

## How the English Reformation Produced a Tale of Two Churches

High Anglican



Grace Memorial Episcopal  
Lynchburg, Virginia

Low Anglican



Westover Church (Episcopal)  
Charles City County, Virginia

David Sutton, Lynchburg College

The event referred to as the English Reformation was much more than a mere offshoot of the larger Protestant Reformation. In fact, the English Reformation was a series and conglomeration of events that could arguably be considered a work still in progress. As the British Empire covered the world, so did its Church. As the British left the former colonies, the Church stayed. In contemporary times, a worldwide Anglican Communion of eighty million communicants in 160 countries still looks to the Archbishop of Canterbury as a symbolic figurehead in the continuing debate over scripture and liturgy.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Anglican Communion Official Website, *Welcome*, Accessed 24 November 2007, Available from <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/index.cfm>.

Who could have foreseen that ideas espoused by John Wycliffe in England during the fourteenth century would lay the seeds of not only the English Reformation but the general Protestant Reformation as well? Teaching from Balliol College at Oxford, Wycliffe attacked the secular wealth of the Roman Church, questioned papal supremacy, and disagreed with belief in transubstantiation. As Wycliffe's teachings were adopted by the Lollards in England, Jan Hus took them to Bohemia and started to influence religious thinkers on the Continent.<sup>2</sup> Still, it would be over a hundred years before Luther posted his *95 Theses*. It would be another dozen years before the Pope's defender, Henry VIII, would begin the initially politically oriented, schismatic movement now known as the English Reformation.<sup>3</sup>

Even from its beginning, The Reformation in England was disjointed, affected by religious extremism, conservatism, moderation, and political expediency. Cromwell and Cranmer, supporting radical reform, struggled with Henry VIII's quasi-Catholicism.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Henry's children and their advisors had to deal with conflicting religious views. The Reformation of the Tudors never really solidified into a single doctrine. Instead, it gelled into an uneasy alliance of two camps, a Church within a Church with only the monarchy to hold it together.

Today, the Church is still divided into Low Church and High Church. *The Book of Common Prayer* provides Low Church congregations with a simple, yet beautiful, service to celebrate the Eucharist. The same prayer book provides four separate and more elaborate versions of the Eucharist for those who prefer the pomp of High Church ceremony.<sup>5</sup> Dr. Horton Davies, who was awarded a Doctorate of Letters from Oxford for three volumes of his history of English religion, referred to the two factions as Puritans (Low Church) and Anglicans (High

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<sup>2</sup> Norman Davies, *Europe, A History* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1998), 403-04.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 485, 90

<sup>4</sup> George C. Perry, *History of the Reformation in England* (London: Longman's, 1911), 50-52.

<sup>5</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 323-82.

Church). He cautions that Anglican Puritans should not be confused with separatists, such as the Pilgrims who fled to North America.<sup>6</sup> When did this divide occur?

The subtitle of Dr. Davies' book, *From Cranmer to Hooker, 1534-1603*, seems to follow the conventional wisdom that the main part of the English Reformation occurred during that time period.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, this exploration will attempt to confine itself to that same time period. On one hand, sixty-seven years might seem like ample time to work out a more cohesive religious entity. On the other hand, one quickly realizes that in the 2000 year history of Christianity, sixty-seven years is not that long to establish a national Church. Many religious differences have gone on much longer.

How did this strange co-existence develop? The first step of this explanation must involve Henry VIII. It may be very true that Wycliffe, Huss, Luther, and others had laid the theological foundations for the general Protestant Reformation. Thomas Cromwell and Archbishop Thomas Cranmer may have greatly influenced the English Reformation. However, it would be hard to argue that England would have removed itself from subjugation to Rome so quickly and completely were it not for the ambitions of Henry VIII. In 1911, English cleric George G. Perry wrote concerning Henry VIII: "In his religious views, he in no way varied from the prevalent (Roman) Church teaching."<sup>8</sup> Henry, the great instigator of the actual break with Rome and starter of the Church of England, had no intention of changing Church practices, only the political structure. Reform minded clergy and politicians in the vein of Cranmer and Cromwell had to compete with those faithful to the Roman Catholic religion, like Bishop Stephen Gardiner and Sir Thomas More. Serving the king's political side, not his spiritual side, was the key to

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<sup>6</sup> Horton Davies, *From Cranmer to Hooker, 1534-1603*, vol. 3 of *Worship and Theology in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1970), 325.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., iii.

<sup>8</sup> Perry, 5.

advancing whatever views one might have. Failing to realize this situation cost many, both reformers and Catholics, their heads. Cromwell and More were both included in that number.

Henry VIII had been named “Defender of The Faith” in 1521 by Pope Leo X for teaming up with Thomas More in writing against the rather mild (by later standards) reform views of Martin Luther. It was not until another pope refused to bend to his will in 1529 that Henry considered leading his mostly Catholic subjects away from Rome.<sup>9</sup> It took another five years before the English officially broke with Rome.<sup>10</sup> Even then, the doctrine and ceremonies of the church remained almost unchanged.<sup>11</sup> Still, by making himself head of the Church in England, Henry gave his reform-minded advisors an opening, and change did begin to occur.

Initially, these changes were mainly in the governing and policies of the Church and not in doctrine or practice. Those changes would come later. For the time being, it was enough to assure a complete renunciation of Roman authority. Perhaps surprisingly, Henry VIII’s advisors were joined in their attacks on Rome by much of the conservative English clergy. Perry surmises that this approach may have been calculated to gain the king’s favor and to avert radical liturgical changes.<sup>12</sup> These developments could be viewed as the beginnings of the dual Church that was to come.

Henry VIII was himself an object of duality. On the one hand, he believed in the religious practices that he had followed for his entire lifetime. On the other hand, his reform-minded advisors showed him enticing ways to increase his own power and wealth. By requiring allegiance of the clergy and suppressing the monasteries, Henry gained personal power, and the wealth that was headed for Rome came to his treasury instead. Cromwell and Cranmer used

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<sup>9</sup> Linda Alchin, The Tudor Website, *Henry VIII*, July 16, 2005, Accessed 30 November 2007, Available from <http://www.the-tudors.org.uk/henry-viii-accomplishments.htm>.

<sup>10</sup> Perry, 17,18.

<sup>11</sup> Horton Davies, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Perry 19.

Henry's good will generated by this approach to further the reform cause.<sup>13</sup> Soon, legislation, which would give them encouragement, was passed.

*The Ten Articles*, passed in 1536, kept many old beliefs, but did contain some significant changes. Saints were no longer to be worshipped; the Sacraments were reduced to three in number, and the concept of purgatory came under attack. These articles were soon followed by and expounded upon by *The Institution of a Christian Man*.<sup>14</sup> This book, which contained some weakening of *The Ten Articles*, was seen by Perry as being "intended as a happy compromise between the reforming and anti-reforming party."<sup>15</sup> This pattern of half measures, giving no one complete satisfaction but avoiding complete chaos, would become a hallmark of the English Reformation.

In seeking to overcome these half measures, Cromwell and Cranmer made an error of judgment that would hold the reformers back for almost a decade. Forgetting their sovereign's vanity, in 1538 they invited Lutheran theologians from Germany to attempt to convince the king to make further reforms. Henry VIII was not the sort of man to be lectured by strangers. He angrily reverted to his previous leanings and had *The Six Articles* enacted. Transubstantiation was confirmed; clerical celibacy was retained, and other Catholic practices were enforced. The penalties for failure to conform were severe. Just disagreeing with *The Six Articles* could result in burning or hanging.<sup>16</sup> The reformers then had to wait until the new king came to power to regain momentum. Although Cranmer would live to have a great influence on the Church, Cromwell would not.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 41-46.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 50-52.

The year 1547 saw the death of Henry VIII and the ascension of Edward VI, the boy king. Though Henry had maintained his old religious beliefs, Edward had had a distinctly Protestant upbringing. After his father's death, the nine year old boy's tutors had more freedom to advance more radically progressive ideas. The impressionable young king was greatly influenced by his uncle, Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, who also served as Lord Protector. At least one twentieth century Anglican cleric saw Seymour as a man of "large and noble" ideas.<sup>17</sup> However, Perry contends that Seymour did not really care about the Church or religion in general. He sees the Protector as pushing the Protestant agenda merely as a means to strengthen his own powerful position and to seize wealth from religious property.<sup>18</sup> Whatever Seymour's motives, he and Cranmer did make real progress in turning the Church in England into something other than a carbon copy of the Roman Church.

The first of these changes originated with a royal proclamation which came about, "by the advice of our most dear uncle the duke of Somerset."<sup>19</sup> It is highly likely that Seymour had the proclamation written in proper form, as the king was still quite young. The importance of the proclamation was not really who wrote it, but what it enacted. At this point, the role of the liturgical father of the Anglican Church, Archbishop Cranmer, becomes important..

*The Order of Communion*, proclaimed in 1548, was a cornerstone in creating the Church of England. Finally, at least some liturgy was spoken in English. Most give credit to Cranmer for the writing of this groundbreaking work; some of his wording is still used today.<sup>20</sup> Being careful not to cause any more controversy than necessary, Cranmer included both conservative and

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<sup>17</sup> Rev. E. Hirst, *Archbishop Cranmer*, Churchman 48/2, 1934. Accessed 3 December 2007, Available from [http://www.churchsociety.org/churchman/documents/Cman\\_048\\_2\\_Hirst.pdf](http://www.churchsociety.org/churchman/documents/Cman_048_2_Hirst.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> Perry 60.

<sup>19</sup> *The Order of the Communion 1548*, Anglican Resource Collection, Accessed 3 December 2007, Available from [http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Communion\\_1548.htm](http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Communion_1548.htm).

<sup>20</sup> Book 323.

reform elements in the new liturgy. Besides being in English, *The Order of Communion* allowed general confession and absolution, and it also referred to *spiritually* feeding and drinking the Body and Blood of Christ. Now, the laity as well as the clergy would partake of both of the Eucharistic Elements. Nevertheless, secret confession was allowed, and parishioners were enjoined not to attack those who used it. Also, the consecrated elements of what is still referred to as the Mass continued to be called “Holy Mysteries,” a decidedly Catholic reference.<sup>21</sup> Although this new liturgy represented a major a step, even more radical changes were still to come.

The next, and arguably most influential, step in the process of solidifying the English Church came very shortly after *The Order of Communion* was proclaimed. The first *Book of Common Prayer* was declared by the Act of Uniformity of 1549. This religious milestone, written mainly by Archbishop Cranmer, Bishop Ridley, and a few others, laid the foundation of Anglicanism. Much of the form and language of the first prayer book are still used. The preface states that an inconvenient variation of services was the primary reason for establishing the prayer book. However, Davies observes that this justification was really not the driving force. He observes that minor variations from place to place had always occurred and probably always will. Instead, this prayer book was an effort to bring England itself together.<sup>22</sup> The *Book of Common Prayer* contained everything needed for the united and common worship of one people.

In keeping with Cranmer’s desire to please the reformers without alienating the conservatives, this new guide to the divine contained Protestant ideas with enough of the old religion to make it familiar. The book was written in English; the Preface maintains that people cannot worship what they cannot understand and condemns the use of services in Latin. Another

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<sup>21</sup> Order.

<sup>22</sup> Davies 174-75.



Protestant influence is the exhortation that common knowledge of the entire Bible by the people is necessary. Immediately after the Preface is a schedule of daily readings, one per day from each Testament, to lead a reader through the Bible in the space of a year. The title page presents more reform influence, referring to “Sacraments, rites and other ceremonies.”<sup>23</sup> Only Baptism and Holy Communion are considered sacraments. The other five services considered sacraments by the Roman Church are treated as rites by the English prayer book. Finally, clerics are given some freedom of choice in the wearing of vestments.<sup>24</sup> So, what concessions were made to the conservatives?

The main consideration given to the conservative wing of the Church was the service of Communion. It remained virtually unchanged, with the exception of being in English rather than Latin.<sup>25</sup> The Roman name is even acknowledged in the title “The Supper of the Lorde and holy Communion, commonly called the Masse.”<sup>26</sup> Though the service refers to “spiritual feeding” rather than transubstantiation, the Elements are still called “Mysteries.” There is also a provision made that no man would receive blame for genuflection or other physical gestures. As mentioned before, clerics now had some freedom concerning vestments. In some cases, clergy were required to wear surplices, and bishops were required to wear surplices and copes and to carry their staffs whenever ministering in public.<sup>27</sup> Cranmer seemed to be succeeding in changing the substance while retaining the form. Very soon, that fine line became harder to walk.

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<sup>23</sup> The 1549 *Book of Common Prayer*. Anglican Resource Collection. Accessed 3 December 2007. Available from [http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1549/BCP\\_1549.htm](http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1549/BCP_1549.htm).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Davies 179.

<sup>26</sup> 1549.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.



King Edward's older sister, the Princess Mary, saw nothing of Catholicism in the new liturgy and banned it from her private chapel. However, the Catholic-leaning Bishop Gardiner found enough of the old faith in the *Book of Common Prayer* to rule it compatible with Roman doctrine. Radical soon-to-be-bishop John Hooper found it so much in tune with Roman worship as to be unacceptable.<sup>28</sup> In 1550, Hooper had preached a series of sermons for Edward VI, which had greatly impressed the growing monarch. Now at the age of twelve, Edward was starting to get an increased sense of himself and his authority. He was so taken with Hooper's Protestant views that he personally altered the service of consecration when Hooper was made Bishop of Gloucester. Hooper grudgingly consented to wear vestments, but Edward removed a ceremonial reference to saints and angels.<sup>29</sup> About the same time, Cranmer began to be perturbed by Gardiner's acceptance of the new prayer book. Critics believed that if Gardiner liked it, it must be too much like Romanism. In addition, Seymour had been replaced by John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, who was one of the radical reformers.<sup>30</sup> As important as the first *Book of Common Prayer* was, it was already being revised.

By 1552, a new prayer book was ratified by Parliament. This new book was decidedly more reformed and pleasing to those who wished to purify the Church of England of the remaining Roman influences. Now the terms "Low Mass" and "Low Church" came into play; the word "Mass" was deleted in this second *Book of Common Prayer*, and singing was discouraged. Most outward signs, such as crossing the forehead at Confirmation, were removed. Altars were replaced by tables (a pet project of Hooper's), and even the order of worship was changed. Only the simplest of vestments were required. At the insistence of John Knox, a rubric was added that kneeling at Communion in no way meant that the Elements themselves were

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<sup>28</sup> Davies 182.

<sup>29</sup> Perry 88-90.

<sup>30</sup> Davies 201, 02.

being worshipped. Davies believes that although the first prayer book was used as a primary source for the second, Cranmer was determined to remove anything that Gardiner could directly connect with the Latin Church.<sup>31</sup> It seemed that the Church of England was becoming more divided than ever. However, the next set of events was to bring the two sides back together in a struggle for survival.

Edward VI possessed strong Protestant leanings. Had he survived to adulthood, the development of the Church of England probably would have been very different. It likely would have gone in a much more Calvinistic direction and lost much of its dual nature. The early death of the teenage king in 1553 makes such musings mere speculation. His Catholic sister Mary took the throne, and both factions were placed in mortal danger. Queen Mary was a devout Catholic, who married His Most Catholic Majesty, King Philip II of Spain. The religious acts passed during Edward's reign were repealed, and England was placed back into religious submission to the Pope in Rome.<sup>32</sup> Mary's enthusiasm for her faith manifested itself in ways that people today view as incompatible with the teachings of the Christian faith. Though all of the Tudor monarchs ordered their share of executions, this one became known as "Bloody Mary." She did not practice religious tolerance by any means. Many Englishmen, both traditional Anglicans and those Davies calls Puritan, fled England for safety on the Continent. Many Church leaders who stayed came to regret it. Bishop Gardiner and a few others were against the persecution of their non-Catholic countrymen but were overruled. Some of the clerics who died for their faith were Ridley, Hugh Latimer, and Hooper, the extremist reformer.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid 201-06.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 133-34.

Gardiner personally pleaded with Hooper to recant, but to no avail. The fire took forty-five horrible minutes to kill Hooper.<sup>33</sup> However, the queen's wrath against Cranmer had to wait.

Of the men who had helped Henry VIII take England out from under the Pope's influence, Cranmer was the main one still living. It was Cranmer who had granted Mary's father his divorce, thus displacing her mother. Cranmer had influenced her brother away from the true faith, so she considered him a heretic and a traitor. However, swift justice would elude Mary. Cranmer was a metropolitan, appointed by the pope. Mary could not execute him until sentence was passed in Rome. It finally did come and at one point, Cranmer did recant and admit heresy. At his execution, he reclaimed his honor. The hand that had signed his recantations was burned first as he declared the pope an anti-Christ.<sup>34</sup> Mary would be denied the humiliation she had wished to impose against her nemesis by causing him to reject his beliefs. When Mary's reign ended in 1558, it was clear that her main gift to the English Reformation had been to create the sense of an English Church.<sup>35</sup> Her persecution of both conservative and radical reformers united them as Englishmen.

The long reign of her sister Elizabeth now began. Elizabeth I had no love of the papacy, because the Pope considered her illegitimate and therefore not entitled to the English throne, nor did she embrace the severity of Puritan beliefs. She acted cautiously at first, more intent on securing her throne than on religious fervor.<sup>36</sup> Dr. Clifton Potter theorizes that Elizabeth did not really care that much about personal religious beliefs as long as loyalty to the crown and civil order were maintained. She leaned toward Protestant doctrine but also enjoyed the "bells and

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<sup>33</sup> Perry 124, 25, 31, 32.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 129-35.

<sup>35</sup> Perry 152.

<sup>36</sup> Davies 210-12.

whistles” of High Church pomp and ceremony.<sup>37</sup> Since Elizabeth could not be Catholic, some action did have to be taken. A new Act of Uniformity, which established a new *Book of Common Prayer*, was passed in 1559. The book was primarily the same as the 1552 version with some slight modifications to satisfy those conservatives who wanted a return to the 1549 standards.<sup>38</sup> Still, dissatisfaction persisted, and in 1563, Archbishop Parker began work on what would become the *Thirty-Nine Articles of Faith*, enacted in 1571. These articles finally laid out a firm doctrine of beliefs that remain unchanged.<sup>39</sup> Perry maintains that while more was to be done, the passage of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* completed the English Reformation proper.<sup>40</sup> The Church of England would continue to grow and change, but the foundations were now complete.

Today, the Anglican Communion is still divided into the ceremonial High Church and the more sedate Low Church. They still disagree while they co-exist. Separate in method and ceremony, they share a common tale. More importantly, they share a common God and Savior, which makes them one. That is the legacy of the Tudors and the English Reformation.

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<sup>37</sup> Dr. Clifton Potter, Class Lecture, History 338, Lynchburg College, 29 November 2007.

<sup>38</sup> The 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*, Anglican Resource Collection, Accessed 3 December 2007. Available from [http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1559/BCP\\_1559.htm](http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1559/BCP_1559.htm).

<sup>39</sup> *Articles of the English Reformation*, Church Society, Accessed 5 December. 2007. Available from [http://www.churchsociety.org/issues\\_new/doctrine/39A/History/iss\\_doctrine\\_39A\\_history\\_english.asp](http://www.churchsociety.org/issues_new/doctrine/39A/History/iss_doctrine_39A_history_english.asp).

<sup>40</sup> Perry 199.

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