

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

John Hooper, Bishop and Martyr.

IT would not be far wrong to say that to the present generation of Churchmen the writings of the great fathers of the English Reformation are sealed books. They may occasionally be found as ornaments to their library shelves, but they are seldom, if ever, opened. There can be no question as to the serious loss which this culpable neglect entails, for not only were our Reformers well versed in Patristic learning, but there is scarcely a point in our modern controversial theology which they have not anticipated and thoroughly sifted. We can find answers in their writings to almost any supposed new theory or opinion which confronts us to-day.

Certainly one of the most important, and probably one of the most influential, of our English Reformers was the martyr, John Hooper, who was for two years bishop of the sees of Gloucester and Worcester. Not only was he a zealous and able scholar, a profound theologian, and a most powerful and popular preacher, but his strenuous and apostolic labours in his dioceses furnished a wholesome and conspicuous example in a degenerate and worldly period of a truly pious and primitive bishop. His career is too well known to need much notice. He was born in Somersetshire towards the close of the fifteenth century, and was the son of wealthy parents. He graduated at Merton College in 1518, and soon after entered a Cistercian monastery, but probably about 1535 applied for a licence to change the monastic life, for about this time he revisited Oxford to continue his studies. His father was a zealous follower of the mediæval system, and young Hooper also seems at first to have fully supported the "old" religion, since he tells us that he had after arriving at manhood "begun to blaspheme God by impious worship and all manner of idolatry, following the evil ways of my forefathers" (Orig. Letters, 34). He was evidently, however, attracted by the "New Learning" and the Reforming movement, as he tells us that his conversion was entirely due to the study of the writings of Zwingle and the commentaries of Bullinger, while he was chaplain to Sir Thomas Arundel. His subsequent zeal for Reforming opinions soon compelled him to retire from Oxford, and also incurred for him the personal animosity of Bishop Gardiner. On the passing of the Act of Six Articles, Hooper was compelled to fly to the Continent, and

while there he married a Belgian lady of noble birth. Returning to England for financial assistance, he experienced great difficulty in escaping abroad again, but finally arrived at Zurich in March, 1547. Here he was hospitably entertained by Henry Bullinger, the celebrated pastor of the Reformed Church, and during his two years' stay at Zurich diligently studied Hebrew. He became greatly attached to Bullinger, who was godfather to his eldest child, and was also intimate with Bucer, Alasco, and other foreign Reformers. But on the accession of Edward VI he resolved, although reluctantly, to return to his native country and help forward the work of Reform. He arrived in England in May, 1549, and was appointed chaplain to the Protector Somerset. He at once devoted himself to the work of instructing the people, and he vigorously denounced the corruptions and abuses of the Church. He lectured twice a day in London to enormous congregations. So great was his eloquence that even his Romish adversary, Dr. Smith, declared that "he was so admired by the people that they held him for a prophet, nay, they looked upon him as some deity" (Later Writings, p. x). The king greatly admired him, and he was ordered to preach before the Court once a week in Lent. He soon engaged in violent controversy with Bishops Bonner and Gardiner, and humorously declared that should the former be "restored to his office and episcopal function, I shall, I doubt not, be restored to my country and my Father which is in heaven."

Nominated to the see of Gloucester in 1550, he strongly objected to the oath by the saints required in the new Ordinal, and also refused to be consecrated in the episcopal vestments, which he regarded as "plainly impious." Owing to his persistent opposition the oath was dispensed with, but Hooper still remained obstinate regarding the vestments, and a bitter and unedifying dispute ensued between him and Cranmer and Ridley on the subject. Cranmer sought the advice of Bucer, the foreign Reformer, and both Bucer and Peter Martyr advised Hooper to submit to the vestments as to "things indifferent." Alasco and Micronius, however, encouraged him in his opposition. It was not until Hooper had been imprisoned in the Fleet that he was at last persuaded to yield, and he was consecrated in March, 1551. He commenced visiting and preaching throughout his diocese so vigorously as to endanger his health. On the accession of Mary he refused to escape. "Once," he says,

“ I did flee, and took me to my feet, but now because I am called to this place and vocation I am thoroughly persuaded to tarry, and to live and die with my sheep ” (Foxe, “ Acts and Monuments,” vi. 645). Hooper was very soon deprived of his sees on account of his marriage and his denial of the corporal Presence in the Eucharist. His grievous imprisonment, his sufferings and constancy at his terrible martyrdom at Gloucester are too well known to be more than mentioned.

Even this short recital of his career is sufficient to show what a considerable influence Hooper must have exerted on the course of the Reformation in England. He was, as we have seen, directly instrumental in the removal of the objectionable oath in the new Ordinal, while his important position as the most prominent and popular Court preacher enabled him to exercise a very great influence in favour of the overthrow of all the superstitious forms and ceremonies, which he vigorously denounced. The king, he says, kept him in London “ to advance the kingdom of Christ ” (Orig. Letters, p. 79), and it was probably due in no small measure to his fearless exhortations that fresh Visitation Articles were issued in 1549 strictly forbidding the maintenance of images, altar lights, holy water, candles, or any “ counterfeiting of the Popish Mass.” In his Lenten sermons before the king upon Jonas, in 1550, Hooper had earnestly pleaded for the removal of altars from the churches, on the ground that the only three kinds of sacrifices lawful for Christian men were thanksgiving, almsgiving and bodily mortification, none of which needed any material altar. “ It were well then,” he urges, “ that it might please the magistrate to turn the altars into tables according to the first institution of Christ, to take away the false persuasion of the people they have of sacrifices to be done upon altars, for as long as the altars remain, both the ignorant people and the ignorant and evil persuaded priest will dream always of sacrifice ” (Early Writings, p. 488). Barely six months later (Nov. 23, 1550) an Order in Council directed the substitution of Communion tables for altars in all churches! Hooper had at the same time pleaded for the removal of chancels as “ separating the congregation of Christ one from the other,” and the failure to attain this object both then and a little later on affords us the true interpretation of the order in our “ Ornaments Rubric ” that “ the Chancels shall *remain*, as they have done in times past.”

There is also little doubt that the further revision of the Prayer Book of 1549. was due in a large measure to Hooper's strong opposition to many things contained in it. He had told Bullinger that it "was very defective and of doubtful construction, and in many respects indeed manifestly impious," and had declared that "if it be not corrected, I neither can nor will communicate with the Church in the administration of the Lord's Supper" (O.L., p. 79).

Hooper's aim was, as Burcher told Bullinger, "to effect an entire purification of the Church from the very foundation" (O.L., 674), and in his strenuous opposition to the episcopal vestments, and indeed to all special "habits" for the clergy, he was the father and pioneer of the party of advanced, or, as they were soon called, "Puritan" Reformers. But although he differed thus on minor matters of ritual and ceremony, he was entirely in harmony with the other leading Reformers on vital and fundamental matters of doctrine. Hooper in common with all the Reformers was most insistent on the right of the individual believer to appeal to the Holy Scriptures as the touchstone of Truth and as the final authority on matters of Faith and doctrine. We can understand better the strong assertion of the supremacy of Holy Scripture throughout our Articles (notably in Articles 6 and 20) when we remember that it had been anticipated by his very definite teaching: "Remember, Christian reader, that the gift of interpretation of the Scriptures is the light of the Holy Ghost given unto the humble and penitent person that seeketh it only to honour God, and not unto those persons that acclaim it by title or place, because he is a bishop, or followed by succession Peter or Paul. . . . Remember, therefore, to examine all kind of doctrine by the Word of God; for such as preach it aright hath their infirmities and ignorancy" (Early Writings, p. 85).

In his "Brief and Clear Confession of the Christian Faith," the phraseology of which displays a remarkable similarity to the wording of our Articles, Hooper puts the supremacy of the Scriptures still more clearly: "I believe that the same Word of God is of far greater authority than the Church, the which Word only doth sufficiently show and teach us all those things that in any wise concern our salvation . . . the same Word of God is the true pattern and perfect rule, after which all faithful people ought to govern and order their lives" (Later Writings, p. 43). Hooper, while

stoutly denying the catholicity of the Roman Church, firmly believed in one Catholic and Universal Church, "an holy congregation and assembly of all faithful believers," but declared this Church to be "invisible to the eye of man and only known to God, and is not set, compassed and limited within a certain place or bounds, but is scattered and spread throughout all the world." "It is the body of Christ, wherein there is never a rotten, corrupt, or infected member." It is "like unto the ark of Noah, within which is safety and life," "the which true Church is maintained and upholden by the Spirit of Christ, is ruled and governed by His holy Word, and is nourished and fed with His holy Sacraments" (L.W., p. 42). There is a remarkable similarity in this definition with that given by (Bishop) Horn in 1558, as the spokesman of the Reformed at the Westminster Disputation, when he declared, "By the Catholic Church we understand not the Romish Church . . . but that which St. Augustine and other fathers affirm ought to be sought in the holy Scripture, and which is governed and led by the Spirit of Christ" (Cardwell, "Hist. of Conferences," p. 56).

Hooper, however, carefully differentiated between this Universal and the Visible Church, "the congregation of the good and wicked" (L.W., p. 41), a distinction which was also probably in the minds of our Reformers in the wording of our Article 19. Hooper concurs with Ridley in defining the marks or "notes" of the true Church of Christ as "the Word, the Sacraments, and discipline" (L.W., 43), the latter "note" being also included in the description given of the Church in the Homily for Whit-Sunday (second part). But on another occasion Hooper declares that "this commonwealth of the true Church is known by these two marks, the pure preaching of the Gospel, and the right use of the Sacraments. Such as teach the people to know the Church by these signs, the traditions of men, and the succession of bishops, teach wrong" (E.W., pp. 81-2).

When we turn to his Sacramental views we find that they are almost identical with the teaching of Cranmer and Ridley, while he rejoices that they are in perfect accord with the opinions of the Swiss Reformers. "I believe," he says in his Confession of Faith, "that the holy supper of the Lord is not a sacrifice, but only a remembrance and commemoration of the holy sacrifice of Jesus Christ" (L.W., p. 32). Although a Zwinglian, Hooper did not regard the Sacraments as mere "signs," as Zwingle's teaching is so often misrepresented

to mean. "Which sacrament," Hooper says of the Eucharist, "is not a bare sign and token of His death only, as many men imagine . . . but I put as much difference between the Sacraments of Christ, and all other signs and tokens not appointed for Sacraments, as I do between the seal of a prince annexed unto a writing or charter . . . and the king's arms painted in a glass window. . . . As the writings sealed doth confirm and declare the right of the owner unto all the world, so doth the Sacraments confirm the assurance of everlasting life unto the faithful, and declareth the same unto all the world" (E.W., p. 191). Probably no better explanation of the meaning of the Lord's Supper can be found in a few words than that which Hooper gave in a letter to Martin Bucer while at Zurich in 1548. "The holy supper," he says, "is not a bare sign, neither in it is the true and natural body of Christ corporally exhibited to men in any supernatural or heavenly manner . . . the holy supper is a testimony of grace and a mystery of our redemption, in which God bears witness to the benefits bestowed upon us by Christ, not that the remission of sins, which in believers ought to precede all use of the sacraments, is there applied; nor that the true body of Christ, which is in heaven and not on earth, is exhibited together with the bread; but that it may confirm that faith which I have in the death and passion of that body which was alive, died and rose again." "The minister gives what is in his power, namely the bread and wine, and not the body of Christ, nor is it exhibited by the minister, and eaten by the communicant, otherwise than in the word preached, read or meditated upon. And to eat the body of Christ is nothing else than to believe, as He himself teaches in the sixth of John. . . . It is necessary therefore, to bring Christ to the Sacraments by faith, and not to look for Him there. And thus the promise of grace is received by faith, as are also the Sacraments, of which faith they are the testimonies and seals" (O.L., p. 47).

A special interest attaches to Hooper as being one of, if not the first, English Churchman to come into close personal touch with the foreign Reformers. He owed, as we have seen, his conversion to the Reformed Faith to reading the works of Zwingle and Bullinger, and he had already visited Zurich in the reign of Henry VIII. His sojourn there from 1547-9 and the very close friendship he enjoyed with Bullinger, Gualter, Alasco and others of the leading Swiss

Reformers laid the foundation for that full intercourse and fellowship which was maintained later between the chief Elizabethan divines and their Swiss brethren. Hooper led the way in accepting Bullinger as his spiritual father and preceptor, and like the later Elizabethan bishops he maintained a close correspondence with him after his return to England in 1549. As early as 1546 Hooper wrote to Bullinger, "Suffer me, I pray you, to be numbered amongst those who truly and from the heart admire the majesty of your religion," and after his two years' residence in Zurich he was so thorough in his admiration for the great Swiss pastor, and for the purity and simplicity of the Reformed worship there, that the return to England was a real blow to him. "I have often," he writes later, "grieved over my departure from you" (O.L., p. 67). On his way home he wrote to his beloved teacher, "Take in good part my services, which I owe and shall owe you as a father and a most esteemed master as long as I live." He begs for copies of Bullinger's commentaries, because he "knows that they are all pure in doctrine, learned and holy" (O.L., p. 70), and he declares that if he "is able to effect anything," and his "slender powers are of any benefit to the Church of Christ," "I confess, and by the blessing of God will confess as long as I live, that I owe it to yourself and my masters and brethren at Zurich" (O.L., p. 73).

There is little doubt that by his diligent preaching and teaching Hooper was very largely the means of moulding the religious views of the English Reformers into a full accord with those of their Swiss brethren. He often rejoices to tell Bullinger that all the Reformers in England are embracing the Swiss views on the Lord's Supper. Although Cranmer's change of opinion on the Eucharist was probably due to the influence of Ridley, there is little doubt that Hooper considered that he was also in a good measure responsible for it. In 1549 he writes, "The Archbishop of Canterbury entertains right views as to the nature of Christ's presence in the Supper, and is now very friendly towards myself" (O.L., p. 71). "His sentiments respecting the Eucharist are pure, religious, and similar to yours in Switzerland" (*ibid.*). Cranmer had already entertained a warm regard for Bucer and Martyr, and had invited them to fill important posts in England, but it was apparently solely due to Hooper's influence that he became friendly with Bullinger. In 1549, when Hooper gave Cranmer a letter from Bullinger, he records, "When I

gave your letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury he did not vouchsafe a single word respecting either yourself or your most godly Church" (O.L., p. 64). And again a year later he refers to the subject to show the change which had meanwhile taken place, "The Archbishop of Canterbury, to say the truth, neither took much notice of your letter nor of your learned present, but now, as I hope, Master Bullinger and Canterbury entertain the same opinion" (O.L., p. 77). In 1551, he is able to write, "My lord of Canterbury, who is in truth a great admirer of you, when I received your last letter in his palace and acquainted him with its contents, could hardly refrain from tears when he understood your feelings in regard to the king and to the kingdom and also the perseverance of your Church in these most lamentable times. He made most honourable mention both of yourself and of your profound erudition. You have no one, I am sure, among your dearest friends who is more interested about you, and who loves you in Christ more ardently than he does" (O.L., p. 93).

Hooper must have many times during his stay abroad joined in fellowship round the Lord's Table with his Swiss brethren. He speaks of their mode of administering the Lord's Supper "as most simple" and also "most pure" (O.L., 56), and we do well to remember that the Church of Zurich was not episcopal in government. Moreover, it does not appear that Bullinger, its chief pastor, had ever received episcopal ordination, but simply the call, which he records, to the pastoral office by a Reformed synod presided over by Zwingle (Bullinger's "Decades" v, p. x). We have therefore here probably a practical illustration that Hooper did not regard episcopal ordination as a necessary mark of the "right use of ecclesiastical discipline." He, as well as the later Marian exiles, would certainly not have regarded participation in a "united" Communion service or the reception of the Sacrament in a non-episcopal Church as "subversive of Church order," or "inconsistent with the principles" of the Reformed Church of England (Report of the Consultative Committee on the Kikuyu Federation Scheme).

C. SYDNEY CARTER.

