Introduction to the Reformation 1532-1603

The Reformation in England began with the need of a king to secure his succession and dynasty. Its ultimate result was an established religion in which the laity, especially women became increasingly disengaged and passive members of their parishes, and a widespread indifference to the established church began.[1] Unlike the Reformation in many other parts of Europe, the Reformation in England took place in a piecemeal fashion. Its earliest manifestation was a mixture of opportunism by a few convinced evangelicals mixed with the political necessity of pleasing a king. This had the effect of breaching the defences of the church, but not sweeping it away. It was rather different to the full-throated cry for change, found in parts of the continent, initiated and fuelled by the evangelical fervour of men, such as Luther, which led to rapid and lasting change. Indeed, Christopher Haigh goes so far as to describe the Reformation in England, as a series of reformations ebbing and flowing with the power of different monarchs.[2]

During the Reformation in mainland Europe, there were a number of different changes in the religious sphere, which in turn contributed to the social political and cultural upheavals of the period. The threefold changes of organisation, practice of faith and theology resulted in the loss of much ritual and religious practice in the everyday life of people and saw the growth of small self-governing communities. This in places led to the practice of separatism, not only from the communal past, but also from an individual's personal past and from the community. Historians agree that such change happened in England also, but question how and to what extent. Was it a continuous process of Protestantisation[3] coming from a people, oppressed, and overburdened by the demands of Catholicism, longing for change and happily following where their monarchs led, except during the brief period of Mary Tudor's reign, changing the Catholic Church in England into the Protestant church of England in a matter of 30 years? Was it imposed from above, or demanded from below? The monarchy through a series of statutes, legally constituted the new Church of England, but it was the people in the pews represented by their church wardens, who had to implement it.[4] There is also conflicting evidence of when the minority became the majority; local studies show that Protestantism was much stronger in towns, such as London[5] at an earlier stage than in the country as a whole[6]. The late 1570s saw arise of the Protestant preacher, proclaiming Protestant values to the people and Claire Cross has charted this change as ongoing as late as the 1620s in the north of England.[7] When was a consensus reached? Research shows that in the years after the 1559 settlement, despite the end of constitutional reform, reform of the hearts and minds of the people was still required.[8] Some clung to the old ways others such as the puritans wanted more reform. Other studies reassert the importance of the late mediaeval church to the people and argue that the reform started by Henry VIII, and finally 'settled' by

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[1] See Rex Richard, *Henry VIII and the English Reformation* (MacMillan 199) 166

[2] Haigh, Christopher *English Reformations* (Oxford 1993)

[3] Dickens A.G., Reformation Studies (London 1982) 443

[4] Duffy E., *The Voices of Morebath* (Yale 2001) is a powerful example of this process in one Devon Community.

[5] Bridgen S *The Reformation in London* (Oxford 1990)

[6] Duffy. *Morebath*

[7] Cross, C., 'Priets into ministers: The establishment of Protestant Practice in the city of York 1530-1630 in Heal and O Day (Ed's) *Church and Society in England Henry VIII-James 1* (McMillan 1977)

[8] Scarisbrick J.J. *The Reformation and the English People* (Blackwell 1984) and Duffy E *The stripping of the Altars*

Elizabeth were unwanted intrusions that turned lives upside down and only succeeded due to a combination of obedience to the monarchy and exhaustion due after nearly century of upheaval. 'on the whole, English men and women did not want the Reformation, and most of them were slow to accept it when it came.'[9] No view seems to offer a complete picture of the English Reformation, but it can be ascertained that the Reformation in England led to a church that was neither Protestant enough for some, nor yet Catholic.

Two central pillars, devotional practice and acceptance of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome, supported the late mediaeval church. In Western Europe early continental reformers destroyed these pillars simultaneously, in England only one fell when Henry VIII broke with Rome and assumed headship for himself over the English church. The other pillar was only partially demolished and has caused confusion and bitterness ever since. McCulloch comments the Church of England proved in the long term to be much less theologically tidy than any other church of the Reformation.[10] The main concern of all Christians is how one achieves salvation. The traditional answer of the church said that it was by means of prayer centred on the mass. This re-enacted the sacrifice of Christ, and the role of the priest in offering the sacrifice was central, leading to a separation between the lay and priestly states characterised by the obligation of priestly celibacy. In the eyes of some, western devotional practice had become subject to the abuse of power by elements of the clergy, and the evangelical reformers were not the only ones to demand change; leading conservative thinkers, such as John Colet in 1510, also called for reform in practice, but not doctrine.

It was the refusal of Pope Clement VII to sanction the King's divorce from Katherine of Aragon that allowed early English reformers access to real influence over the English church and engineer the break from Rome. In some way, it was natural that Henry would look to them for help. Not because of their evangelical tendencies, but because many of them were the intellectual elite amongst the clergy and had powerful patrons at court.

As the case was a matter at the theological controversy, it had to be decided by the Pope who was unlikely to impugn a decision by a predecessor. The Pope's political situation whereby he was a virtual prisoner of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V who was also Katherine 's nephew led to a policy of delay in Rome. It also led to the re-emergence of a much earlier idea of royal supremacy over the church in England. The English form of this concept that the only authority above the monarch in a nation is God came from a set of documents put together by Thomas Cranmer and others - The *collectana satis copiosa* (1529). This examined the' real' difference between ecclesiastical and Royal power from a general theological and historical stance. Although a similar position of imperial monarchy could be found in France and Castille, it remained compatible with the papacy. The continental reformers held the concept '*cuius regio, eius religio'*, but the idea that the King was the means of both temporal and spiritual jurisdiction, initially found little support from leading continental protestant reformers or fellow monarchs. Enactment of the Royal Supremacy in 1534, left the church in England, with no clear spiritual authority, other than the monarch who could choose to act or even act against the advice of counsellors, and this dilemma of the church of England has never been satisfactorily resolved. The early Evangelicals believed that the royal supremacy was the way to bring about true religion in England: a religion founded on the Word of God and proclaimed by preachers and ministers.

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[9] Scarisbrick *Reformation 1*

[10] MacCullagh D., *The Reformation; a History*

They believed that, as on the continent, once the renunciation of papal dominion was complete, King and country would be ruled by this new religion. The majority of people appeared to feel that on the basis of history, the break would only be temporary, which could explain the relatively low level of dissent recorded. What they had failed to realise, was that this time the rupture was caused by the king casting off the pope, instead of the pope casting off the king by excommunication. Henry, always an egoist and supported by Cranmer grew into his new role, and when the death of both his wives presented the opportunity for rapprochement Henry ignored it. He also ignored the expectations and hopes of the evangelicals for the full implementation of the new religion. Superficially remaining a conservative in many of the devotional areas the changes he did allow were consistent in that all centred on the need to establish the place of the royal supremacy in the minds of the people, ensure obedience and increase the wealth of the monarchy against the threat of invasion by the papal allies. His policies seemed to have been inconsistent moving between reform and reaction as his advisers changed.[11] To others they seem like a search for a Middle way foreshadowing the achievements of the Elizabethan settlement. However, in the reforms, Henry made to the church one can see not a move towards Protestantism but moves to guard his self- interest. By systematically reducing the power of the clergy, Henry enabled his supremacy to come into being; by denouncing the doctrine of Purgatory, Henry was able to rid his church of many Popish reminders; by encouraging the use of vernacular Bibles, and primers the biblical basis for his view of kingship could be more easily understood by the people; by dissolving the monasteries, he was able to remove a constant reminder of the fact England was in a state of schism, and increased the wealth of the crown at a time of expected invasion. Further denigration of the religious life was made possible by the uncovering of apparent superstitious fraud in some of the houses which allowed Henry to justify his supremacy on an international stage. At the same time however, much appeared the same, theology was unchanged the diocesan and parish system remained intact and was in fact extended by the creation of new sees and priests remained celibate.[12] However, the loss of shrines and relics, along with the other para- liturgical practices, did alter the English church from being one that was essentially visual to one nearer the Protestant ideal of a church, listening to the Word of God. The policy, however, was incoherent and left people unsure of how they could achieve their salvation. Purgatory was reduced to a vague possibility; therefore what use was prayer and good works? The Protestant alternative, Justification by Faith was rejected as heresy. In 1546, John Hooper felt that salvation for the English had become a matter of diplomatic advantage, depending on the outcome of the Schmalkaldic war in Germany, when Henry would align himself with whatever faction won.

By his belief in the royal supremacy and denial of independent authority and identity to the church, Cranmer was left dependent on the concept of the godly prince, who, in the person of Henry was an irascible monarch, but who had destroyed one pillar of traditional Christianity and might do more with guidance. Furthermore, Henry's heir by virtue of his upbringing and education was a convinced evangelical and courtly intrigue ensured the ascendancy of the reformers at the time of Henry's death. Indeed, Haigh makes the point that court politics influenced the religious experience of the English people during the Reformation far more than the preacher or priest.[13]

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[11] Dickens AG, *The English Reformation* (2nd edition) 131 , 192-201.

[12] Rex, op cit 72-103, 167-172

[13] Haigh *Reformations* 21

Comparative studies of the Reformation show that only in the Scandinavian countries, and England was the Reformation more a matter of law than conversion.[14]

The short reign of Edward V1 reveals continuity of purpose in its religious revolution to destroy one church and build another. The force of stability in this change was Thomas Cranmer, he planned it, although the secular authorities in the name of the King, enacted the pace of change. Edward's reign is crucial in terms of the English Reformation in that it established the essential being of the Church of England. It is often viewed by historians to be part of a mid-Tudor crisis together with the reign of Mary Tudor.[15] This obscures the positive aspects of what was established in the reign both by design and default. Cranmer, when he presided over Henry's traditional Royal funeral effectively buried both the king and the remains of a Catholic past. At Edward's coronation he set the agenda for the new reign by emphasising the sanctity of the royal supremacy, and the fact that despite the ceremonies, no cleric could add to the powers of God's anointed, Edward was hailed as the new Josiah, the boy King of Israel, who removed idolatry and ruled a land where God truly was worshipped. This too, would be the achievement of the Edwardian reign.

However, the first half of Edward's reign must have appeared as a time of destruction and looting by the crown to many people, the positive religious agenda, shrouded by the apparent secularisation of England. Through acts of Parliament the liturgy of the church was denied its traditional elements of drama, movement and visual impact thereby lessening its power and opening the way for new ways of worship. The Chantries Act (1547) continued the work started by Henry of acquiring much of the church's wealth for the crown. Despite its stated intent that chantries were a device that encouraged 'phantatising vain opinions of purgatory and masses satisfactory to be done for them, which be departed',[16] a privy council minute in 1548, stated that it was primarily to relieve the King's charges and expenses, that is the cost of the Lord Protector's wars against Scotland and France. The plundering of the wealth of bishops and cathedrals and selling the lands to the gentry raised further funds. The policy of transferring the church's assets to the crown was continued by the Earl of Northumberland and led to bitter recriminations at the end of the reign with disastrous consequences for Cranmer's revision of Canon law. Repeal of the heresy law meant that traditional doctrine could be changed, but it led also to an increase in radicalism, which was as worrying for the leaders of reform as traditionalism. To their eyes a double offence was being committed in that error not only affected the individual, it could also be a stumbling block to others. The ultimate solution to this problem came in 1550, with the burning of two unrepentant radicals; with no specific heresy law reliance was placed in the common-law powers of the crown to achieve conviction and execution.

Positive moves towards the new church were made in terms of faith and practice. Homilies were produced to be used in the parishes to teach the new faith and remedy the shortage of reliable preachers. Amongst these was enshrined for the first time in official, teaching, the central Protestant belief of justification by faith, and that particular homily was later referred to as the standard text on the subject in the 42 articles of faith, (1553). Communion in both kinds was introduced, a strong Protestant statement that refuted Catholic teaching that Christ was fully received under one species. This also allowed a vernacular insertion to be made into the Latin

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[14] Cameron, Evan The European Reformaion (Yale 1991)

[15] See Loades D., *The mid Tudor Crisis* 1545-1565 for a full discussion of this.

[16] *Act dissolving the Chantries etc(* 1547)

mass foreshadowing what would be found in the 1549 prayer book. The prayer book itself, encompassed a change of Eucharistic doctrine in the English church from the theology of Real Presence and sacrifice to the reformed theology of remembrance and spiritual presence of Christ at communion. The book was widely criticised by other evangelicals for allowing doctrinal ambiguities, but the evidence is that Cranmer never meant it to be a definitive statement of worship and its replacement in 1552 removed any such ideas and centred worshippers' thoughts to Christ's sacrifice on the cross. The later book is also noteworthy for the fact that the protestant lack of concern for the departed is revealed, the communion intercessions only pray for the church militant here in earth, and the funeral service is for the comfort of the living, not an aid for the deceased. It was a metaphor for discarding the burden of history and liberating the English people.

The fact that Cranmer's hopes for a general reformed Council rivalling the Council of Trent were rebuffed by a lukewarm reception from leading European reformers is an indicator that Protestantism beyond Luther was more successful in smaller independent units with charismatic leaders. Additionally, the doctrinal differences between the groups meant that working together as one body would be impossible. This tendency towards separatism was evidenced in England also, both in the proliferation of small radical groups, the difficulties of organising a Protestant church on a national scale and in the dissent shown by some of the other Evangelicals to Cranmer's policy of reform. Change was only permitted with authority of the crown together with the consent of parliament. Cranmer twice defended this principal against John Hooper in 1550, and John Knox in 1552 and in so doing established a precedent that would become a hallmark of the nascent Anglican Church. It also signalled the beginning of the end of the hope for a Church of England that was totally Protestant. Edward's early death stopped any further change, and the history of the English Reformation became one of retreat from that high point.

Echoes of the old devotional world could be seen in the preservation of cathedrals with little change to the ethos of elaborate ceremonial, and they became increasingly isolated from the parish system. In addition, they were useful conduits of patronage for the powerful to reward the greedy or deserving. The parish system too was unreformed, and with first the loss of religious foundations then the chantries, the whole burden of care for liturgical, pastoral and spiritual need was placed on a structure not designed for it. Its code of law was not suitable for the purpose of 'godly reformation. Many of the clergy abandoned celibacy with enthusiasm but stumbled over the need to change from performance of the liturgical round to preaching and teaching the word of God. In many cases, the depths of protestant conviction needed for success was not there.[17]

The reign of Mary Tudor with its popular memory of the mass burning of heretics in fact, began to address some of these problems, and does not deserve the subjective opinion of Dickens that it was a failure.[18] Mistakes were made in that she overestimated the level of support for return to the jurisdiction of Rome. The gentry were anxious about losing the lands they had obtained from the church, and conservative bishops had to confront their years of papal disobedience; but in the face of Mary's rejection of the royal supremacy, they had no alternative to offer. Recent research has shown that people returned to Catholic practice with enthusiasm and Duffy emphasises the fact that, in his model to educate the clergy more effectively Cardinal Pole pre-

[17] See Cross op cit 203-225

[18] Dickens *The English Reformation* 313

empted the discussions about seminary provision by the council of Trent.[19] Time was needed to re -educate the people about Catholic belief and practice that were stripped of the superstition surrounding it in the pre-Reformation period. What Mary restored reflected the changes in this direction, made by Henry in particular. Furthermore, the churches began to make good the losses felt during Edward's reign and clergy morale improved as evidenced by the once more growing numbers of ordinations[20]. Mary's failures were more the result of politics than religion, apart from the relentless persecution of protestants, which fuelled protestant propaganda, and was counter-productive to winning the loyalty of people. Mary's tragedy was to die, for as McCulloch points out 'Death was the greatest enemy of the struggle for Catholic restoration' . Thomas Cranmer became a victim of his belief in the Royal Supremacy as he found himself a rebel against the crown. His manner of death emphasised the fact that his final loyalty was to God not to his monarch.

During Mary's counter reformation, the exiled English Protestants became steeped in the psychology of John Calvin, and his work in Geneva. Calvin was, was as convinced as Luther before him that the true church had two characteristics, preaching the Word of God, and the right administration of the sacraments. However, he differed in his beliefs about the nature and structure of the church, Eucharistic doctrine, church-state, relationships and soteriology. Calvin introduced a fourfold system of leadership which he felt reflected scripture more accurately, and in the Eucharist, the body of Christ was present spiritually uniting the community of the elect. Luther, followed by Cranmer, and the English church had accepted the dependence of the church upon the state. Calvin, on the other hand, taught that the state was subservient to the church. The centre of his thought was soteriological; like all the earlier reformers he emphasised the majesty of God, and the fallen- ness of humankind, incapable of salvation by its own efforts. Calvin taught the Christ died for all in order to do this, but not all were free to enjoy it only the elect predestined by God in his enigmatic way, and they would find it an irresistible call. Calvin's successor Beza took this this further with the concept of suprelapsarianism and the idea that Christ only died for the elect. The returning exiles in 1558, felt hopeful the English church would also move forward on similar lines.

The Elizabethan Settlement of 1559 was a constitutional reform of the church in England. It contains no statement of doctrine, and the nature of the Church of England has evolved ever since. The English church became Protestant in that it rejected the primacy of the pope and the Magisterium, but it never fully embraced any one form of Protestant practice and as such was unacceptable to many people, catholic and protestant alike. Debate has raged as to whether the Settlement was fully acceptable to the Queen despite the fact she prevented any further major reform during her reign. It seems likely that the restored Edwardian church did meet a need for Elizabeth personally and politically. Much has been written about her beliefs, and both Collinson and Haigh[21] agree there is evidence she did show glimpses of more than a conventional piety in her personal prayers, despite the complete dismissal of this by earlier writers. Loach has argued in her biography of Edward VI, that the young King formed attachments to what he had grown up with that these influenced his beliefs and actions,[22]. The same is true of Elizabeth, the formative

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[19] Duffy, *stripping the Altars* 525

[20] Haigh *Reformations* 215-6

[21] Collinson, P., *Elizabethans (Hambleton 2003* 87-118 Haigh C., *Elizabeth I (* Longman) pp87-118

[22] Loach Edward VI

influence in her case being her stepmother, Catherine Parr. MacCullough shows there were many points of references between the two in terms of belief and practice and hints that the settlement would have pleased Catherine. Politically the settlement also met the needs of Elizabeth; many have argued that she wished to be conciliatory to the Catholics in her kingdom until *Regnans in Excelsis*, (1570) destroyed, any such need. The international situation also demanded a cautious approach to stop France from invading through Scotland if the pope declared war and allowing the possibility of German Lutheran alliances.

The Settlement restored the Edwardian Church of Cranmer, as it had been in 1552, with three changes designed to conciliate Catholics, encourage Lutheran alliances and fulfil personal preferences. The Act of Supremacy in deference to both Protestant and Catholic scruples styled the Queen as Supreme Governor and established the role of Parliament in governing church affairs. Unlike previously, the queen would act with parliament through ecclesiastical commissions. The caesaro-papalism of the early Reformation was at an end although Elizabeth herself considered that there was no change and throughout her reign, she discouraged parliamentary attempts to impose further reform. She believed that the right people to decide doctrine and create the church she wanted lay with the bishops not parliament. Apart from the visitation articles and injunctions of 1559, when she had no bishops, Elizabeth hid behind them, and unwilling to appear responsible for decisions, thus often leaving the bishops to struggle with unpalatable situations they personally were also out of sympathy with. Elizabeth seemed to treat the national church in the same as the landed classes regarded the provision of worship in their personal households, reflecting their own preferences. The Elizabethan church had three elements – the Godly Puritans, the Old Catholics and parish churchgoers. Each created local churches to suit their needs. For those termed old Catholics if they did not go into recusancy the church would have seemed very different with its lack of colour and drama, the loss of the Latin Mass and sacramental life. For a time the two intermingled with clergy using the new forms of worship but observing the old practices. Some also celebrated the Catholic rites clandestinely. Gradually an alternative church developed which rejected the Settlement and after the Bull of 1570 was sporadically persecuted by a hierarchy fearful of armed resistance, fuelled by the arrival of the seminary priests and Jesuit Missionaries from the continent and the presence of the Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots. Whether such wholesale fear was justified is a matter of debate, but what is clear is that a Catholic voice was unwanted and unpatriotic. It is often said that history is written by the victors and the historiography of the Reformation has until recent times painted a picture of pre-Reformation Catholicism as evil and corrupt and those who followed it as traitors. Mary Tudor in particular has been painted as an incompetent and harsh ruler with the epithet 'Bloody'- a term that could equally apply to her father and half sister. The Reformation tied church and state together in a way that is unique but despite such an unprepossessing situation, those who maintained the traditional Catholic faith gently persisted and prepared the ground for a 'Second spring' in the middle of the C19th.

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