



Title: *Reforming Words: Sermons that Saved a Nation, A Survey of the First Book of Homilies*

Course: Anglicanism 103

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Introduction:

In the mid-sixteenth century, the nascent Church of England was in a mess. Its recent split from the Church of Rome for reasons of state, had left unaddressed the reforms that were sweeping Europe known as the Protestant Reformation. Although England's Church had become independent of papal government, it remained largely Roman Catholic in its doctrine, customs, and practice. England's clergy, especially those in the countryside, were often poorly educated and unknowledgeable of the biblical teachings that were transforming the peoples and cultures of Northern Europe. To address these problems Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, issued in 1547 a series of sermons, the *First Book of Homilies*, to be read in the churches. The *Homilies* was the first in series of reformational formularies that transformed the English people and their Church.

This class will read and discuss the *First Book of Homilies* in its historical context and with contemporary application and relevance to our own beliefs and lives. Along with the *Second Book of Homilies* (1563), these sermons form part of the Anglican formularies, taking their place alongside the Book of Common Prayer (1662), the Thirty-Nine Articles (1571), and the Ordinal. Published in the first year of the reign of Edward VI, they are the least known and thus least formative of the formularies. This is regrettable for, in the *Homilies*, Anglicanism carries the distinction of being "the only branch of Christendom that incorporated sermons into its statements of faith" (Bray). Thomas Cranmer and his fellow English Reformers intended these sermons to be read in those parishes lacking learned and faithful preachers. They declare and explain a range of important matters of doctrine, worship, and life. These matters include sermons on the nature of sin, the source of salvation, the supremacy of Holy Scripture, and the necessity of Christian love. In so doing, they complement the other formularies in articulating Anglican theology, devotion, and practice. The *Homilies* also show Anglicanism's commitment to the centrality of preaching in the worship of God's people. It was the great 18th century Anglican evangelist and preacher George Whitefield who advocated the parity of the Book of Common Prayer and the *Homilies*: "Both were compiled by the same great luminaires of our Church, and that too in the very same important era of the Reformation. Both contain the same godly and wholesome doctrine, and both are equally adapted to instruct the ignorant, and at the same time to raise and elevate the devout and simple heart." Our exploration of the *Homilies* will read the *First Book* using the modernized edition edited by Lee Gatiss, Director of the Church Society and a Lecturer in Church History at Union School of Theology in the U.K.

Objectives:

1. To acquaint the learner with the biblical, theological, and devotional content of the *First Book of Homilies*
2. To explore the *Homilies*' historical significance and contemporary relevance to Anglican faith and practice
3. To equip the learner with the practical knowledge and ancient wisdom to more fully participate in the life of Christ and His church

Expectations:

Learners are encouraged to

1. Obtain a copy of the *Homilies*
2. To faithfully prepare for class by reading the assigned sermon for that morning
3. To regularly attend class
4. To participate by asking questions in class sessions or afterwards

Resources:

The First Book of Homilies: The Church of England's Official Sermons in Modern English
(Edited by Lee Gatiss)

Other Recommended Resources:

Gerald Bray, *A Fruitful Exhortation: a Guide to the Homilies* (2021)

John Griffiths, "Editor's Preface" to *The Two Books of Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches* (1859)

Peter Toon, "The Articles and the Homilies" in *The Study of Anglicanism* (1998)

Class and Reading Schedule:

1/15: Class Introduction (6-22)

1/22: Homily 1: The Reading of Holy Scripture (31-42)

1/29: Homily 2: The Misery of All Mankind (43-54)

2/5: Homily 3: Salvation by Christ Alone (55-69)

2/12: Homily 4: True and Living Christian Faith (70-86)

2/19: Homily 5: Faith and Good Works I (87-98)
2/26: Homily 5 (continued): 99-104
3/5: Homily 6: Christian Love (105-114)
3/12: Homily 7: Making and Breaking Oaths (115-126)
3/19: Homily 8: Falling Away from God (127-139)
3/26: Homily 9: The Fear of Death (140-158)
4/2: Palm Sunday—No Class
4/9: Easter—No Class
4/16: Homily 10: Obedience to Authorities (159-174)
4/23: Homily 11: Adultery and Sexual Sin I (175-195)
4/30: Homily 12: Strife and Contention (196-214)
5/7: Conclusion