

By

**Mark McGee**



Whether you or your church uses the “Book of Common Prayer” or not, I believe you will find *Worship by Faith Alone: Thomas Cranmer, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Reformation of Liturgy* (IVP Academic, 2023) by Zac Hicks an important read.

I write that as a former atheist who never attended a church that used the ‘Book of Common Prayer.’ What I found interesting about the book at first was the history of Thomas Cranmer and his involvement with the Book of Common Prayer that so many hundreds of thousands of Christians have used personally and in church services since the 16th century AD.

# The Book

As you can tell from the title of the book, it concerns four things:

1. Worship by faith alone
2. Thomas Cranmer
3. The Book of Common Prayer
4. Reformation of Liturgy

The author does a good job of covering each thoroughly, as well as give the reader a sense of what it was like to live during the transitional 'Reformation Period' of the 16th century.

Being a Christian during the 16th century must have been both amazing and terrifying. The 'Church' was suffering through another major split. I say 'another' because of the split between East and West (known as the **East-West Schism** of 1054). The 'Reformation' five centuries later affected the Western Church.

Though Martin Luther is credited with starting what became known as the 'Protestant Reformation' in the early part of the 16th century by posting his 'Ninety-five Theses,' many other Christian leaders were involved. One of them was Thomas Cranmer.

Cranmer was the first Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury in England (1533-56). Here's how Zac Hicks described his passion for his ministry –

*Getting right to it, what overwhelmed Cranmer was God's love for him in Christ, and once that love seized him, the Archbishop became fiercely committed to the clear proclamation of that good news. In other words, Cranmer's vision for liturgical renewal was intensely fixated on the gospel. His evangelical convictions drove his liturgical decisions. If this is true, then I would suggest that as we look over the Archbishop's shoulder, we will discover that he provides, among all the sixteenth-century Reformers English and Continental, a most exemplary model of what it might mean to be gospel-centered in our worship today. Introduction, pp 4-5*

Dr. Hicks has done a wonderful job in presenting both the issues surrounding the Protestant Reformation in addition to the detailed work Thomas Cranmer did in developing the Book of Common Prayer. As you will see in the Contents list, the primary focus is on the concept of *Sola Fide* – ‘By Faith Alone.’ It impacted Cranmer’s ‘theology’ as well as ‘liturgy.’

I highly recommend this book to everyone interested in the history of the Protestant Reformation, and the Book of Common Prayer.

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## The Author



Zac Hicks (DMin, Knox Theological Seminary) is pastor of Church of the Cross in Birmingham, Alabama, adjunct lecturer in music and worship at Samford University, and author of *The Worship Pastor: A Call to Ministry for Worship Leaders and Teams*. He lives with his wife, Abby, and their four children in Birmingham, Alabama.

## Publisher Description

**In every age, the church must consider what it means to gather together to worship God.**

If the church is primarily the people who follow the risen Christ, then its worship should be “gospel-centered.” But where might the church find an example of such worship for today?

In this *Dynamics of Christian Worship* volume, scholar, worship leader, and songwriter Zac Hicks contends that such a focus can be found in the theology of worship presented by Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury during the English Reformation. Hicks argues that Cranmer’s reformation of the church’s worship and liturgy was shaped primarily by the Protestant principle of justification by faith alone as reflected in his 1552 edition of the *Book of Common Prayer*, which was later codified under Elizabeth I and has guided Anglican worship for centuries.

Here, we find a model of “gospel-centered” worship through which the church of today might be reformed yet again.

The Dynamics of Christian Worship series draws from a wide range of worshiping contexts and denominational backgrounds to unpack the many dynamics of Christian worship—including prayer, reading the Bible, preaching, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, music, visual art, architecture, and more—to deepen both the theology and practice of Christian worship for the life of the church.

## Reviews

“The rediscovery of Thomas Cranmer’s vision for worship, enshrined in the *Book of Common Prayer*, is one of the exciting developments of recent years. Zac Hicks takes us to the source of Cranmer’s inspiration in the great doctrine of justification by faith alone, which he expressed in timeless prose. A must-read for everyone who wants to worship God in spirit and in truth.”

Gerald Bray, research professor at Beeson Divinity School of Samford University and author of *Doing Theology with the Reformers*

“Worship and trust go together, for good or ill. Zac Hicks shows how the *Book of Common Prayer* was shaped brilliantly by Thomas Cranmer to commend a deep trust in the sufficiency of Jesus Christ, in whom is all comfort and eternal life. *Worship by Faith Alone* shows us the richly Protestant nature of Cranmerian Anglicanism. Even

more so, Hicks shows us how worship can convey Jesus Christ to us.”

Michael Allen, John Dyer Trimble Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando

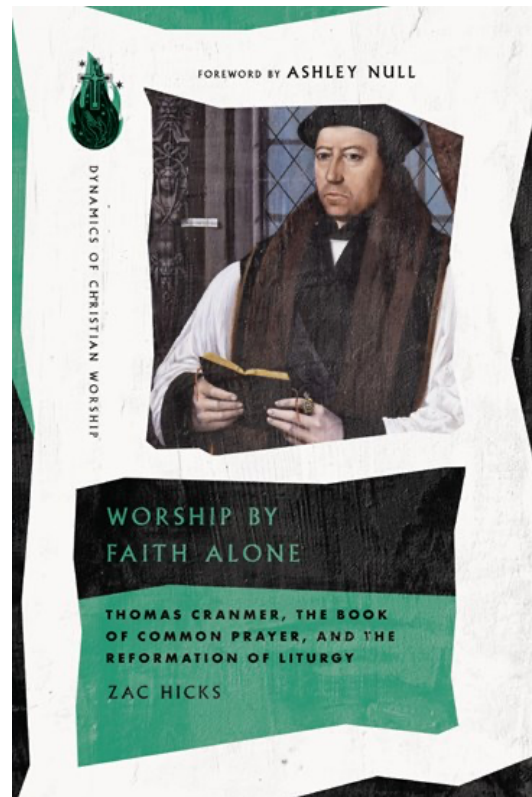
“In an era obsessed with questions of worship style or the worshiper’s positive experience, Zac Hicks’s study of Thomas Cranmer reminds us that the more critical issue is how worship proclaims and participates in the gospel of Jesus Christ. I have long been concerned that much of the worship in this contemporary era has been ashamed of this gospel, not by overt rejection but by a more subtle—and equally disastrous—omission. *Worship by Faith Alone* through Cranmer’s historical example shows how to avoid this drastic error.”

Lester Ruth, research professor of Christian worship at Duke Divinity School

“In *Worship by Faith Alone*, Zac Hicks brings together analysis of Cranmer’s thought and Reformation liturgy with a deep concern for the health of modern worship. Useful to church leaders and students of worship and liturgy, *Worship by Faith Alone* offers readers a vision of worship that is gospel centered in word, action, and atmosphere, exemplifying the belief that history has relevance for the contemporary world.”

Matthew Laube, assistant professor of church music at Baylor University

[From IVP Academic Website]



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