

### Hugh Latimer

**H**is name was Hugh Latimer. His conversion was remarkable for its simplicity. Born in England around 1490, he went to Christ's College, Cambridge, at the age of 14. Deeply religious, he became a priest in the Catholic Church in his 20s and zealously opposed the English Reformation movement. He labored to dissuade people from reading the Bible and became the leading defender of his faith in England. In 1523, he delivered a sermon in which he denounced Melancthon and the Reformation. In his audience that day was Thomas Bilney, who had recently trusted the Lord Jesus as his Savior. He had a deep concern to win Latimer's soul for Christ and asked Latimer if he would hear his confession. In the confessional, Bilney explained how he had found Christ. *"My soul was sick, and I longed for peace, but nowhere could I find it ... I went to the priests, and they appointed me penances and pilgrimages; yet, by these things my poor sick soul was nothing profited ... But at last I heard of Jesus. It was then, when first the New Testament was set forth by Erasmus, that the light came ... I bought the book ... and, on the first reading of it, as I well remember, I chanced upon these words, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.'* That one sentence, through God's inward working, did so lift up my poor bruised spirit that the very bones within me leaped for joy and gladness. It was as if, after a long, dark night, day had suddenly broke!" Latimer's reaction was more than Bilney could have hoped for. He, too, had known the awful uncertainty, the same unsatisfied thirst for truth, that Bilney described. And that day Latimer, too, found peace with God through the One Who came to save sinners.



Martyrs Memorial, Oxford

As was the case with Saul of Tarsus, the man who had been the most zealous defender of a Christ-less religion became a mighty vessel for God. Eventually, during the reign of the queen whom history would remember as "Bloody Mary," Hugh Latimer was condemned to death as a heretic. He and Nicholas Ridley were burned at the stake in Oxford on October 16, 1555. As the flames quickly rose, Latimer encouraged Ridley,

***"Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man! We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace, in England, as I trust never shall be put out."***

*"And the flames leaped up, but the blinding smoke could not the soul of Hugh Latimer choke; For, said he, 'Brother Ridley, be of good cheer, a candle in England is lighted here, Which by grace of God shall never go out!' And that speech in whispers was echoed about— Latimer's Light shall never go out. However the winds may blow it about. Latimer's Light has come to stay till the trump of a coming judgment day."*



Cross in Broad St., Oxford, marking the spot where Latimer & Ridley died

### The Third "Oxford Martyr" – Thomas Cranmer

Thomas Cranmer was Archbishop of Canterbury in the days of Henry VIII. When Henry's daughter Mary took the throne she commanded him to return to the Catholic Church. After much vacillating, Cranmer signed a number of recantations. Nevertheless, Mary did not believe Cranmer was sincere and sentenced him to death. Cranmer was ordered to make a final recantation, but this time in public, at the University Church (Church of St. Mary). On March 21, 1556, the day of his execution, he stood in the pulpit and opened with a prayer and an exhortation to obey the king and queen. His enemies expected him to "stick to the script" and renounce the Gospel. Instead, Cranmer, to their horror, renounced his recantations, ending with, ***"And forasmuch as my hand offended in writing contrary to my heart, therefore my hand shall first be punished: for if I may come to the fire, it shall be first burned."*** Enraged, his enemies pulled him from the pulpit and took him to the spot where Latimer and Ridley had been burnt six months before. At the stake, true to his word, he held up his hand and said, ***"This was the hand that wrote it, and therefore shall it suffer first punishment."*** Eyewitnesses said he "stretched out his right hand, and thrust it into the flame, and held it there a good space, before the fire came to any other part of his body; where his hand was seen of every man sensibly burning, crying with a loud voice, 'This hand hath offended.'" Some said his dying words were quoted from Acts chapter 7:

"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit ... I see the heavens open and Jesus standing at the right hand of God."



The Arrest of Thomas Cranmer in St. Mary's Church. (From Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*.)