne's phrase "doubt wisely" is worth the whole poem. He is not urging doubt for doubt's sake about the nature of true religion, but doubt of the superficial justifications which so often pass for it.

24. Thomas V. Moore, "Donne's Use of Uncertainty as a Vital Force in 'Satyre III,'" *Modern Philology* 67, no. 1 (Aug 1969): 45.

Donne perceives that, beyond such factionalism, there is true religion to be found, but the route to her is circuitous and exhausting:

> "...On a huge hill,
> Cragged, and steep, Truth stands, and hee that will
> Reach her, about must, and about must goe..."

These lines summarize the experience of many evangelicals pursuing Reformed catholicity. It is a dizzying uphill struggle; we are pulled hither and yon between the merits of different traditions, and between our familiar upbringing and the riches of the wider church.

Yet "Satire III" does not denounce denominationalism, or despair of finding a settled ecclesial identity in this life. Quite the opposite:

> "Yet strive so, that before age, deaths twilight,
> Thy soule rest, for none can worke in that night.
> To will, implyes delay, therefore now doe:
> Hard deeds, the bodies paines; hard knowledge too
> The mindes indeavours reach, and mysteries
> Are like the Sunne, dazling, yet plaine to all eyes"

EVEN DOUBTING WISELY CANNOT GO ON INDEFINITELY; "HARD DEEDS, THE BODIES PAINES, AND HARD KNOWLEDGE TOO" LIE AHEAD, AND MUST BE FACED.

Donne urges rest in a church identity *in this life*. Continual "willing" for true religion means perennial delay; the Christian must *act* in the hard business of embracing a church. If the reader has earnestly sought true religion, prepared to incur personal cost, rejected shallow factionalism, doubted wisely, and finally settled in a church identity, then Donne urges him to hold fast there: "Keepe the truth which thou hast found."

Donne had not yet made good on his own exhortation at this stage, and John Carey summarizes "Satire III" as being "not an account of a crisis, but an operative part one"—yet it is striking to see that, in the midst of that crisis, Donne grasped how it must ultimately be resolved.[25]

Such articulation of a crisis, and how to end it, should be both a devotional challenge and comfort to conflicted evangelicals. We are aware that even doubting wisely cannot go on indefinitely; "hard deeds, the bodies paines, and hard knowledge too" lie ahead, and must be faced. Yet it can strengthen us to read the account of one wracked by the same struggles, but who eventually found that there was indeed a historic, biblical faith in which his soul could rest before night fell.

CONCLUSION

In Alan Bennett's *The History Boys,* a tender scene finds the lonely, eccentric English teacher, Hector, bonding with his equally forlorn student, Posner, over a poem. Hector remarks:

> "The best moments in reading are when you come across something—a thought, a feeling, a way of looking at things—which

25. Carey, *Donne,* 29.

you had thought special and particular to you. Now here it is, set down by someone else, a person you have never met, someone who is long dead. And it is as if a hand has come out and taken yours."[26]

For the wearied evangelical, unsettled as Reformed catholicity expands his horizons, John Donne may be just such a hand—perhaps an unexpected hand, reaching out as it does from the opposite side of Christendom. But reach out it does.

For many, the pursuit of Reformed catholicity is a lonely ordeal. A habit of reading widely, or some taste of a different church tradition, can expose individuals to the riches of the Christian past, yet leave them feeling isolated in a home church unconcerned with—or even hostile toward—what has gone before them. Even when we are theologically convinced of Protestantism, with our intellectual needs met, ecclesial loneliness is an emotional affair, requiring counsel and companionship. It is in that context that we might find Donne's hand most worth taking.

We can of course find Donne's companionship in any of his religious writings. But if we meet him first in the struggles explored in "Satire III" (or similarly in Holy Sonnets XIII and XVIII, or "The Crosse") we will see in his wider work one who has shared our griefs, and doubted wisely, before settling into his Reformed convictions.

This is not to say we cannot find emotional companionship in more familiar Reformers—we must not mischaracterize them as unfeeling, or forget that plenty wrestled with Catholicism as Donne did. Yet the intimate nature of Donne's poetry, and its spread across his entire life, makes him a singularly vivid and appropriate fellow pilgrim.

Donne has traditionally been likened to Augustine on account of his dissolute youth; yet we should see the greater similarity in their eloquent articulations of the inner life. Those struggling with a divided soul have long found a devotional companion in the Bishop of Hippo. It may be time for those struggling with a divided church to find a devotional companion in the Dean of St. Paul's.

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26. Alan Bennett, *The History Boys* (London: Faber & Faber, 2004), 56.

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