

# Introduction to Church History

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## The English Reformation

Precursors:

- Wycliffe and the Lollards (see last week)
- Humanism's influence on scholarship: not just reformers – eg. Thomas More (1478-1532)

## The beginning of reform

Henry VIII (1491 – 1547), King of England from 1509 – 1547.

Married Katherine of Aragon (daughter of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella) in 1509. K had been married to Henry's older brother, Arthur, who had died in 1502.

Henry wasn't a natural 'reformer' – tended to be very conservative about belief and practice: wrote *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum* against Luther in 1521. Pope bestowed on him the title *Defender of the Faith (Fides Defensor)* in thanks.

Katherine failed to produce a male heir: her only surviving child was the princess Mary (1515 – 1558). Henry fell for Anne Boleyn around 1525.

Henry blamed his lack of an heir on God's wrath (see Lev 20:21). Petitioned for an annulment from the pope on the grounds that the marriage was invalid as contrary to God's law. Pope couldn't grant one, as he was imprisoned by forces of Charles V – holy roman Emperor – the nephew of Katherine.

All the main churchmen of England tried to assist in getting the annulment, including Cardinal Wolsey (Papal Legate). They failed, which led to Wolsey's 'fall' in 1529 – he was originally a commoner and had lots of enemies at the court.

In his place, Thomas More became Chancellor. The following year (1530) Thomas Cromwell, a lawyer and Wolsey's secretary, was appointed to the Privy Council and became the King's chief adviser.

In 1530, Thomas Cranmer (1489 – 1556) who was then a lecturer at Cambridge, sent to seek opinion of the leaders of the reform, who were more obliging in providing a theological justification for annulment, but the existing clergy were obedient to Rome (as was Henry). Cranmer given job as ambassador to the Imperial Court of Charles V. During this time, he had further contact with reformers and married niece of Osiander (reformer in Nuremburg), thus breaking his clerical vow of celibacy. Sign he was, by then, clearly on the side of the reformation.

The old archbishop of Canterbury, Warham, died in 1532, and Cranmer appointed Archbishop of Canterbury.

Henry marries Anne (believing that his marriage to Katherine was null and void). Cromwell passes a judgement in parliament that the marriage to Katherine was invalid. Cranmer blesses the marriage in May 1533.

Thomas More resigned the previous year, leaving the power behind the throne to Protestants.

Pope threatens Henry with excommunication. *Restrain of Appeals Act* passed: anyone who disseminates pope's legislation guilty of *Praemunire*. *Act of Supremacy* (November 1534) broke the link with Rome: the King was 'Head of the Church of England' - the Pope's jurisdiction was no longer legal. The 'Church of England' was distinct from the 'Church of Rome'.

## **Dissolution of Monasteries**

Monasticism had fallen into disrepute in late-medieval England. Until Act of Supremacy, only the Pope and bishops could dissolve monasteries. This did happen on occasions (eg. under Cardinal Wolsey).

Cromwell's inventory of monastic possessions (1534). The visitation by Cranmer's commissioners: exposed bogus use of relics to con pilgrims; sexual immorality.

Suppression of Religious Houses Act in 1535 marked the first stage of dissolution, mainly of minor monastic houses. Importantly, *all property of closed religious houses would revert to the Crown* (ie. the King). Voluntary closure led to pensions for abbots and monks.

1538, further legislation, enforcing closure on larger monasteries, on pain of treason.

Although the monasteries' property was initially owned by the Crown, Henry subsequently sold it off to local gentry to fund his lavish expenditure and the cost of wars he pursued.

## **The Halting Progress of Reform**

1536 - The Ten Articles

1537 - the Bishops' Book

1540 - The 'Fall' of Cromwell: executed for treason (again, a commoner with a lot of power, hence enemies).

1540 - Return of Bishop Stephen Gardiner of Winchester (against reform) - intellectual force.

1541 - Publication of The Great Bible (first official Bible in English) to be placed in all churches. (Henry has persecuted William Tyndale for translating the Bible just a few years before).

1543 - *The Kings Book* (more catholic, less protestant) and *The Six Articles* (again, reinforcing Catholic doctrine).

1546 - plot against Katherine Parr (Henry's 6<sup>th</sup> wife) stopped by the king himself; Parr was a protestant, so the pendulum swung back to favour reform in the latter years of the reign.

## **Edward VI**

Edward became king in 1547, at the age of 9. Edward Seymour became Lord Protector. Protestant reform marches forward throughout the reign.

1547 – Injunctions removing images and rood screens, destroying shrines and stained glass. Processions for holy days banned.

1549 – The Act of Uniformity: new prayer book in English, offending Catholic doctrine (purgatory, sacrifice of the mass) removed. Called ‘The Book of Common Prayer’ to replace local (Latin) variations. Critique by Martin Bucer (reformer) and affirmation by Stephen Gardiner (catholic) made further reform inevitable.

In 1552, a further Act of Uniformity – with second BCP: reforms the Communion to remove any doctrine of the mass as a sacrifice and also any sense that the bread and wine of communion were the body and blood of Christ.

## Mary I

1553 – Death of Edward VI; accession of Mary I. Recinding of Act of Supremacy and all other reforming legislation. Church of England back under control of the Pope, masses again in Latin. Imprisonment and execution of Cranmer, Ridley and other protestant bishops. Exile for others in Strasbourg, Frankfurt and Geneva.

Mary reinstated old catholic heresy laws and a total of 283 protestants were burned for heresy during her reign. (Hence her title ‘Bloody Mary’).

Mary married Philip II of Spain, but – despite a false pregnancy – no heir was born. Mary herself died in 1558.

## Elizabeth I

Act of Supremacy was passed in 1558, shortly after Elizabeth’s coronation. Although broadly the same as Henry’s, Elizabeth was described in the new act as the ‘supreme governor’ rather than ‘head’ of the Church of England, since only Christ can be the ‘head’ of the Church. This remains the title of the monarch to the present day. All bar one of the bishops refused to accept it, so lost their seats.

Elizabeth appointed Matthew Parker as the new Archbishop of Canterbury, the question of Apostolic Succession raised its head. Parker ordained bishop by four bishops: two of these had been ordained using the 1551 Ordinal, two by bishops who had been ordained using the old Latin ordinal. Although these bishops had all be ordained after England broke with Rome, they had all been ordained by bishops who had been ordained when England was still in communion with Rome.

In 1558, Act of Uniformity: reinstated the 1552 BCP but with some changes. The words of distribution were a combination of the words from 1549 and 1552, making up the words which now form part of the 1662 BCP: *the body of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life; take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thy heart by faith with thanksgiving*. Removal of the ‘Black Rubric’ (from 1552, which denied the presence of Christ in the bread and wine of communion) was omitted.

Elizabeth’s conservatism and reformers’ frustration: led, over time, to them becoming a distinct ‘party’ within the Church: the Puritans. Others felt England

had got the balance just right. Led to work of Richard Hooker. (1554 – 1600) defending the Elizabethan church against Rome and against Puritans.

Persecution of Catholics and the Spanish war. Anti-Catholic legislation.

## The Early Stuart Kings

The Elizabethan 'Settlement' – the Continental Reformation was largely complete by the end of her long reign. For reformed Anglicans – the reformation of the Church was incomplete. For others, it was just about enough.

James VI of Scotland (James Stewart) accedes to the English throne as James I. Though Scotland was Calvinist reformed in his reign, he preferred the English Church settlement.

The Millenary Petition (Puritan complaints):

- Signing of the cross in baptism
- Confirmation
- Baptism by lay people (especially women)
- The use of a ring in marriage
- Bowing at the name of Jesus
- The requirement of a minister to wear a surplice at worship
- Pluralities of benefices (drawing multiple sources of tithe-income)

This led to the *Hampton Court Conference*. No change, but commissioning of a new translation of the Bible, the KJV/Authorised Version.

New code of Canon Law in 1604: further changes of practice in a slightly more 'Catholic' direction: eg. consumption of consecrated remains of the bread and wine of communion.

## Laudianism

After William Laud: Oxford scholar, then Dean of Gloucester; Bishop of St Davids, Bath and Wells and Archbishop of Canterbury.

Return to more 'Catholic' layout of churches. Autocrat. Persecutor of Puritans, whom he regarded as heretics. Forced liturgical reform on Scotland (and imposition of bishops).

## The English Civil War and the Commonwealth

Charles' belief in *divine right of kings to govern* (see Romans 13) and Laud's authoritarianism led to clash with Parliament, dominated by Puritans.

Ultimately led to Civil War (1642–1651) between Parliamentarians and Royalists.

1645 – after military defeats, Charles imprisoned, tried for treason and executed. His son declared new king by Royalists in Channel Islands; further war. Charles II's forces defeated and he escapes to France. *The Commonwealth* under Oliver Cromwell.

- Episcopacy Banned

- Book of Common Prayer made illegal – used *Westminster Directory* to help the minister conduct the service.
- Lack of uniformity of faith (even Jews were readmitted for first time since 1290) led to religious plurality of practice; also Baptists, Congregationalists; Quakers; Ranters; Levellers; Diggers; etc.
- Unpopular moves: banning festivals; sabbatarian rules
- Pluralism in religion led to failure of political consensus in Parliament

Death of Cromwell, lack of confidence in his son by the Army.

Self-dissolution of Parliament. Invasion of royalist forces from Scotland. Threat of further, anarchic, return to Civil War worried many. Charles was able to return and state the terms of his own reign. The Restoration of the Monarchy.

## **The Restoration**

Restoration of Episcopacy at Charles' insistence.

Savoy Conference, to hear concerns of Puritan clergy.

New Book of Common Prayer – mainly 1559, but with consolidation of Stewart changes (rubrics at the Prayer of Consecration), consolidated belief in the “real presence” in Communion.

New Act of Uniformity, 1662. Over 2000 ministers could not accept it, so were ejected from their livings ('The Great Ejection').

At this point, we get the division of English protestantism into: 'non-conformists' and 'conformists' (ie. Anglicans).

Clarendon Code (after Lord Chancellor, Earl of Clarendon) of 1661 – 1664: legislation to persecute non-conformity. Some were repealed in 1689 with Act of Toleration, but it remained impossible for non-Conformists to go to University or to sit in Parliament until 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Church of England: was it fully reformed? Not really. Describes itself as 'Catholic and Reformed'.