

LANGUAGE AND RELIGION IN TUDOR CORNWALL:
THE TESTIMONY OF *SACRAMENT AN ALTER*

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ABSTRACT

This article is centred around a detailed review of D.H. Frost's new (2023) critical edition and translation of the Cornish and Latin text *Sacrament an Alter*, in both its theological/historical and its philological/linguistic aspects. First, Dr Frost's exposition of his text's remarkable background is placed against the constantly changing character of official Tudor ideology, and the ecclesiological lens through which he views his material discussed. Points from his linguistic analysis (including revivalist reconstructions) are then examined and, prompted by Frost's portrayal of the state of Cornish-language literacy in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, similarities are adduced with the known situation of near-contemporary Manx Gaelic. Traditional Cornish went into ultimately terminal decline, but Manx went on to receive both the Prayer Book and the Bible in translation; Cornwall's disadvantage in not constituting a diocese in its own right is suggested as a significant factor in the contrasting fates of the two small Celtic languages in question. Finally, attention is drawn to the potentially striking efficacy of small networks of dedicated scholars, whatever their time and place.

Keywords: Cornwall, Cornish, Latin, code-switching

Frost, D.H. 2023. *Sacrament an Alter: The Sacrament of the Altar: A critical edition with translation*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press. xi + 353 pages. ISBN: 978-1-80413-030-8

1. Introduction

The remarkable book to be evaluated here deserves full review-article treatment because it is (at least) two works in one: an exemplary exercise in the theological and ecclesiastical history of an extraordinarily turbulent period on the one hand and, on the other hand, a critical edition and translation of *Sacrament an Alter*

(SA), a key Cornish and Latin text that bears witness, explicit and implicit, to the ideological and societal upheavals of that time. The historical component shows with new clarity how trends that were fundamentally national and even international nevertheless had a close bearing on developments that were entirely specific to a locality (in this case part of Cornwall), while the minute observation and dense explanatory annotation that accompany the critical edition render it as fine a piece of philological work as this reviewer has seen applied to any historical text in any Celtic language. I also propose and briefly conduct a “thought experiment” to investigate the striking contrast, arguably stemming from this time, between the fate of Cornish and that of traditional Manx, given the similarities of scale and cultural situation that otherwise pertained between the two linguistic communities.

If the volume has a double identity then the individual responsible for it has a quadruple one! On the theological and historical side Dr Frost is a skilled investigator, scrupulous analyst, and vastly knowledgeable expounder of his sources, and at the same time a devout Roman Catholic educator who deftly arranges his material against a background that is gently (and usually implicitly) presented as containing certain timeless truths. On the linguistic side Daveth Frost is a leading expert on the surviving writings of traditional Cornish and on how to interpret these semantically as well as linguistically in an unimpeachably scholarly fashion, and simultaneously a clear and constructive partisan of the language revival movement. When it comes to SA, so intertwined are the historical/theological and the philological/linguistic aspects that probably only Frost could have done such justice to both. Within each of these, the extent to which he has appropriately balanced the contributions of his two sub-personae is a question more open to debate. But in order to address such matters in the context of SA one first needs an awareness, at least in outline, of the chronology of the developments in Tudor national policy and practice that prompted its composition.

2. Outline chronology of relevant Tudor policy and practice¹

From the point of view of ecclesiastical history Henry VIII, king of England from 1509-47, is probably best known for his breach with Rome: the Act of Supremacy in 1534 declared that he rather than the Pope was the head of the national Church. This move was primarily motivated by Henry’s need to validate his divorce from Catherine of Aragon, which Rome had refused to sanction; but it was then used as

¹ One reason for providing such a framework here is that Frost himself seems never to do so; instead, in his modest way, he pays his readers the compliment of assuming that we have it all at our fingertips already.

cover by the king and his oligarchs for their rapacious dissolution of the realm's monastic foundations and the seizing of their assets, which was almost complete within five years. The monarch's headship of the Church of England went on in subsequent reigns to provide an enduring constitutional and legal basis upon which official ecclesiastical ideology could be (and frequently, suddenly, and radically was) changed at national level, from the top. However, it is a major (though widespread) misconception to see Henry as having begun to do this himself; he was not a Protestant in any doctrinal sense, nor did he tolerate Reformation ideas.²

It was in fact in the reign of Henry's son Edward VI (1547-53) that Reformation principles were first brought in and instituted; this was done under the aegis of two successive Lords Protector regent, since Edward himself was only ten years old when he came to the throne. But things then went into shuddering reverse under the even briefer rule of his half-sister Mary "the Catholic" (1553-58), who dedicated herself to the reintroduction of former ways, and persecuted Protestants. The trend towards reformation of the Church of England was only resumed (and was then resumed quickly) with the accession of the third half-sibling, Elizabeth I (1558-1603); although many initiatives taken in her time were emergency measures introduced *ad hoc*, in practice her long reign allowed for some stability, and the famous *Thirty-Nine Articles*, adopted in 1563, ultimately bedded themselves in as the *de facto* as well as the official doctrinal basis of distinctively Anglican ecclesiology.

When reading the book under review one has constantly to bear in mind the stage that national policy had reached at any particular time as, lurching from side to side in the manner just described, it constituted the context for, and necessarily exerted enormous influence upon, the words, actions and works of all of the people involved.

2.1 The revolving door

For many individuals who were influential at a level just below the national, the ideological flux manifested itself as a revolving door. Beginning in some high University or ecclesiastical position, such men (always men!) would find themselves abruptly committed to prison, only to be returned just as suddenly to the summit of power – and then to fall from it again, as the régime changed for

² The title "Defender of the Faith" had been awarded to Henry by pope Leo X in 1521, and the king never abjured such central Roman theological tenets as transubstantiation (the belief that the eucharistic bread and wine actually change into the body and blood of Christ at the moment of consecration); indeed, as late as 1539, in his *Statute of the Six Articles*, Henry officially declared to be heretical any denial of that or of other specified doctrines. These doctrines were anathema to Reformed theologians.

the third time in a dozen years.³ At this level, Dr Frost does provide the detail;⁴ and it is against this background that he introduces, edits, translates, and discusses the fascinating SA, found in a single, apparently autograph copy appended to the better-known *Tregear Homilies* in British Library manuscript Add. 46397. But we first need to look at the latter (as Frost does, on pp. 31-39).

3. The *Tregear Homilies* (TH)

TH is “a translation into the Cornish language of a book of homilies issued by Edmund Bonner, bishop of London in the reign of Mary I” (p.4),⁵ Frost reminds us that the priest responsible “is now known to have been the vicar of St Allen in Cornwall from 1544 to 1583”.⁶ He comments that the translation was “presumably ... intended to support a Counter-Reformation programme of preaching, disputation or theological education in western Cornwall and is most likely to date from sometime between 1555 and 1558” (p.11). This analysis constitutes a key insight, as it shows that Mary’s attempts to reverse the Reformation were by no means reliant on force alone: minds, hearts, and shared beliefs were appealed to, in a campaign of persuasion that was thought out nationally (as by Bonner) but applied locally and in detail (as in TH), even when this involved expedients such as working in the generally despised Cornish language.⁷ Given the brevity of Mary’s reign, for this programme to have been implemented as quickly and as thoroughly as it was shows enormous and flexible dedication on the part of its protagonists at every level.

³ This is what happened to numerous anti-Reformation figures as Edward succeeded Henry, Mary succeeded Edward, and Elizabeth in turn succeeded Mary. But for some key clergy in the Reformed party, who by contrast were in high office under Edward and then deprived under Mary, the door did not revolve again; there was no way back for someone burnt at the stake.

⁴ Thus he outlines how, among academics, “John Young (1514-1580) ... came before the Privy Council in 1551 for opposing Edward’s reforms, but was rehabilitated under Mary, becoming Regius Professor at Cambridge. On the accession of Elizabeth, he was deprived and imprisoned successively in the Counter, the Marshalsea and Wisbech Castle, where he died” (p. 168, n. 74). Among clerics, “Thomas Watson (1513-1584) ... imprisoned for his opposition under Edward VI but restored to favour under Mary I, ... became Dean of Durham, then Bishop of Lincoln. Under Elizabeth I he was deprived, imprisoned and committed to Wisbech Castle” (p. 191, n. 163). Similar trajectories are outlined for many individuals in both categories.

⁵ Frost characterizes Bonner’s initiative as as part of Mary’s “programme to renew [Roman] Catholicism in England through worship, preaching and catechesis” (p. 4).

⁶ For this priest to have translated the *Homilies* and still to remain in post throughout the period indicated suggests, given the unpredictable turbulence described above, that he must have been very lucky, very blessed, very popular, or politically very skilful: to regard him as simply a compliant “vicar of Bray” would be unfair seeing that he was clearly not content merely to keep his head down.

⁷ As Frost remarks, perhaps “there was an element of counterbalance to Cranmer’s lack of diplomacy towards Cornish-speakers at the time of the 1549 Rising, in the reign of Edward VI” (p. 11); see n. 10 below.

4. The purpose and significance of *Sacrament an Alter*

Despite being appended to TH, SA differs from that work in its author and date (and hence context), and in what it is talking about. The subject-matter of SA, all the way through, is the question of transubstantiation,⁸ and the author one Thomas Stephyn. In the course of his formidable detective work in identifying who exactly Stephyn was, Frost is charmingly, interestingly, and unashamedly discursive;⁹ but the upshot of his investigation is that “we can date the Cornish of SA as being written no earlier than 1576, and conceivably somewhat later” (p. 25). This means that, unlike the presumably Marian TH (see above), SH dates from well into Elizabeth’s reign. It being a collection of arguments in favour of transubstantiation, this means that it was a subversive tract, as the pendulum of English national ideology had by now swung back to embrace Reformed ideas. So Stephyn was taking a risk in compiling it; the fact that he felt it worth doing so, *and in Cornish*, is of considerable significance since, unlike most of the authors we think of as responsible for the surviving post-medieval Cornish corpus, he must have been motivated by practical rather than primarily antiquarian concerns. In other words, there was a perceived spiritual or pastoral need in West Cornwall that, as late as the last quarter of the sixteenth century, could only be addressed through the language.¹⁰

5. Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* the surprising source of SA

Even more intriguing is the primary source upon which Stephyn closely based his compilation of SA. This source, of which SA is in fact a selective translation, is John Foxe’s English-language *Actes and Monuments*; Frost skilfully pins down the edition used to that published in London in 1576 (which is how he establishes that as the earliest possible date for SA itself). What is striking about Stephyn’s

⁸ See n. 2 above; matters of theological doctrine, such as this, had quickly eclipsed the importance of the question of who was head of the Church of England, the latter being a dispute that tends retrospectively to be given much more weight than seems to have been accorded to it by either side once the reign of Henry was over.

⁹ Thus on p. 51 we read that, looking even “outside the diocese of Exeter [to which Cornwall unfortunately belonged; see below] ..., a considerable number of Thomas Stephyns crop up. None of these are necessarily anything to do with the author of *Sacrament an Alter* ... I will nonetheless summarize what we know of one or two of them” (which he does).

¹⁰ This observation further demonstrates (see n. 7 above) how tin-eared, as well as ideologically inconsistent with one of the principles of his own movement, Thomas Cranmer had been when, a generation (and two reigns) previously, he had counter-productively denied the Cornish the Anglican Prayer Book in their own tongue. The difference a more enlightened linguistic policy might have made is indicated by the contrasting Manx experience, on which see the “thought experiment” conducted below.

choice is that Foxe's work is itself an ardently Protestant composition, being none other than what came subsequently to be known as the famous *Book of Martyrs*. Foxe had centred this around "an account of the full-scale academic disputation conducted by theologians from both Oxford and Cambridge with the bishops Latimer, Ridley and Cranmer in April 1554" (p. 22). The process had evolved under queen Mary from debates into trials, then into show-trials, then into sentencing to burning; Foxe, as a supporter of the defendants, obviously felt it vitally important to "collate a narrative" of the proceedings, even though the latter had been "meant to demonstrate the victory of Catholicism over Protestantism",¹¹ presumably feeling that the (to him) outrageous result would speak for itself.¹² So Frost calls it "fascinating that Stephyn ... attempted the difficult task of reversing the impact of Foxe's account again, by similar selectivity" (p. 22),¹³ and "intriguing ... to find a traditionally minded priest in the 1570s using a Protestant account of the Disputations to provide the spine of his *catena* of patristic proof texts of transubstantiation and the sacrifice of the Mass" (p. 68). Why should Stephyn have adopted this doubly oblique approach to his subject? "Foxe's work, from 1570 on, was supposed to be made available as a large, chained volume in every cathedral in the land and in a number of larger churches" (p. 23), so one factor may have been the purely practical one of ease of access to it; one does wonder also if its Protestant nature might usefully have camouflaged what Stephyn's real purpose was in translating it (after all, his reversal of Foxe's argumentation is only fully revealed once one realizes what he has left out). As for its (to Stephyn) uncongenial slant, in the *Actes and Monuments* record of the Disputations "there was a genuine aspiration towards accuracy and integrity and ... although Foxe is often our only source, the fact that we can even attempt to reconstruct what might actually have happened says a great deal for him" (p. 64).

6. Dr Frost's theological analysis

Even apart from the edition of SA itself and all of the significance for Cornish Studies that it entails, this volume would be ground-breaking in its detailed

¹¹ It is worth noting that Frost's use (as here) of "Catholic" as the appropriate identifying label for the anti-Reformation party, though now used ubiquitously as convenient shorthand, is anachronistic and mildly tendentious: both sides saw themselves as the legitimate protagonists of Catholic truth, a consideration that was (and is) as fundamental to the self-identification of mainstream Protestants as it ever was to that of the pro-transubstantiation party. Less inoffensive is Frost's use of quotation marks when referring to Latimer, Ridley and Cranmer as "the Oxford 'martyrs'", as he does on p. 63.

¹² In rhetorical terms a modern analogue to this approach might be the screenplays of some of the BBC's *Storyville* documentary *exposés*: these are famously effective exactly because they consist exclusively of interviews with, and recordings of, key partisans of the very formation that is being critically examined.

¹³ "Selectivity within selectivity", as it were – with the slant reversed each time!

analysis of the theological argumentation involved.¹⁴ By this I mean not only its treatment of the pro-transubstantiation discourse that Stephyn's carefully selective translation constitutes, but also of the content and background of the original disputations (to the extent that the latter can be apprehended through the filter imposed by Foxe), as well as of the manner in which these were conducted. Ever discursive but at the same time informative and constructive, Frost introduces his treatment by declaring (p. 20-21) that "it may be helpful to look at the context of other Eucharistic debates at the time and explain briefly how they were conducted". This is something of an understatement of what he then goes on to do: such debates largely consisted (on both sides) of extensive citation from early Christian patristic sources, and Frost informs us comprehensively about those as well. Thus in his invaluable and extraordinarily detailed "Commentary" (pp. 147-219), which is focused "on the theology and structure of SA" (p. 147), Frost provides micro-biographies of each of the Church Patriarchs cited by the disputants. When this extends even to St Augustine of Hippo, telling us that he "greatly influenced the development of western Christianity" (p. 150), it verges upon patronizing the reader; but in general it is extremely useful, for example in confirming that the famous Council of Nicaea of A.D. 325 (the first Ecumenical Council, of Nicene Creed fame) took place at İznik in modern Turkey and not at Nice in modern France (which had the same Latin name and whose own church had delegates at the Council, so confusion would be understandable); after all, particularly in a double-targeted work like this,¹⁵ who can be sure what some readers may not be aware of?

6.1 Dr Frost's ecclesiology

All of that being said, and possibly stemming from a sense that Catholic teaching has adhered to the maxim *nihil novi nisi quod traditum est* ("Nothing new except what has been handed down") and therefore is essentially timeless, Dr Frost occasionally strikes a surprisingly anachronistic-sounding note. For example, on

¹⁴ The aspects cannot be separated within SA, and Frost makes no attempt to do so. The result, however, is that one needs to keep three bookmarks synchronized as one works through the edition: one moving through the "Commentary" (see below), one through the philological "Notes" (pp. 221-89), and one through the "Edition" itself (pp. 77-145). Furthermore, within each two-page spread that faces one upon opening the Edition section, four coordinated components need to be kept track of: a diplomatic transcript (about twenty lines at a time) of the Cornish-and-Latin MS (top left), Frost's corresponding critical text (bottom left), his corresponding English translation (bottom right), and – potentially confusingly, at top right – the English-and-Latin passage from Foxe of which the SA text is itself a translation.

¹⁵ Frost is explicit that the "overall aim of this edition is ... to provide the means of understanding *Sacrament an Alter* both for those who know Cornish (but have been put off by the theology) and for those who know theology (but have been put off by the Cornish)" (p. 15).

p. 190 he appears to be asserting rather than merely reporting the view that “the Church has always ‘worshipped the flesh of Christ in the Eucharist’”. On p. 213, trying to source a passage in which substance and accidents are referred to in connection with transubstantiation, he remarks that the terms are “found among Augustinian material, but not in this context”. It is strange that Frost doesn’t add that they would have remained alien to the context for a further nine hundred years, which is when these Aristotelian concepts were first yoked to the Eucharist.¹⁶ Again, it seems odd for a historian to say that “Stephyn’s ... use of the Geneva Bible (and Foxe) for his annotations in TH hints at a world in which Catholic and Protestant clergy, arguments and sources are somewhat jumbled together” (p. 179). My point is that these categories were not, at the time, distinct; everyone would have agreed that there was just one, Catholic Church, containing on the one hand sound teaching and its proponents, and on the other hand unsound teaching (which was to be countered) and its proponents (who were to be argued with and, depending on the balance of power, brought into line or, failing that, excommunicated, but in any case neutralized as influencers); but it was recognized (and indeed hoped or feared, depending on the direction) that any individual might show tendencies one way or the other, possibly varying over time, as might their teachings. Reconciliation was always on the cards, and the notion of two (or more) Churches, with separate (that is, Catholic or Protestant) clergy, would have made no sense to anyone.¹⁷

In an appraisal of the overall tendency of the 1554 Disputations, Frost senses, particularly at one point with Ridley on the stand, “the possibility of a meaningful discussion, had both sides been more open” (p. 196). Unfortunately, “as it happens, Watson [the Marian Bishop of Lincoln]¹⁸ takes the debate in another direction”. Nevertheless, the tenor of the final few extracts in Stephyn’s selection could be seen as grounds for a possible rapprochement between the parties: Foxe’s original English notes have the traditionalist Hugh Weston saying “By the presence of his flesh he [Christ] is not here. The Church hath hym not in flesh, but by believe” (p. 145) – which is about as compatible with the Reformers’ view as they could reasonably have hoped. SA itself is fragmentary at the

¹⁶ Similarly we read on p. 205 of Latimer’s argument that St Augustine’s “understanding of [the Mass] must have been very different to the Catholic one”; however Latimer may have phrased it, it can hardly have been like that!

¹⁷ To be a bit discursive (but only a little more so than Frost is!), the changing situation during those turbulent years seems in fact to have resembled that artfully depicted in Rowling (2003) as pertaining at Hogwarts and in the Weasley family during the stealthy ideological coup and counter-coup within the Ministry of Magic: at no time does anyone suggest founding a rival school, all four contending Houses continue to exist within Hogwarts and, at a personal level, individuals lean one way or the other, or seek to find a middle way, or try just to get by and hope for better times.

¹⁸ See n. 4 above.

corresponding point and, as Frost remarks, we are “in the realms of conjecture for Stephyn’s final words” (p. 219). It is therefore more as the devout former Principal of Holy Cross College and University Centre than as a purely academic historian that Frost imagines those final words as having affirmed Stephyn’s faith in, specifically, “the sacrifice and sacrament of the altar”.

7. Linguistic analysis: Code-switching

Turning to Frost’s expert analysis of linguistic aspects of SA – a change of topic more extreme than is encountered in most scholarly books, and that few academic fields apart from Celtic Studies would be wide enough to accommodate – it is noteworthy that the term *code-switching*, the name for a concept of increasingly recognized significance over recent years,¹⁹ appears not to be used. However, at least sometimes code-switching is surely what is going on (I would characterize the relevant passages as having a Cornish matrix within which the semantically key words are English); for example, at 64r25-28 in the MS we read *an quantite a’n oblation-ma ew sufficient ... Whath eth ew gwrys satisfaction ... accordyng the’n quantyte age devotion & not rag oll an payn* “the measure of this oblation is sufficient ... Yet it becomes a satisfaction ... according to the measure of their devotion & not for all the pain” (pp. 124-25). Or (although here the English words are somewhat assimilated to Cornish shapes) we have, at 65v13, *An Arluth a thisquethas an cruelte a Judas pan rug an Arluth Dew e rebukya, whath na ruk Judas e understandya: ef a tastyas kigg an Arluth Dew* “The Lord showed [= exposed] the cruelty of Judas when the Lord God rebuked him, yet Judas did not understand it: he tasted the Lord God’s flesh” (pp. 134-35). On other occasions Stephyn retains one English phrase from Foxe so as to balance it with another, while translating the remainder of the words into Cornish; thus 59v16-17 gives us [*n*]ot der (“through”) *faith only, mas e weth* (“but also”) *in very deed* (p. 86). Frost says that Stephyn has here “drifted into using a number of English words ... raising questions about the nature of his bilingualism” (p. 239) though surely, in this instance at least, it is a question of code-switching for rhetorical effect.

7.1 Frost’s “General notes”

In the body of Frost’s valuable “General [linguistic] notes” (pp. 222-33), he comments (on p. 224) on Stephyn’s *oma* for an expected *ema* (3sg. present of **bos** “to be”) at 63r23, and on the stressed vowel in his *a thoskas* “learned” at 63r15

¹⁹ Early evidence of the growing level of interest in this within our field was the workshop on *Code-switching in the medieval classroom* that was held in Utrecht in May 2015, with proceedings subsequently published as Ó Flaithearta and Nooij (2018).

(*recte* 19), where a higher vowel than *o* would be expected. Frost adduces influence from the respective cognates *y mae* and *dysg-* in Welsh; but why the alleged influence would have had this particular effect is not explained, and the question of how it might have been brought to bear is not addressed.

On p. 227 he rightly reports as important the late and much lamented Albert Bock's finding that the reflexes of etymological /l/ and of etymological /ll/ are very rigorously kept apart in spelling in SA (namely by being represented with *l* and *ll/lh* respectively). The distinction is also found in other Late Cornish writings and, given how much variation there is in other orthographic features of these texts, their consistency on this point must reflect some living phonetic differentiation. The consensus seems to be that whatever distinguished the erstwhile geminate cannot have been pre-occlusion (namely a pronunciation of it as [tl] or [dl]); but I feel we should ask why not.²⁰ And while Frost's "General notes" do remark (at p. 228) upon Stephyn's frequent, sometimes almost perverse-seeming non-marking of mutation, the most extreme example of all, namely *an mam* for "the mother" at 59r37 (p. 84) and 59v8 (p. 86) alongside three occurrences of the expected *an vam*, is not explicitly adduced (though it is duly indexed in the comprehensive "Glossary" (pp. 297-318 at p. 310).

7.2 Frost's "Textual notes"

In the course of his detailed and erudite "Textual notes and apparatus" (pp. 233-89), in which Frost comments *seriatim* on specific linguistic points in order of their occurrence, we have on p. 280 a nice account of how the manuscript's *a feran* (for *aferan*, a late spelling at 66r17 of the word for Mass) was long misread as *a* plus *seran*,²¹ the latter form being (mis)understood from the (over-interpreted) context as a Cornish word for a prayer for the dead. Apparently this item then "made its way into various dictionaries", being accorded an etymology from Latin **serenare** ("to free from gloom"). But the dictionaries are not specified (I don't find **seran** in any that I have consulted), and there is no indication that the word ever went on to be used in fresh writing; using the taxonomy developed in an earlier number of the present journal,²² it may therefore be classified as a

²⁰ In the light of undisputed [bm] for original /mm/ and [dn] for /nn/, [tl] or [dl] for /ll/ would make sense phonetically and would fit structurally; and just such a set of realizations is attested in Manx. To propose that [tl] was the form that the original Cornish geminate sound had by now taken, despite continuing to be represented by the traditional spelling *ll*, does not seem unreasonable (Icelandic has witnessed just that development), while the occasional *lh* would not be a bad fit for [tl] either.

²¹ The *a* was presumably taken, given the context, as the English indefinite article rather than as a spelling of the Cornish definite article, attested though the latter phenomenon is.

²² Harvey (2019); the taxonomy has subsequently been adopted by Robertson (2022).

ghost that was successfully busted before it had a chance to become a poltergeist word.

On the complicated Latin etymology lying behind the second element of *deow habblys* “Maundy Thursday” at 66r25, discussed on pp. 281-82, see further Harvey and Power (2005), s.v. **capitulatio**. And on p. 285, discussing the *crig ge* “Believe thou!” of 66v10, Frost outlines the well-known (and hotly contested) problem of relating the varying spelling of the consonant that follows the vowel in that verb (and that occurs in numerous other items of Cornish vocabulary) to what must have been its evolving phonetic nature. What seems clear are the end-points: it began as /d/ (pronounced as such, as it still is in Welsh *cred-*) and finished as what Lhuyd wrote as *dzh* (presumably the sound in English *fudge*). At points in between, however, it was spelled with *s* (presumably voiced, as both its predecessor and its later reflex were); but does this imply that it had lost its original stop element, only to regain it later? Further work is needed on this.

7.3 Frost’s linguistic reconstructions

What is unusual in a field dominated by essentially antiquarian philology is the editor’s clear commitment to the life, in the present day, of the language that he is dealing with. This leads him to “fill in the blanks” in a manner that will be hailed as brave and commendable by those who see no conflict between scholarship (provided it is conducted rigorously), and the ideals of the Cornish revival movement; others, however, might potentially see it as foolhardy and pointless. An example may be found on p. 271, where Frost offers a 22-word reconstruction (I would call it “informed speculation”, since it is based upon what Foxe says in English at the corresponding point and upon what would physically fit on the page) of a fragmentary passage of which, in fact, only the single word *rag* (“because, for”) survives! Our editor is entirely frank about what he is doing; but those who would insist on a distinction would have to admit that the academic philologist has here become the language revivalist or revivalist. Again, on p. 138 a thirteen-word mantra is reconstructed from a passage in which only three of the words are complete (and only five appear at all). The basis for it is unclear; as it rhymes, I should have thought it worth pointing that out, and writing (and translating) it as the couplet(s) [*Bar*] *a ha gwyn dir ger[ryow Dew / Corf ha Gois Christ gwris e thew]* (“[Br]ead and wine, through the wor[ds of God, / Are made Christ’s Body and his Blood”).

7.4 Reassessing the significance of Glasney

Until very recently the conventional wisdom was that the tragic 1548 dissolution of Glasney collegiate church at Penryn signalled the end of all hope that the

medieval tradition of Cornish-language literary production might continue into subsequent times in any kind of organized manner; the undeniably authoritative and influential institutional basis provided by the College until then was seen as having been quite simply a *sine qua non*. However, the need for at least some catechetical and pastoral provision through the language across wider West Cornwall had been recognized in pre-Reformation times: although the liturgy was in Latin, permission had been granted to teach the Apostle's Creed in Cornish "in certain parishes" (p. 170), and it has now become clear that, already by the time of the dissolution, "some of those seeking to preserve Cornish Catholic heritage through the medium of the language ... were not at Glasney", even if they "were possibly influenced by a Glasney priest out in the parishes" (p. 61). As for the geographical area implied by this, Dr Frost speaks of the origins and zones of work of the activists as having spanned "northern Kerrier and eastern Penwith ... although their area of operation extended beyond Glasney to Mylor, Truro, St Allen and Newlyn East" (p. 72) – quite a large district. So it is beginning to look as if the crucial factor in precipitating traditional Cornish into ultimately terminal decline may not, after all, have been primarily the loss of Glasney as an institutional base, but rather the fact that the network of individual influencers operating through the language came to find themselves on the wrong side of ecclesiastical history; if any one of a number of factors had been less unfavourable then, even without Glasney, the fate of Cornish might have been different.

7.5 Proposing a Manx comparison

Exploring further the lead given us by Dr Frost here, we have already noted that, as archbishop of Canterbury under Edward, Cranmer had squandered a potential opportunity to attract the Cornish-speaking community into the Reformed camp.²³ But let us conduct a "thought experiment" and imagine that Cornwall had been an episcopal see in its own right, rather than being ruled ecclesiastically from far-away Exeter.²⁴ In that case its successive bishops would presumably have been installed and/or deprived in accordance with the ideology of the monarch of the day, as happened elsewhere; but even so, whoever was the incumbent at any given point in the Tudor period might, even if only as a pragmatic response to the needs he perceived, have been in a position to take the initiative and provide his diocese with the vernacular materials required for the implementation of his agenda. A series of bishops doing this in succession, even if ideologically opposed to one another, might have made all the difference to the survival of the language. It seems not unreasonable to suggest this because,

²³ See above, nn. 7 and 10.

²⁴ A situation not remedied until 1876, when the diocese of Truro was formed.

beginning only a generation later in another small and isolated Celtic-speaking community,²⁵ that is what did happen: between 1604 and 1610 the Prayer Book, including the psalms, was translated into Manx under bishop John Phillips, while subsequent sustained initiatives by bishops Thomas Wilson and Mark Hildesley ultimately saw not only the Prayer Book (in a fresh translation) brought to print in 1765, but the whole Bible itself a decade later, to the incalculable and lasting benefit of that diminutive part of Gaeldom. And in the Manx case, unlike the Cornish, the orthography had to be developed from scratch.²⁶

What is more, the Manx example indicates that similar provision could in principle have been made in Cornish even in the absence of continued institutional underpinning from Glasney: between them, the clergy of the seventeen parishes in the Isle of Man proved to have the necessary skillset to do the job,²⁷ so there is no reason to suppose that a similarly-sized network of literate parochial clerics in Cornwall, like that actually identified by Frost, could not have achieved the same thing given the same degree of episcopal backing.

8. Conclusion: The enduring effectiveness of networks

Be all the above as it may, looking at the context in which Dr Frost's magisterial publication was produced, and the scholarly inputs to it that he graciously acknowledges, one is reminded of one of the aspects of the situation pertaining in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Mann, and at least potentially in Tudor Cornwall, to which attention has just been drawn: namely just how much of real worth can, in principle, be achieved by a small network of committed people, even in the absence of a formal institutional framework. In the case of the present book itself one is struck by the amount of contributory work, of the highest scholarly standard but often unpublished, that was produced or generously contributed by individuals generally known to Celticists primarily in their capacity as protagonists in the language-revival movement (and hence undervalued by some). Examples are the work of Benjamin Bruch (p. 10, n. 31 and p. 78) and, earlier, the transcription of TH jointly undertaken by Robert Morton Nance and A.S.D. Smith.²⁸ Oliver Padel and Nicholas Williams (p. 78)

²⁵ The Manx population has probably never been more than a sixth that of Cornwall, though of course a much higher proportion of it was Celtic-speaking throughout the period under discussion.

²⁶ On this disadvantage (and for the dates) see Lewin (2020). On the other hand the three Island bishops did hold in common (and maintain) a clearly *Thirty-Nine Articles*-based Anglican ideology (see above), a continuity of agenda that must have helped.

²⁷ Lewin (2020) at 40-41.

²⁸ As Dr Frost points out, had this "ever been published in full, it would have advanced the study of Tregear's work (and the reputation of Nance) considerably" (p. 12); "the value of this body of meticulous scholarship has been insufficiently appreciated" (p. 12, n. 38).

were both already well known for their scholarship in Cornish; but the outstanding contribution made by Andrew Hawke (p. 12) will come as news to some, as he is generally known instead for directing the ongoing second edition of the Welsh national dictionary *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*. Similar observations go for others: provided they care enough, individuals can (and do) quietly produce work on and in Cornish of a calibre comparable with the best in the wider Celtic Studies field, but their efforts often “fly under the radar”. The *1,000 Years of Cornish* series, in which Daveth Frost’s volume is the first to appear, will make it impossible to remain genuinely unaware of these contributions and of their impressively high quality.

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