

*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

Catholic Church, was described as the final document of the Second Vatican Council, putting the ecclesiology of that Council into a practical form. A major home-grown contribution to the jurisprudence of the new Code, eagerly awaited for over ten years, has now arrived in the shape of this handsome purple-bound hard-back volume. The distinguished Editorial Board, chaired by Mgr Gerard Sheehy (himself both a Doctor of Canon Law and a holder of the common law degree of barrister-at-law) was assisted by a list of learned contributors from these Isles and Canada (the Canadian Canon Law Society is associated with the Commentary).

As both the title and sub-title suggest, the primary thrust of this work is to be a clear and readable practical and pastoral guide for the non-expert who needs more than simply the text of the canons. (This is especially to be recommended for those who are brought up in the common law tradition, and who are therefore prone to interpret the bare text of the Code as if it were an Act of Parliament!) The Commentary's style is simple and generally takes little for granted, making it an ideal reference work for the ordinary Parish Priest or other pastoral worker in the Church and an excellent starting point for anyone with an interest in Canon Law. Indeed, it was conceived with this audience in mind.

It is inevitable that this commentary will be compared with the other two English Language commentaries on the 1983 Code (the *Canon Law Society of America* and the *Navarra/St. Paul's* editions). It goes without saying that *Letter and Spirit* has the advantage of being the most up to date, but twelve years having elapsed since the promulgation of the new Code also gives it the luxury of a considered reflection not open to the earlier works (just as it was generally acknowledged that the best commentaries on the 1917 Code did not start to arrive until at least ten years later). In style, *Letter and Spirit* appears the least academic, as its title would suggest. This is, however, a clever deception, as the content is in fact as scholarly as the other two. The trick is that the commentary is written so that allusions to academic debates are made in such a way that they can be picked up by the academic reader but appear straightforward and unobtrusive to the more practical user. The danger with this approach, of course, is that it may pass over those who are unaware of a particular debate but would like to know of its existence, but in the main it works remarkably well. In line with the overall approach, the use of footnotes is restricted, but adequate. In particular, the widespread citation of *Communicationes* (an official Vatican publication containing allocutions of a canonical nature) is enormously helpful.

At £65 the book is well priced, and it is therefore not surprising that there are one or two omissions which could be put down to lack of space. From a practical point of view, the lack of particular legislation (even just for the British Isles and Canada) is a serious one, as this is often important, relevant and difficult to find. Even footnote references directing the reader to an accessible place are often lacking, and there appear to be no references to the official promulgating publications (such as *Briefing* for England and Wales). Similarly, for a bibliography the reader must be content with the lists of abbreviations, and the glossary is the same meagre one which appeared with the original translation of the Code. Still, the index is excellent and the Concordance of Canons 1983–1917 is very useful.

The English translation of the Code contained in this edition is an amended and improved version of that produced by the Society (together with the Societies in Canada and Australia and New Zealand) in 1983 (gone, for instance, are the clumsy dagger signs to distinguish between the words *fideles* and *christifideles* in the Latin text).

In the preface to *Letter and Spirit*, Mgr Sheehy declared that the aim of the work was to be 'the simultaneous combination of a practical guide and an academic investigation', an ambitious, some might say impossible, task. Yet in this volume one must conclude that the aim has been ultimately successful, leaving it as an equally worthwhile investment for canon law libraries and pastoral workers alike.