

CHURCH HISTORY

The Reformation in England, part 1 (1509–1625)

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The Modern Church, part 2

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The Reformation in England was unique, unlike reform that took place on the Continent. The change came by a king, not a Reformer. The movement had no great leader like Luther or Calvin. The initial break with Rome was more political than religious, but the end result was great religious power. The English Reformation stressed organization more than doctrine.
- B. The Reformation in England is essential to understanding the history of Christianity in America, for the early religious beliefs of the U.S.A. came from England.

II. REFORMATION UNDER KING HENRY THE VIII (1509-1547)

- A. There was a general dissatisfaction with the Roman Church throughout England, although most of the English people were thorough going Catholics. Latent within the English was a desire for reform because: (1) they resented the pope's interference in English affairs; (2) the influence of Wycliffe in the hearts of the people was still strong; and (3) they objected to paying money to the pope.
- B. The Reformation probably would have been long in coming to England had it not been that King Henry VIII applied to the pope for a divorce from his wife, Catherine of Aragon, because he was enamored with Anne Boleyn, and because Catherine had not given him an heir to the throne. But Pope Clement VII, under the influence of the powerful Charles V of Spain, would not agree to the divorce. The patience of Henry grew short, and under his influence he was able to get Parliament to pass a law which decreed that the king had the right to be the supreme head of the Church of England. This Act of Supremacy brought the official break with the Roman Church in 1534. Thus, the Reformation began with a carnal motive on the part of Henry. He immediately appointed Cranmer Archbishop of Canterbury.

- C. Not all Englishmen were willing to submit to the Act of Supremacy, so Henry passed the Law of Treason and Heresy which said that to refuse to acknowledge the king as head of the Church of England and to refuse to practice Catholic doctrine was heresy. Many Roman Catholics were executed, including two prominent men: John Fisher, bishop of Rochester; and Sir Thomas More. Sir Thomas More had been a zealous Roman Catholic and had caused many English Lutherans (Protestants) to be sent to the stake. Both Protestants and Romanists that opposed Henry were put to death.
- D. Very little reform took place in Henry's reign, although there was a closing of the monasteries for political reasons — he feared a revolt from organized Catholicism. Also, relics were no longer thought of as sacred.
- E. When Henry died (1547) England was in a ferment, some wanting new ideas, others wishing to adhere to the medieval system.

III. REFORMATION UNDER EDWARD VI (1547-1553)

- A. Edward took the throne at age ten and was trained by Archbishop Cranmer, a Protestant. King Edward was a Protestant, and the Protestant cause flourished. Transubstantiation was done away with and the clergy were permitted to marry. The mass and images were also scrapped.
- B. It was during Edward's reign that the First Prayer Book (1549) was written, which put the church service into English. This Prayer Book was mandatory for all the churches in England. Also, a doctrinal statement of Forty-Two Articles was set forth, which was definitely more Protestant than the Prayer Book. These articles were subscribed to by the King, but not by the Parliament.
- C. Protestants who fled under Henry VIII began to return to England, including Ridley, Coverdale, Hooper, Ponet, and Scory. These men proved to be much help to Archbishop Cranmer, and he made them bishops of the Church of England.
- D. During this time, great persecutions of Protestants began on the Continent, and many fled to England for refuge. Men such as Martin Bucer, who became professor of Theology at Cambridge; Paul Buchlin, a brilliant Hebrew scholar; Peter Martyr and Bernard Ochino, both Italians; and John a Lasco, a Polish

nobleman who was an excellent theologian, supported the reform movement as it was taught by John Calvin in Geneva. These men became known as “Puritans” because they wanted reform within the Church of England, consisting of more discipline and less ritual. Because these men were aliens, they had the political freedom to set up independent congregations, especially in London. These churches became a rallying ground for Puritans in the time of opposition. The Puritans at this time were too small in number to be a threat to anyone.

- E. In 1552 a Second Prayer Book was composed, revising the old Prayer Book and making the services of the Church of England more like those of the continental Reformers. This is essentially the same prayer book that the Anglican Church uses today.
- F. Just when it looked like the Protestant cause would completely triumph in England, King Edward died of tuberculosis in 1553 at the age of sixteen. His sister Mary succeeded him to the throne of England.

IV. RETARDATION UNDER MARY TUDOR (1553-1558)

- A. Mary, like her mother Catherine of Aragon, was a fanatical Roman Catholic. Her great aim was to bring England back under the yoke of the Roman Church. She married Philip II of Spain in order to bring political pressure on England to turn Roman Catholic. Her marriage proved to be unpopular with the English people and brought her much personal unhappiness. Fortunately, she was out of the country during much of her reign.
- B. When she came to power, Mary had Cranmer, Ridley, Coverdale, Hooper and Latimer jailed. She replaced these men with bishops who favored Rome. At this time many Protestants fled to the Continent and were welcomed by Calvin in Geneva. This was a blessing in disguise, for these refugees would later return to be the backbone of Christianity in England.
- C. In 1554, England was brought back under Papal authority. The former laws against heresy were invoked, and Roman Church liturgy and ceremony were brought back to England. Terrible persecutions broke out against Protestants. During Mary’s reign 286 Protestants were burned at the stake and 1,200 were kept from ministering. Bishops Ridley and Latimer were burned for denying transubstantiation. As the flames curled around their bodies, Latimer spoke

courage and comfort to his fellow martyr: “This day we shall light such a candle, by God’s grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.”

- D. Archbishop Cranmer also became a victim of “Bloody Mary,” for she had put great pressure on him and had him officially excommunicated from the Church. Cranmer weakened for a moment and declared that he recognized the authority of the pope over the Church in England. But Mary was fanatically bent on Cranmer’s death. Cranmer even signed a statement in which he denied Protestantism, but he was still put to death. On March 21, 1556, he was burnt at the stake. Just before he was to die, he renounced his denial, and once more in the strongest terms declared his Protestant faith. In dramatic fashion he showed how he felt about his denial of the Protestant cause. The hand which had signed the denial he held in the flames until it was burned to a crisp. Then the flames scorched his body, and he died the death of a martyr and a hero.
- E. Mary died a bitter woman, hated by England, hated by the pope, and hated by her husband.

V. REFORMATION UNDER ELIZABETH I (1558-1603)

- A. Elizabeth was the sister of Mary and had been educated under Archbishop Cranmer. She was a Protestant at heart, although she loved the pomp and ritual of Rome.
- B. Under Elizabeth, persecution of Protestants was stopped and refugees from the Continent flooded back to England. Even Puritans, at first, were welcomed back to the Church of England. However, Elizabeth disliked the theology that came from Geneva and treated the Puritans very badly. The Puritans were the Calvinists within the Anglican Church. Elizabeth loved the pomp and ceremony of Rome, and she is primarily responsible for the liturgy in the High Church of England today.
- C. Elizabeth was somewhat tolerant of the Puritans (Calvinists) because she needed them politically. She had to fall back on all Protestants for survival, for Italy, France and Spain all felt she was not the legal heir to the throne. She disliked John Knox, the Calvinistic Reformer of Scotland, with a passion, but history shows it was the Scottish Covenanters under Knox that saved Elizabeth’s throne.

- D. Under Elizabeth the Act of Supremacy was reenacted and the Second Prayer Book of Edward VI adopted once more. Elizabeth made a few changes in order to satisfy her love for ritual. In 1562 the doctrinal statement the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England were adopted. All in all, this is a marvelous statement of the Reformed Faith, and it states clearly the belief of sovereign election, which was an influence of Calvin. She also effected the Act of Uniformity again.
- E. Elizabeth came into conflict with the Puritans, who controlled a majority in the House of Commons. The conflict was severe, and was the beginning of that contest between Crown and Parliament which was to issue in the Civil War of the seventeenth century and the overthrow of the Stuart dynasty. In 1571 there was passed an act acknowledging the validity of ordination by presbyters, without a bishop. While it demanded acceptance by the clergy of the doctrinal part of the Thirty-Nine Articles, it did not bind them to the constitution of ritual. This is how the Presbyterians (Puritans) were able to remain inside the National Church until driven out during the Restoration in 1660.
- F. In spite of her Tudor obstinacy and autocracy, Elizabeth was a great queen. The foundations of England's civil and religious greatness were solidly laid in her reign.

VI. REFORMATION UNDER JAMES I (1603-1625)

- A. When James VI of Scotland became James I of England in 1603, the Puritans hoped that, coming from Presbyterian Scotland, he would show them more consideration than had Queen Elizabeth. But James held to the Divine Right of Kings, which made him sovereign ruler over state and church. He came into immediate conflict with the democratic spirit of Presbyterianism in England. James often said, "No bishop, no king," and "Presbytery agrees as well with monarchy as God and the devil." The Puritans' remarkable strength lay in their constant appeal to Scripture to settle all questions of faith and morals, and they united to fight the absolute monarchy of James.
- B. James cracked down on all religious dissenters from the Church of England, and social persecution came to the Puritans. Over 1,500 Puritan ministers refused to conform. Many were shielded by sympathetic bishops, but 300 ministers in England were ousted and silenced. Others were imprisoned. This was the first great rift in the English church. These views placed the Puritans in direct opposition to the political and ecclesiastical status quo of the

seventeenth century in England. They were left with three alternatives, and various groups of Puritans chose different routes:

1. *Withdrawal from England*: This led to the great Puritan migrations to America.
 2. *Espousal of Religious Toleration*: The Puritan preachers and pamphleteers flooded England with propaganda arguing for toleration of their own dissenting views. They did not seek toleration for the Catholics, Quakers and other sects, but in the end their arguments were used to support complete religious freedom — an end they never sought to achieve.
 3. *Revolution*: This was the final and disastrous alternative which came about during the civil war, commonwealth and protectorate.
- C. It was during this time numerous Christians in England became Separatists or Dissenters. They felt that the reform of the Church of England was hopeless or would take too long to achieve by natural processes. Thus, they separated themselves from the Church of England. They believed in the autonomy of the local church, and the independence of churches from one another. Because of this, they were called “Congregationalists” or “Independents.” The Puritan Presbyterians stayed in the Church of England while the Puritan Congregationalists left it. Both groups, however, remained Calvinistic in their doctrine.
- D. The only positive thing by way of reform that came out of James’s reign was the King James Bible (1611), but the only thing that James had to do with it was the attaching of his name to the Bible.
- E. Early in the seventeenth century, the Baptists began to form their congregations. They were separatists or independents that believed in baptism by immersion and that children should not be baptized at all. Only those adults who professed faith in Christ and gave signs of being regenerate received this sacrament from them. In 1611 a group which separated from an independent church at Amsterdam came to London under their leader Thomas Helwys, and a few years later formed a Baptist church in London. By as early as 1620, when they presented a petition to Parliament, they were recognized by the civil power as being distinct from the Anabaptists. The early Baptists from Holland were called General Baptists because they believed Christ’s death was for all men, whether they accepted or rejected it (they were Arminian in theology).

Particular Baptist churches also began springing up after 1638 that believed Christ's crucifixion was only for the elect (they were Calvinistic in theology). In their early years, the Baptist groups practiced affusion (pouring), but by 1642 immersion had begun to replace affusion as their accepted mode of baptism. In 1891 the General and Particular Baptists were fused into one group.