George Rayner - An Elizabethan Carmelite

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The suppression of the mendicant houses in 1538 by Henry VIII's commissioners put an end to the official presence of friars in England and Wales, but also it provided the impetus for a number of sporadic and isolated missions to the British Isles. In Carmelite history the most well known ones are those of the Ancient Observance in the 1680s and 1690s and of the Discalced branch in various chaplaincies to foreign embassies, as well as rural missions. (1) Among the Carmelite missionaries of the Ancient Observance is George Rayner, (2) a priest and a Carmelite who worked in Yorkshire in the late 16th century and who died in the early 1600s in York Castle. His name was not among the 262 presented to the Holy See in 1886 for beatification, and he hardly figures in "official" recusant or Carmelite history. Indeed in English historical sources he appears a somewhat shadowy figure: he is never identified as a Carmelite, but simply as an "old Queen Mary priest". However, there was good reason for Rayner to keep his identity secret for by doing so he was able to protect himself and those to whom he ministered.

Of Rayner's early life almost nothing is known except that he was a student for the diocese of Chester and that he was ordained acolyte by Cuthbert Tunstall, bishop of Durham, on 5th March 1559 at his manor of Bishop Auckland in County Durham. (3) This was one of the last ordinations performed by Tunstall before his deprivation and imprisonment by order of Elizabeth I. Tunstall had been ordained bishop of London in 1522, had survived the Henrician reformation as bishop of Durham and after deprivation and imprisonment during the brief reign of Edward VI (1547-1553), had been restored to his see under Queen Mary. (4)

When Elizabeth acceded to the throne in 1558 she found it expedient to leave Tunstall in place so that he might lead negotiations with the Scots to restore peace with them. Given this rather delicate foreign situation, Elizabeth moved cautiously on domestic issues and this included above all a religious settlement to restore protestantism. Therefore, for the first ten months of her reign she left the church of the Marian restoration largely in place. (5) It is for this reason that George Rayner is described as "an old Queen Mary priest": not that he was ordained in the reign of Mary (she died in fact a few months before his acolyte ordination) but that he was ordained by a Catholic bishop using a Marian (that is, Roman) Ordinal. This put Rayner, and others like him, in a unique position.

For the Roman church and for the Church of England the ordination of men using the Marian ritual was valid and they could legitimately officiate at worship, including the celebration of marriages. The implications of this position are seen in the case of Hugo Ile, a contemporary of Rayner's. (6) He officiated at the second marriage (7) of the recusant Thomas Meynell in 1605 which was impugned by a High Commission of the Archbishop of York in 1607 on the grounds that Ile was a Roman priest. (8) Meynell recorded the event in his diary, preserving the full judgement of the commission that Hugo Ile "per reverendum in xpo patrem Cuthbertum nuper episcopum Dunelmi rite et legitime ordinati" had performed a valid and legal marriage between Thomas Meynell and Mary Thwaites. It appears that this was the first marriage performed by a Marian priest to be "proved" in England. A "Queen Mary priest" then, could offer not only a Catholic service to a couple getting married, but a form which would be acceptable also to English law. (9)
Marian priests were also unique in that as "native clergy" they were not subject to the penal legislation introduced by Elizabeth from 1585. The various acts passed were designed to ensure a measure of uniformity in religious observance and also to protect the English from the wave of proselytising Jesuits and other "seminary priests" coming from continental Europe. (10) These priests were subject to harsh penalties if caught since they were to be tried as traitors, and they were generally advised to keep a low profile in order to protect their flocks. Marian priests such as Rayner and Ile, while they could be fined and imprisoned were not regarded as traitors and, as will become clear, were conscious of the great advantage they enjoyed in having been ordained by an English bishop in England. (11)

The details of Rayner's life from 1559 to 1599 are shrouded in obscurity and few facts can be stated with any certainty. It appears that he became curate of Cockfield (County Durham) in 1559 and that he absented himself from the parish during a visitation that same year, presumably to avoid detection as a Roman priest. By 1563 he had become curate of Haughton-le-Skene (Nottinghamshire). (12) The next reference to Rayner is in the Pilgrim Book of the Hospice of the Most Holy Trinity and St. Thomas of Canterbury attached to the English College in Rome. In 1581 it appears that "Georgius Raneus" arrived from Rheims and stayed in the hospice from 3rd October for 10 days. Rayner is identified in the entry as from the diocese of York, but this probably reflects Rayner's actual location for apostolic purposes, rather than his juridical status. (13)

The questions which naturally arise at this point are what Rayner was doing between 1563 and 1581 and his putative membership of the Carmelite order. Of modern historians only Aveling appears to know of this connection and he is rather circumspect: "he is said to have gone abroad and become a Carmelite at Mechelen (Malines)." (14) From Carmelite sources there is one reference to Rayner in Norbert of St. Julian's Notitia brevis virorum plurium celebrium Carmelitarum in Belgio. The entry is for a "Georgius Reynerus", English and sometime member of the Mechelen community. (15) The reader is referred to the Supplementum of the Bibliotheca Carmelitarum which was a pet project of Norbert's designed to redress the balance in the Belgian entries in Cosmas Villiers' original. Unfortunately, Norbert never finished his own edition and one of the "missing" entries happens to be for Rayner.

There are also external considerations which might shed light on Rayner's membership of the order in Mechelen. It seems probable that Rayner left England in the mid 1560s (certainly no earlier than 1563) and that he returned in the late 1570s or early 1580s: the Pilgrim Book entry in 1581 refers to the diocese where he presumably worked. It is in this period that John Baptist Rossi was actively pursuing a policy of reform as prior general of the Carmelites. (16) He was assisted in this project in the Low Countries by Peter Wolf (or Lupus, as he is better known) who had entered the Order in Mechelen and become prior of the house in 1566. (17) He was provincial from 1578 and died in the town square of Mechelen in 1580 in defence of the city. During his period as prior and provincial Lupus carried out Rossi's plan for reform by bringing greater observance to the house and to the province and at the same time facing up to the challenge of protestantism openly and courageously. Lupus must have been an attractive, if sometimes difficult figure, yet it is not impossible to imagine someone like Rayner entering the order in Mechelen at the height of Lupus' influence. (18) As Aveling notes, there were always a few Englishmen who were prepared to join religious orders abroad: "Down to the 1590s odd English people became Franciscan, Capuchin, Carmelite or Dominican friars … but they were few and had to settle in foreign communities." (19)
Similarly, perhaps it is no coincidence that as Rayner found his way back to England in the 1580s, John Baptist Caffardi (prior general 1580-1592) on 2nd August 1588 appointed John Chizzola and Jerome Aleotto "to visit the French provinces … and to obtain information on the Order in England, Ireland, Scotland, the Low Countries, Germany and Poland." (20) Certainly a return to England by the Carmelites had been mooted on and off since the suppression of the friaries in 1538, but nothing had ever come of it. Nicholas Audet had tried to get the Lower Germans to send friars in 1556, possibly at the suggestion of Cardinal Reginald Pole, whom he had got to know at the Council of Trent. (21) The title "provincial of England" remained available for honorific purposes until the abolition of titular offices in the early years of the 20th century. (22)

In conclusion, it seems a firm tradition in the Order that George Rayner was a Carmelite, and a member of the Mechelen community. There is no documentary evidence against his membership and one piece of evidence, albeit slight, in favour, that is the entry in Julian of St. Norbert's register. The circumstantial evidence of a reformed house and province under Lupus makes it at least explicable that Rayner should have joined this particular house and this point in time. Renewed interest in England (along with other "protestant" countries it must be said) by Caffardi in 1588 is suggestive when taken with Rayner's possible return to his native land in the 1580s. However, because of Rayner's unique status as a Marian priest it was never likely that he was about to refound the province, and indeed, there was every good reason to keep quiet about his experience on the Continent when he got back to England.

If the entry in the Pilgrim Book for 1581 is only suggestive of Rayner's return to England, then by 1588 it is certain that he was back in Yorkshire, for in that year he officiated at the first marriage of Thomas Meynell with Wenefred Pudsey. Meynell records the event thus:

Notwithstandinge the Tempestuous stormes of the tyme, yet I humblie thanke Almightye God, and owr blessed Ladye, I was maried to Wenefrede at Barforthe by Sr George Raine a vertuous Catholicke preist: who died happelie afterwars (sic) in Yorkcastle. … (23)

Again from 1588 to 1599 there are few facts that can be stated with any certainty about Rayner's ministry. A further trip to Rome is recorded in the hospice Pilgrim Book from 10th to 19th April 1591 and it is possible that Rayner had some specific link with the English College. (24) New students at the college had to fill in a questionnaire regarding their family background and religious education. Their replies are preserved in the Liber Responsa and two pupils, Seth Forster and Thomas Oglethorpe, record that they were reconciled to the faith and instructed in Catholicism by one "George Keynes". (25) In a later manuscript which records the imprisonment of Rayner in York Castle this same spelling occurs where it is quite clear that Rayner's name is intended. (26) It seems possible therefore that the two young students from York in the English College in the 1600s had been educated in the faith by Rayner. Forster was born in 1590 and Oglethorpe in 1594 so it is not impossible that Rayner instructed them, even though they would have been very young at the time. The latter entry, which is dated 1613, describes "Keynes" "piae memoriae" indicating that he was already dead. This may be the reason that some later historians have assigned 1613 as the date of Rayner's death, although no other writer has noticed the possible connection between Rayner and Keynes up to now.

While no account of Rayner's ministry to the people of Yorkshire survives, other
contemporary sources allow a certain reconstruction of the work of a chaplain to an English Catholic household in the recusant period. Father John Sharpe (1576-1630, alias Father Pollard) was a secular priest in Yorkshire and subsequently a Jesuit who left an account of daily life in a recusant house in about 1610. (27) Generally there were two priests, one to work in the house itself and one "on call"; on Sundays and holy days there would be Mass, a sermon and spiritual instruction. Even on ferial days, there would be Mass at 6 am for the servants and men and another at 8 am for the women. Vespers and matins were said at 4 pm and while the priests recited the office, the others prayed private devotions. Night prayers consisting of various litanies followed supper at 9 pm. All members of the household engaged in daily meditation and mental prayer and all the lay members were encouraged to go to confession and communion at least every two weeks.

Although Rayner enjoyed some freedom of movement as a Marian priest, the religious environment in which he worked was becoming more and more restrictive. In 1593 he was captured in Nottingham and taken to Hull where he was incarcerated in South Blockstone jail. (28) In the 1590s the government of the north of England was vested in the Council of the North headed at that time by the archbishop of York, Matthew Hutton. (29) It seems that the council was considered somewhat lax in the matter of enforcing the Elizabethan religious settlement and was "encouraged" by London to adopt a more uncompromising stance regarding recusants. (30) The archbishop was relieved of his office and Lord Burgleigh appointed as President of the Council. (31) Part of this tightening up is seen in the imprisonment of George Rayner, a seminary priest Christopher Wharton and 51 other Catholics in York Castle from late 1599 to mid 1600. During this period the prisoners were forced to listen to some 50 sermons preached by various Anglican divines, including the archbishop of York. Accounts of these sermons and a description of the prisoners' behaviour were compiled by Fr. William Richmond (Richmont) whose manuscript is still extant in the British Library. (32) Subsequently Fr. John Knaresborough incorporated part of Richmond's work into his own book, Sufferings of the Catholicks in the early 18th century. Bishop Challoner then transcribed Knaresborough's account as part of the appendices to his own Memoirs of Missionary Priests and used some of the details of the York imprisonment in his description of the more famous Christopher Wharton. (33)

It seems, by all accounts, that despite his age (perhaps he was 60 years old by now) Rayner was more than a match for his captors and had to be quietened down on more than one occasion.

After they were set upon the bench, [i.e. the Lord President and Council of the North] sir George Rains, (an old priest there amongst them) rose up, and went towards my lord, and all the company followed after him, and they all made suit to his lordship, to give them leave to depart, for that it was against their consciences to hear their sermons; … (34)

The prisoners were hauled down, and placed within the rails, and the bishop in a chair over against them, at the other end. And after the lord president was come in, the two old priests, Sir George Rains and Sir Christopher Wharton, stood both up together, and proffered to speak. This bishop stayed them, and said that they should have time to speak, but they should hear first; … (35)

One modern commentator notes: "There were only two priests in the prison at the time, one of whom was an old Queen Mary priest, although he was more effective than his seminarist colleague." (36) Wharton, the "seminarist", came from Middleton in Yorkshire and was a
Master of Arts and sometime Fellow of Trinity College, Oxford. He trained for the priesthood in Rheims and was ordained on 31st March 1584 by Cardinal de Guise, the local archbishop. He arrived in England in 1586 and was imprisoned with Rayner in 1599. He was brought to trial at the Lent Assizes of 1600 and indicted for being a seminary priest and for returning to England contrary to the provisions of the 1585 Act against seminary priests and Jesuits. By way of defence, Wharton claimed that he had been ordained before 1559 and therefore was not subject to the 1585 Act. This was patently untrue and Wharton had the misfortune to find himself before a judge with whom he had studied at Oxford and who could guarantee that Wharton had not been a priest at that time. (37) However, there seems to be a clear influence from Rayner here: the defence that Wharton attempted is precisely the circumstances that applied to Rayner. Wharton appealed to the unique status of the Marian priests, preferring to ignore his training on the continent. Rayner, with truth on his side it must be said, could claim exactly this status and this explains why there are apparently no references to his membership of the Carmelites in the British records. Even though Rayner had been ordained in England and was therefore not a seminary priest, the fact that he had entered the Carmelites would certainly have muddied the waters for him, had it become known. Rayner simply could not afford to run the risk of indictment, imprisonment and execution - not only for his sake, but also for the sake of those to whom he ministered and who would have been severely punished for harbouring a traitor. (38) Wharton was found guilty of treason and executed on 28th March 1600. He subsequently numbered among the 262 men and women who were presented to Rome for the process of beatification by the English hierarchy in 1886. He was finally beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1987 as part of the group known as the "Eighty Five Martyrs of England and Wales." (39)

Of Rayner's fate the only contemporary source to speak of it is Meynell's diary which refers to his death in York Castle: "Sr George Raine a vertuous Catholicke preist: who died happelie afterwars (sic) in Yorkcastle." (40) Given the conditions at the time this is not at all surprising. (41)

It is impossible to speak in terms of too strong reprobation of the state of the northern prisons in the seventeenth century … Some of them had no light and no ventilation; several were partly under water whenever there was a flood. The number of prisoners who died in gaol during this century is positively startling. (42)

Benedict Zimmerman OCD in an article in 1892 seems to know of a story of martyrdom, but notes that Rayner's name was not included in the list submitted to the Holy See in 1886. (43) There seems to be no trace of Rayner's martyrdom in any of the contemporary sources and certainly no reason to suppose that he died in 1613. Challoner records no deaths for the faith in 1613 and is silent on Rayner's faith. On the other hand, Zimmerman has no doubt that Rayner belonged to the Ancient Observance of the Order, despite the silence of English primary sources. Subsequent historians have tended to repeat Zimmerman's views without adding much in the way of new information. (44) Rayner is certainly known to recusant historians such as Aveling, McGrath and Rowe, but only the former seems to know of a Carmelite connection.

Rayner lived in turbulent times and enjoyed the status of a Marian priest which allowed him a certain latitude in his ministry. There seems to be good reason for accepting his membership of the Order: he would have entered Mechelen at the height of reform there under Lupus. However, he preferred not to make mention of this fact in order not to compromise his position as a "Queen Mary priest". Yet his status did not protect him in the long run from
imprisonment and after a long life of ministry he died "happily" in York Castle probably in 1600 or shortly thereafter.


2. Variously spelt Reyner, Raines, Raine, Raynes, Reynes, Reines, and Rein.


5. In May 1559 Parliament passed two statutes: one to abolish papal supremacy and restore the Queen as supreme governor of the Church; a second to replace the Latin Mass with a service similar to Edward VI's Second Prayer Book. Cf. G. Prothero (ed.), *Select Statutes and other Constitutional Documents illustrative of the Reigns of Elizabeth and James I* (Oxford, 19063) pp. 1-20 and for a discussion of the significance of these and other statutes see G. Elton, *The Tudor Constitution: Documents and Commentary*, (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 410-413

6. Ile was ordained priest at the same ceremony that Rayner was ordained acolyte. Ile was arrested in 1609, he appears in a recusant list again in 1611 and died in Hulton, according to Thomas Meynell. Cf. J. C. H. Aveling, *Northern Catholics: The Catholic Recusants of the North Riding of Yorkshire, 1558-1790*, (London, 1966), p. 43.

7. Rayner himself had performed Meynell's first marriage in 1588 (see below).


9. Cf. J. C. H. Aveling, "The Marriages of Catholic Recusants 1559-1642" *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 14(1963)68-83 who notes that the situation was complicated further by some "Marian" priests who had been accepted into the Church of England without re-ordination. Although Meynell's case was not heard until 1607, recusants were fully aware of the legal loophole of which they were taking advantage. Aveling notes that as late as 1612 there may have been as many as 150 priests from Mary's reign working in Yorkshire.

10. An Act against Jesuits and Seminary Priests (27 Eliz. I c. 2 1585) which brought the penalties of high treason against those ordained according to Catholic rites abroad and then who came to England. Cf. Prothero, *Select Statutes*, pp. 83-86.
11. Cf. G. Anstruther (ed.), *The Seminary Priests: A Dictionary of the Secular Clergy of England and Wales, 1558-1850*, 4 vols, (Durham, 1968), vol. I, p. ix, who sums up the situation thus: "Seminary priests [is] first used in Act 27 Eliz. I c. 2 (1585) to distinguish a new generation of priests from the 'old priests' or 'massing priests' who survived from the reigns of Mary and Henry VIII. The latter could be fined and imprisoned for recusancy and even hanged for being 'reconciled' (sc. to the Church of Rome) but they were not affected by this particular act which stamped the seminary priests as traitors."


26. Cf. Hull University Library, the Maxwell Constable Collection, Knaresborough Ms, (DDEV/67/1-4) Perhaps Keynes was an alias for Rayner or perhaps this is just a poor transcription. In the earlier Richmond Ms the name is quite clearly "Rainer". The


30. It seems that the number of recusants was actually growing in Yorkshire. Cf. A. G. Dickens, "The First Stages of Romanist Recusancy in Yorkshire, 1560-1590" Yorkshire Archaeological Journal 35(1941)157-182 and "The Extent and Character of Recusancy in Yorkshire, 1604" YAJ 37(1948)24-48 who estimates that in 1604 there may have been between 3,000 and 3,500 recusants in Yorkshire. Note that in 1593 the government had passed an Act against "Popish Recusants" (35 Eliz. I c. 2) which confined those convicted of recusancy to a five-mile limit around their normal place of dwelling. Cf. Prothero, Select Statutes, pp. 92-93.

31. Cf. Calendar of Manuscripts of the Most Hon. The Marquis of Salisbury K.G., part IX (London, 1902), p. 317, letter dated 22nd August 1599, the Queen to the archbishop of York. The letter refers to recusancy as "such iniquity which hath … possessed the greatest of those Northern parts … " Clearly London was rattled by reports of Catholicism running rife in the north despite harsh penal laws.

32. BL Ms Add. 34520, fos 1-71. Richmond was trained in Rheims and ordained priest on 4th March 1581, he was sent to England a month later and seems to have been in York when Wharton, Rayner and the other Catholics were imprisoned. Cf. Anstruther, The Seminary Priests, vol. I, p. 377.


crime (Margaret Clitherow was executed for this). Eleanor Hunt was charged with harbouring Christopher Wharton but not executed, simply left to die in York Castle jail.


41. Cf. P. McGrath and J. Rowe, "The Imprisonment of Catholics for Religion under Elizabeth I" Recusant History 20(1991)415-435 who note that some 130 Marian priests were imprisoned in Elizabeth's reign, 30 of whom were priests and 19 of these died in York or Hull.

42. J. Raine, Depositions from the Castle of York relating to offences committed in the northern counties in the seventeenth century, (Durham, 1861), pp. xxxi-xxxv

43. Cf. B. Zimmerman, "Geschichte der Mission in England 1614 bis 1701", p. 2 of an offprint of Stimmen von Berge Karmel, 2 (1892-93). The details given here were repeated in Zimmerman's full length study, Carmel in England, p. 19 where he is quite categorical that Rayner belonged to the Ancient Observance: "As this religious belonged to the Calced Carmelites, not the Discalced, his history does not come within the scope of this work."

See more ideas about elizabethan era, elizabethan, queen elizabeth. A portrait of Elizabeth I believed to have been commissioned by her favourite, Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester for Kenilworth Castle. The portrait probably dates to Elizabeth’s most famous visit to Dudley’s residence in 1575. The castle was granted to Dudley in 1563 and he soon began a series of costly renovations. Margaret Russell, Countess of Cumberland, wife of George Clifford, 3rd Earl of Cumberland. Margaret Clifford (née Russell), Countess of Cumberland (7 July, 1560 â€“ 24 May, 1616) was an English noblewoman and maid of honor to Elizabeth I. Lady Margaret was born in Exeter, England to Francis Russell, 2nd Earl of Bedford and Margaret St. John. Carmelite, one of the four great mendicant orders of the Roman Catholic Church, dating to the Middle Ages. The monks hoped to continue on Mount Carmel the way of life of the prophet Elijah, whom early Christian writers depicted as the founder of monasticism. The early Carmelites were hermits: they lived in separate cells or huts and observed vows of silence, seclusion, abstinence, and austerity. Soon, however, the losses of the Crusading armies in Palestine made Mount Carmel unsafe for the Western hermits, and around 1240 they set out for Cyprus, Sicily, France, and England.


George Rayner (15 October 1863 â€“ 20 February 1915) was a New Zealand cricketer. He played first-class cricket for Canterbury and Otago between 1884 and 1890.[1]. YouTube Encyclopedic. 1/3. Views: 12 348. 32 271.