Introduction
The Power of Performance in Prayer, Now and Then

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A recent American TV series, *Homeland*, portrays the story of an American marine, captured and tortured for eight years in Iraq, turned by his captors and sent back to America to be a suicide bomber. It is an arresting media event in many ways, both in the 'daring-do' of its plot lines and the provocative images it serves to a global audience. For many in America, the show traces the fears and pathologies of a society traumatised by the carnage of 9/11 and the violent response that followed. For many it confronts the contradiction between the treasured values of free speech and religion and an 'enemy' associated with the signs and symbols of Islam. At the centre of these anxieties, undoubtedly intended to shock as much as to compete for audience sympathies, is the repeated image of a red-haired, pale-skinned Sergeant Brody unfolding his prayer rug, removing his shoes, and performing the Salat, the ritualised prayer that forms one of the five pillars of Islam. The image is striking, challenging and beautiful. It is also a prayer performed within the context of a drama, on stage as it were, before an audience. Sergeant Brody's prayers have all the signs of authentic prayer. They are perfectly performed in Arabic. One might use them, therefore, to ask the question what makes an authentic prayer? I do not know whether Damian Lewis, the actor who plays Sergeant Brody, is himself a Muslim. I suspect he is not. But in wondering whether he is or is not I traverse the difficult terrain that religious thought has covered many times before. What is the difference between the expression of an interior voice, an inner disposition, and prayer as an outward performance, visible to others either real or imagined? What is the connection between an inner belief or mental orientation to the gestures and spoken words of prayer? Moreover, what is the relationship between an authenticity so defined and the reception of a prayer by those nearby, those who may be sympathetic, hostile or simply indifferent to prayer? Where, indeed, does authenticity lie? Change the sense of that word: can authenticity lie? Can it represent something that is not, in fact, there? Does that inner recognition of sincere

and honest prayer depend to a small or large extent on a perception, an understanding and acceptance of a prayer by an audience that is as much human as it may be divine?

I begin this introduction to a book on the performative aspects of prayer in Reformation England and Wales by using an example that is far from that subject both geographically and culturally. I do so not to be provocatively anachronistic, but to make the point that the questions and issues involved in the Reformation prayer wars are still very much alive in our own day. The tenor and context may have changed, but many of the controversies, both religious and cultural, certainly seem to operate according to a strikingly similar dynamic. I might even go so far as to assert that such controversy seems, in fact, to be intrinsic to the very idea and practice of prayer itself.

Prayer is . . . So many books about prayer essentially try to complete that statement: to answer the question, 'What is prayer'?[1] We might take a different tack, however, by simply leaving the sentence as intransitive. Prayer exists. It is in practically every culture at just about every point in history. The invention of the scientific method and the remarkable changes in our world that have come about since have done little to make the presence and practice of prayer recede. And, inevitably, along with the existence of prayer comes a set of definitions about what makes a prayer really a prayer, in other words, a valid prayer rather than a non-prayer or an incorrect prayer. How one defines a prayer is always dependent on a performance, either actual or imagined, and performance, by its nature, is critiqued and assessed by an audience. The performance a prayer takes asserts an understanding of how prayer is or ought to be defined. Public prayers involve collective participation that is heard and felt by those who participate in such prayers. They affect, too, those who might not participate in these prayers, but who merely observe.

I recall a moment when I was visiting, as a tourist, the Old Town Square in Prague when a rather large group of Hare Krishnas had set up an elaborate wooden cart bearing all number of foods set out in bowls, each steaming and blending enticing aromas. Devotees danced in bright garments to a music both rhythmic and cheerful. I am certainly no expert on the Hare Krishnas, but the performance was undoubtedly a complex kind of prayer involving dance, ritual participation and the offering of food to passers-by. The dancers communicated with each other through looks, a shared language and gestured movements that they recognised and expected. As an observer, I remember thinking the display was quite out of the ordinary, strange and alien. It was also intriguing. Could I be

dispassionate and disinterested? Could I eat of the food I was offered when it was part of a ceremony of prayer that I was not a part of? I could, but I did have to think about it: it was not inert. There was a mental process that I had to go through. In actual fact, I was a part of these prayers, an integral part, like all the other tourist passers-by who were in the square that day. The prayer dances were for us if they were for anyone. Our participation was our attention, either momentarily as we hurried past or for longer periods by those who lingered, some sitting on benches set out for that purpose.

My encounter in Prague was not that different from an experience Regina Schwartz describes as a secular Jewish academic attending Holy Communion. Feeling fully capable of comprehending both the practice and its context, of respecting both the ritual and the believing participants, she describes the moment when she decided she too would get up and go forward with the congregation to experience this moving and strange ritual. 'I was unable to move', she says:

> What had happened? Did my terror that Yahweh would strike me down for committing idolatry overcome me? Oh yes. Did I fear that my anthropological experiment was disrespectful of others' meaningful experience? Indeed. Was I afraid that if I ate Christ's body, I would turn into a Christian? That too.[2]

Schwartz puts her finger on the complex emotional and intellectual issues that prayer, or in this case, sacramental liturgy presents even for secular, seemingly objective perspectives. Her experiences will be similar for anyone who encounters a prayer that is not their own. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, for prayer to be a neutral thing, neutral, let us say, in the sense that encountering someone drinking a glass of water is typically neutral: we give it little or no thought. As soon as one encounters prayer, one is confronted with definitions that are in many respects not of one's own making. Prayer involves words (usually) and gestures (undoubtedly) that conform to either a wider set of community definitions of what a prayer ought to be or at least the definitions one's imagined community holds. There is at least some kind of mutual agreement among those who pray together or pray in the same tradition. Often, I venture to add, there is a collective policing of the words and gestures that make 'proper' prayers. Certain words are acceptable, others are not. Certain gestures or postures are legitimate, others profane.

The examples I have briefly used here in the Introduction have begun this discussion in broad terms to make implicit connections between the

questions about prayer in Reformation England that the chapters in this volume examine and their continued relevance in our contemporary world. The above issues and examples from our twenty-first-century context could not be more relevant to our discussion of religious life in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and vice versa. This is apparent from the start; readers will note the issues of veracity and definition, the body in prayer, prayer as a written or spoken text, prayer as an exercise that establishes or reinforces community and the many similar aspects of performance that are developed in different ways throughout the chapters of this book. It illustrates, if not a significant continuity that our twenty-first century world has with early modern England, then the tenacity of religious distinctions made concerning prayer and how rooted these discriminations are in questions of performance.

Scholarship in early modern prayer has begun to re-evaluate and historicise the debates around prayer and how these relate to the central prayer texts such as the prayer book, tracts and prayer guides, as well as literary texts and drama. Historians of prayer have moved away from an oversimplified view of the Reformation as a shift from late medieval collective experience toward a Protestant emphasis on the 'atomised', interior, private prayer.[3] Eamon Duffy emphasises the vivacious individuality in late-medieval private prayer lives, frequently evident in the scribbled margins of personal books of the hours or inserted prayers exchanged in the way recipes would be today.[4] Ramie Targoff focused critical attention on the performative aspects of prayer, noting the ways that the Elizabethan church recognised a connection between physical performance and inner conviction. 'Common' worship, therefore, was a way of cultivating unity of spirit where a congregation were audience to each other's prayers.[5] Targoff's study subtly challenges the notion, popular in literary circles, that religious poetry parallelled private devotional practice.[6]

Following Targoff, literary and dramatic prayer has generated considerable new interest in recent years. In an earlier book, I examined the recurring scenario of unheard prayer in Shakespeare's drama: from the violent arrows of Titus Andronicus, the impotent prayer to nature by Richard II, to the inability of Claudius and Lear to pray. My argument aligned them first with an overhanging solicitation of tolerance and, later in Shakespeare's career, with James's desire for the reunification of Christendom. Other very interesting work by Daniel Swift has read Shakespeare's plays in relation to the *Book of Common Prayer*. Anthony Dawson's reading of Claudius gives important attention to the performative demands and nuance of the scene,[7] as does Paul Stegner in his

examination of confession when he reminds us that 'Theatrical space intensifies rather than resolves the difficulties of determining inward and outward sincerity, for it accentuates the limited points of access into the conscience through a fundamental reliance on visual and auditory externals'.[8] John Cox includes a chapter on 'Shakespeare's Prayers' in his edited volume on Renaissance ethics, aligning Claudius and, indeed, Henry V to the theological concept of attrition. His reading raises a subtle limit to historicism, however, where one could be forgiven for believing that attrition was merely a sign of damnable spiritual failure as the more extremist elements of Elizabethan puritanism (and Cox) portray it. It was, in fact, part of a much more nuanced soteriology that demands the historian be sensitive to a range of theological debate, not just one side.[9] Another recent article by Cox provides a list of prayers in Marlowe and Jonson, noting possible ironic representation.[10] Useful to much of this is earlier work by Virginia Reinhart and Peter Kaufman who explored the tangible, visible practices – the performances – of those who prayed in the early modern period.[11] So too did Achsah Guibbory when she focused on the debates surrounding religious ceremony. Finally, a very important piece that ties together oral and textual practices as well as the thorny question of 'prophecy' has recently been published by Erica Longfellow.[12] This book, therefore, puts its finger squarely on the pulse of this research: where did the body stand (as subject and as metaphor) in prayer during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? Performance could not be avoided, yet it was fraught with controversy, soliciting a diversity of views.

The first two chapters examine two important pillars of Reformed thinking in England: the thought of early reformers – Luther, Calvin and Bucer – and later tendencies toward more formal liturgical prayer that developed with the encouragement of Lancelot Andrewes and William Laud. Nearly all of the questions about prayer in performance in subsequent chapters look broadly to one or both of these two positions in Reformation thought for inspiration.

Brian Cummings in Chapter 1 places these questions at the origin and centre of Reformation thought, tracing the anxieties of early reformers – Luther, Bucer and Calvin – and their deliberations about the meaning and validity of the embodied word. Prayer is collectively performed, defined and critiqued, Cummings asserts. It is 'a system of recognition with a social code of performance'. He shows how Luther's early vexations with the words and performance of the Mass were a remarkable example of what J.L. Austin would later call a 'performative utterance'. (Intriguingly, he also shows how Austin's theories derive from these Reformation debates and,

indeed, the Book of Common Prayer.) Luther's distress over his unworthiness to say the words of the Mass expressed his concern about his ability to meet the conditions that make the act of prayer effective. Did he just say the words? Were the words of the Mass the act in themselves or did his prayers require something more, something inward? This evinces the diaphanous category of sincerity which can be equally evident or belied by performance. Luther's crisis led to what Cummings describes (with regard to Bucer) as the 'daring and energetic experiments' that helped to redescribe prayer. These were experiments in public and private prayer bringing together both theology and practice, belief and the body which would be reflected in the development of the English Prayer Book. He argues that the debate was more than a conflict between outward and inward performances. For Bucer and later for Calvin, the route to sincerity lay through the believer's emotions. Passions, seemingly an uncontrollable performance, became the key to good prayer, 'an index of sincerity'. 'Far from disembodying prayer', Cummings asserts, these theologians revived 'its gravity and meaning by constructing a new theory of the passions in prayer'.

Graham Parry turns our attention to Lancelot Andrewes, a towering figure of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries who embodied many of the views and contradictions of the English church at that time. Just as Cummings noted about the earlier reformers, the passions played an important part in Andrewes's experience of prayer. Though he may have advocated and influenced a liturgically rich style of collective worship, Andrewes also led a deeply personal and rigorous prayer regimen – five hours a day – documented in a personal book of collected prayers known only to his closest associates. Andrewes, we are told, adopted physical postures that corresponded to his emotional state: prostrate in humility, trembling with fear, or his eyes streaming with tears of remorse for his sins. The prayers matched his intellectual quality, collected in a range of languages including Greek, Latin and Hebrew, highly learned and bearing a deep sense of continuity with earlier, often distant Christian traditions. The prayers would be translated and published with a warm reception for years to come as *A manuall of directions for the visitation of the sicke* (1642, 1648, 1655, 1670), part of a wider demand for printed prayer and devotional books in the seventeenth century. It was their private nature, Parry notes, that struck a different tone from other prayer books of the period like John Cosin's. Cosin's was intended to cultivate a style of prayer more amenable to royal sensibilities and inoffensive to Henrietta Maria, the Catholic wife of Charles I. Such an agenda would undoubtedly have been

noxious to those who identified all things Roman as idolatrous. But, as Chapter 3 shows, there was a rising hostility throughout the latter half of the sixteenth century towards the use of any kind of prayer book, especially the Book of Common Prayer. The more extreme of this persuasion in fact found any kind of printed or written prayer objectionable. For them, notably John Milton among them, legitimacy in prayer depended upon the words ushering forth from the spontaneous wellspring of the soul.

With leading figures in the Church of England encouraging more elaborate liturgical worship, it was perhaps inevitable that the wider experience of worship would be viewed within a broader definition of performed prayer. Many churchmen like Andrewes, Donne and Laud saw popular performances of music and preaching as complex and beautiful forms collective prayer. This was, of course, especially true of music. Simon Jackson examines how the particular example of the verse anthem exemplified a movement toward prayerful performance in this most literal sense. With reformed sympathies sensitive to the possibility of delight superseding devotion, the spiritual value of music in worship was a delicate line that directly involved questions of efficacy in performance. In the same way that written prayers had come under scrutiny for being an inauthentic performance, music in prayer was something that some reformers had proscribed for similar reasons. Even Zwingli, ironically an accomplished musician, objected to the use of music in worship. For some, music was a distraction. For others, it was able to lift the soul to God. As Richard Hooker reminded his fellow churchmen, music should be 'an ornament to God's service, and an help to our own devotion'. Properly used, it was capable of cultivating 'ecstasies' in the believer, 'filling the mind with an heavenly joy'. And, though musical prayer was a way of leading the heart to 'heavens doore', it was very obviously a way fraught with the perils of inadequate performance: poor quality singing voices, inattentiveness and so on. Despite these obstacles, composers like William Byrd and Orlando Gibbons combined text, music and prayer in devotional works suitable for both church and domestic settings, a medium simultaneously private and communal.

As already noted, sermons too could be seen as an important collective performance of prayer. Churchmen like Donne, Thomas Adams and Joseph Hall believed that prayer was a process that involved the entirety of worship, not only integrating music within their liturgies and indeed sermons, but by viewing the sermon itself – the centrepiece of Protestant worship – as a central act of collective prayer. The church building and everything that happened in it was a part of the sacred

work performing the 'house of prayer'. They were distinguishing this view, of course, from other reformers, notably Calvin, who believed that there was nothing intrinsically holy in a church building and that only 'we ourselves are temples of God'. Katrin Ettenhuber discusses the example of the well-documented service for the consecration of the new Chapel at Lincoln's Inn in 1623. John Donne was highly commended on the occasion for his sermon. His rhetoric in this moment that designated a mere building to be sacred was an example of his earlier exhortation to 'Let *Preaching* . . . so *possesse* the *Pulpit*, that *Prayer* may *name* the *Church*, as *here* it doth'. Balanced within a structured service of prayers chosen by George Montaigne, Donne's sermon attempted to make no distinction between the preaching and prayer. All in attendance within the packed space were participant in an inter-tissued experience of scripture and common prayer to God.

The Book of Common Prayer and other prayer books that met a growing demand for devotional literature offered their own kind of performance, not simply as a 'script' but by providing a mutually imagined prayer shared between those who prayed with them. Like music and liturgical services, these performances were also controversial. For some, these books were a source of comfort and community, a unifying force in the Church of England. For others, they were egregious examples of insincere performances, as were any prayers that were not spontaneously spoken. The quest, it seems, in both views of prayer was that they be what Sam Gill has recently described as 'heartfelt'. It is a longstanding value applied to prayer's veracity, a discrimination that would have lasting reach, from sixteenth-century non-conformists from the Brownists right up to early twentieth-century studies of prayer and, indeed, to some Congregationalist gatherings in our present day.[13] For sixteenth- and seventeenth-century non-conformists, spontaneity was a vital element of prayer. Prayer books and liturgies were merely barriers to direct communication with God, even a potential form of idolatry. Liturgical worship was an obvious target with visceral objection to the Book of Common Prayer growing throughout the later sixteenth century. This antagonism is taken up in Chapter 3, where what begins as a squabble over a preferred style of worship in the English church-in-exile expands when the exiles return during the reign of Elizabeth I. Unable to shape the official church into what they saw as a more righteous style of government and worship – for many, the appeal was Presbyterianism – 'Puritans' became increasingly vocal and inventive in their opposition, with some finally advocating outright separation from the church altogether.

For many the actual performance of one's prayers was just the beginning. Equally important was the performance of one's daily life. A 'good' prayer was one that was prayed by a sober and pious person. 'Precise' churchmen began to take careful note of their colleagues' activities and lifestyles (Sterrett, Chapter 3). Performance became something of an all-encompassing aspect of a believer's life for those who, ironically, were trying to eradicate it in prayer. Strangely, as they lost the arguments in their struggle for control of the official church in the 1580s, the Puritans gained their most incendiary weapon by adopting the strategies and techniques of the stage. The Martin Marprelate pamphlets performed the voice of the stage clown in print, lampooning what they saw as the inconsistency and corruption endemic in the church. It was a high-risk strategy that received a like response through scathing stage interludes commissioned by Archbishop Bancroft. More than that, the Marprelate pamphlets set the stage for deadly confrontation when dourer, more emphatic voices like Henry Barrow and John Greenwood spread unrelenting invective and sought a more absolute separation from the church. The question of performance in prayer had thus become deadly serious. Barrow and Greenwood's intransigence (or fervour of conviction, depending on one's perspective) gave Archbishop Whitgift's faction reason to hang them for dissemination of seditious writing.

This violent potential had been growing throughout the sixteenth-century English church and would reach an apex in the 1640s with the outbreak of the Civil Wars and the execution of Charles I. The question of prayer in relation to a ruling monarch had always been a thorny one, as John Knox found out when he accused Emperor Charles V of being 'no less [an] enemy vnto Christe, then euer was Nero'.[14] Henry Barrow, too, found himself on difficult ground when he was accused of believing that the Queen's baptism had no validity. By the late 1630s, King Charles I's commitment to liturgical worship grated so strongly with many of his subjects that it led to the Covenanters in Scotland and provided the spark for the English Civil war. As Robert Wilcher explains, Charles had taken his father's admonitions to heart when he accepted his role as a royal actor. He not only controlled his image through portraiture and behaviour, but cast himself as a prayerful king, attending services in the Royal Chapel on Sundays and promoting liturgical order through his own example. Though this may have seemed a sensible, even righteous, course given the intensity of antagonism to set forms of prayer by non-conformists, the king's performances and the programme of liturgical renewal under William Laud only inflamed political and religious antagonism. Charles, by

investing certain forms of prayer with his authority as king, underestimated the fragility of his royal office. His urging of the prayer book on Scottish worship would spark a conflict that rapidly spread beyond his control. Even after his death, the question of the king's prayers would roil the nation as his book of prayers, *Eikon Basilike*, became an irksome symbol to his executioners, marking the stark divide over performed prayers. In death, as he had in life, the king struck a multivalent posture of prayer before a diverse and conflicted audience.

With the collapse of institutions like the crown and the church as many knew it, some endeavoured to sustain the underground Anglican community through substitute prayer books that offered an invitation and a form of worship. These were, at the same time, a form of resistance during the persecutions that came during the Interregnum. Jeremy Taylor's *The Golden Grove* is important here. As Parry notes, it struck a middle way and kept 'the candle of Anglican worship flickering during the years when that worship could not be publicly celebrated'. Similarly, Henry Vaughan, found his poetic voice through the experience of defeat. *Silex Scintilans* and *The Mount of Olives* offered solace for a persecuted community literally locked out of their church and denied their form of prayer. Donald Dickson explains how, though better known for his poetry, Vaughan's prose was also a framework for performing prayer as a form of resistance, 'devotion with a decided political edge', 'a turning of the cheek while setting the jaw'. Prayer was the glue binding communities together in times of adversity as well as the rub of resistance to those who insisted prayer should be prayed another way.

Despite the controversy surrounding spontaneous spoken prayers vs written prayer and prayer books, many found spiritual benefit from combining the two activities, writing their own extempore prayers in spiritual diaries and keeping note of what they believed were God's answers to their prayers. The practice, Effie Botonaki explains, was fairly common until the end of the seventeenth century, especially among literate Protestant women. It provided a nexus of spiritual development, individual creativity and self-reflection. Protestant believers 'were ... encouraged to build a one-to-one relationship with God' – again, emphasising their personal passions – and 'to approach Him through the depth of their emotions'. Though private and thus largely removed from public view, these glimpses, like Andrewes's noted by Parry, reveal a performative conception to personal prayer. Through self-reflection and confession, Botonaki argues, these prayers, like the diaries that contained them, filled the place that the priest left empty once auricular confession had become theologically