

## Preface

FOR THOMAS CRANMER, THE human heart was both the heart of the human problem and the heart of all hope for human beings. As the first Protestant archbishop of Canterbury, Cranmer understood that we follow “too much the devises and desires of our own hearts” and as a result “there is no health in us.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, he also believed that “if the profession of our faith of the remission of our own sins enter within us into the deepness of our hearts, then it must kindle a warm fire of love in our hearts towards God, and towards all others for the love of God.”<sup>2</sup> For Cranmer the three Rs of Anglican pastoral care were: realizing the power of sin; relying on the power of unconditional love; and remembering the power of Scripture to make the first two abundantly clear.

Such clear-eyed honesty about both the pitfalls as well as the potential of human nature has all too often been forgotten in the modern era. As Perry Miller, the famous Harvard expert on Puritanism, recognized, both the religious and rationalist heirs of the Reformation have seemed to suffer from a “failure of nerve.” Too “sentimental” in their estimation of human ability, they have simply “lacked the stomach for reality.”<sup>3</sup>

Not so C. FitzSimons Allison. First as a noted scholar, then as the XII Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina, he has been formed by Cranmer’s three Rs of pastoral care. Consequently, he has devoted his life to reminding Christians cosseted by illusions of human perfectibility that the power of sin merely twists such smug pretensions into crude moralisms justified by cruel heresies. For human self-centeredness will always seek to make religion the ultimate sanction by which to prove ourselves better than other people. And human reason will always seek to rewrite God’s revelation so as to gloss over rather than illuminate our own destructive impulses.

Bishop Allison has taught generations of clergy and laity that the waywardness of the human heart is the human condition’s real tar baby from which only our Creator can deliver us. He has stressed over and over again that the heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not what we have to

1. Joseph Ketley, ed., *Two Liturgies, A.D. 1549, and A.D. 1552*.

2. J. E. Cox, ed., *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer*.

3. Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, eds., *The Puritans*.

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do to please God, for all we do remains tarred by self. Rather, the heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is what God has been pleased to do for us. Humanity finds peace only with God and power for new life in the cross of Christ. For only God's unconditional love shown there can birth grateful love in our hearts, and only love is stronger than sin.

Yet, deluded that the educated human will makes the difference, too many contemporary preachers, whether conservative or liberal, end up relying on the old standard goads to better human behavior. Whether the aim is to discourage sexual immorality or to encourage the acceptance of sexual diversity, the pastoral means is almost always the same: duty and pride in compliance, shame and fear in failure. Modern preachers may proclaim their moralisms and even their heresies in the name of God's love. Nevertheless, they all too often fail to rely on the Gospel of grace to transform their own hearts, let alone those to whom they preach. As aptly expressed by Bishop Allison, they mount their pulpits merely to "fuss" at people.

To cut through all such sentimentality and sloppy thinking, the bishop has taken up his pen one last time. With insight gained from a lifetime of critical scholarship and the cure of souls, he has written a book that lays out for us with unfailing clarity the regularity with which the leaven of self has worked its way through the thought of both secularist and sacred writers in the modern period. He challenges us to heed Perry Miller's warning and steel ourselves to stomach reality. For Bishop Allison knows that only when our eyes have been opened to the destructive yeast of the Sadducees and Pharisees at work in our history and in our own hearts can we begin to appreciate afresh the Gospel of grace. Only when we recognize the power of sin can we learn to rely on Scripture to make clear the even greater transforming power of the unconditional love of God revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. Only when we inwardly digest the pastoral wisdom of the Anglican Reformation can we begin to lay a solid foundation for a new reformation in our own era.

May God so use this book in our hearts that it will be said of us once again that they know we are Christians, not by our fussing, but by our unconditional love.

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