

Another Cranmer fan

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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"The more we read," [writes James Fallows](#), "the more we see reminders that experiences or perceptions we thought were distinctive to us are in fact widespread, even banal." And here I thought I was the only one who ever noticed that!

Fallows has in mind his admiration of the *Book of Common Prayer*:

From first consciousness until age 17 I spent so much time at Episcopal church services with the "old style" [Thomas] Cranmer liturgy that even now I can recite very long passages by rote. . . . [It is] a particular form of stately English whose wording may seem antique but whose rhythms retain a classic beauty. I wouldn't, and can't, write the same way. Yet passages like those after the jump have stuck in my mind as the pure idea of how sentences should be paced, should repeat for emphasis yet also vary, should end.

And now I learn from Ben Schwarz that this is a completely clichéd observation!

Well yes, but there are worse things than liking liturgical prayers that other people like, too. (Come to church and we can do more than like them together!) [Fallows's short post](#) is worth a read for its analysis of Cranmer's rhythm—for my money the quality of good prose (Cranmerian or otherwise) that is least appreciated today.

My wife and I have morning prayer together on weekdays (not all or even most of them, just whenever I can drag myself out of bed at farmer time). We alternate among the Episcopal Church's fairly traditional BCP, the New Zealand church's bold reimagination of it and *Common Prayer*, the newish prayer book by Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove and Enuma Okoro. I like *Common Prayer* for its fresh ideas and the NZ prayer book for its fresh language (and the fun of praying by name for animals we've never heard of).

But for pure poetic rhythm and balance, it's the Episcopal BCP by a mile. I'm not an Anglican, but when I read or hear or pray Cranmer's words I wonder momentarily why anyone isn't.