

*THOMAS CRANMER, DIARMAID MACCULLOCH.* Yale University Press, 1996, 692 pp. (£25.00), ISBN 0-300-06688-0.

A Review by Dr Felicity Heal

Biography is an art form that often alarms the professional historian, particularly the historian analysing the relatively distant past. There are few individuals of the sixteenth century who can provide the subject for satisfying biography, and most of them are rulers. In England one of the few other possibilities is the architect of the English Reformation, Thomas Cranmer. It is some years since J. G. Ridley's lively study of Cranmer showed what could be achieved in understanding the ambiguous public persona without much personal evidence in support. Since then Reformation studies have moved on, and expectations about the depth and substance of biographical research have risen. Now we have in Dr MacCulloch's study an outstanding, indeed a definitive, reading of one of the most controversial figures in English religious history. It is avowedly an analysis of a public career: the author points out in the preface that, even by the standards of the age, Cranmer was an intensely private man who seldom allowed even his closest friends to perceive by 'sign or token of countenance how the affairs of the prince or the realm went.' Yet it is a public narrative in which we are given a remarkable opportunity to piece together the archbishop's own views of the traumatic years of reform. Dr MacCulloch makes very effective use of the work of generations of his predecessors in assessing Cranmer's theological and liturgical innovations: he also provides the first general access to recent research on the archbishop's books, and on the collections of commonplaces that reveal much about his doctrinal commitments. Moreover, Dr MacCulloch has the advantage of a training in two disciplines, and his historian's awareness of the constant significance of high politics never allows him to dwell on ideological change as though it were an independent variable in the Reformation story. Readers of this journal will particularly value the emphasis placed on Cranmer's concern for the reform of canon law. The draft of 1552 failed only because of the duke of Northumberland's hostility. It would have done much to perpetuate clerical power: indeed the author notes that it was a more conservative document than the other great texts of that year, the Second Prayer Book and the Forty-Two Articles. It is also far less well-known, and it is to be regretted that the recent reprinting of the *Reformatio* may not have improved understanding by its confusions about the textual sources.

This is not a biography for the faint-hearted, and readers may well feel the need to dispense with some of the fine detail on the Prebendaries' Plot of 1543 or the negotiations surrounding the construction of the Bishop's Book of 1537. But it is a narrative written with clarity and wit, as well as with great historical insight, and, most appropriately, it has a certain bias in favour of its subject, his flawed humanity and his angelic prose. We are also presented with a radical Cranmer, whose progress in reform would have led the Church of England towards Geneva rather than to the world of the Tractarians. Not all will agree: it will, however, be difficult to ignore the argument.

*CANON LAW: LETTER AND SPIRIT: A Practical Guide to the Code of Canon Law,* GEOFFREY CHAPMAN. The Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland, (1995) 1060 pp. (£65), ISBN 0 255 66702 9.

A Review by Paul Barber

The 1983 Code of Canon Law, only the second Code in the history of the Roman