

# **The English Reformation**

**A New Study**

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# Introduction

## A. Our Aim

The aim of this book is to inform you who are growing up in a society wrapped up in itself of a work of God that took place in England almost five hundred years ago. A Christian historian of our day reminds us that “we need tools, wisdom and skill to impress upon the young of our day and in our churches . . . that study of the Christian past is worthwhile and deeply rewarding.” (Michael Haykin) We hope this study will prove to be such a tool.

But we do not wish you merely to study your nation’s past. That will only feed your mind. When you read this account you must also be spurred into action. The God of the Reformers is still God, and you need Him to stir up your spirit to protest against the evils of our day till you long and pray for and see another Reformation.

Then you will be like the Psalmist, who cried: “O God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us, what deeds you performed in their days, in the days of old: You with your own hand drove out the nations, but them you planted; you afflicted the peoples, but them you set free; for not by their own sword did they win the land, nor did their own arm save them, but your right hand and your arm, and the light of your face, for you delighted in them.” (Psalm 44.1-3) This is our prayer for you as you grow up in our largely Godless society.

## **B. Our Viewpoint**

Before setting out on our journey through the English Reformation, however, we shall make clear our viewpoint. We do this for three reasons.

1. First, because the way we look at the past determines what we say and write about it.

Those of us who believe that the world exists because God made it, and that it steers a certain course because He directs it, will try to see God at work in history, either in mercy or in judgment. This is what the Bible commentator Matthew Henry meant when he wrote: "The Lord's providences concerning His people are commonly mixed: mercy and judgment. God has set the one over against another . . . like showers and sunshine." Mrs. Anne Ross Cousin did the same in her beautiful poem based on the sayings of the Scottish Christian, Samuel Rutherford:

'With mercy and with judgment  
My web of time He wove.'

Seeing history in this light, we will not survey the past from *our* point of view, but from *God's*. We will try to see people, events and changes as God sees them.

2. Second, we adopt God's view of history because we believe in truth. He is the God of truth, and in His Word He has shown that truth is made up of *facts* plus a right *understanding* of those facts.

For example, just before Christ was born, God sent an angel to tell Joseph, Mary's husband-to-be, that she was to be His mother. The message was this: "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1.21)

Notice: "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus." These are the *facts*. Then God gives us His *understanding* of the fact that His name is to be Jesus: "For he will save his people from their sins." The name "Jesus" means "Jehovah is salvation." As Jehovah is one of God's names, the text tells us that the son of Mary is no less than God, and that as God He will save a certain number, called "His people", from their sins.

Here is another example: "Christ *died*:" that is a *fact*. He did not faint. His disciples did not steal and hide His body, then falsely claim that He had risen from the dead. He really died. Then we read: "Christ died *for our sins*:" that is God's *understanding* of the fact. (See 1 Corinthians 15.3) The little word "for" explains to us that He took our place and suffered the punishment we deserve for our sins.

Now if we are to read history as God has interpreted it for us in the Bible, we must seek out the *facts*; then we must *understand* the facts aright. In this way we will arrive at the truth, and the truth will keep us on the right lines. It will keep us from personal bias or wrong thinking. The process is what the astronomer Tycho Brahe once called 'thinking God's thoughts after Him.'

3. Third, we adopt the Bible's view of history because God's dealings with His chosen people and their enemies in the Bible show us how He deals with every nation.

Being a righteous God, He loves righteousness and hates sin. So He has bound Himself to reward righteousness and punish sin. When we study history we are to observe this work of God in action. We are to ask God to show us who are the righteous and who are the wicked. We must also ask Him to show us how He is rewarding His people and punishing His enemies. The more light we get from God's Word about these matters, the more we will see God at work in mercy and in judgment on both individuals and nations.

Our viewpoint, then, is the one that seeks to see God at work in history, and to understand characters, events and changes through His eyes. He Himself expects us to take our stand here, because He says: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and *do not lean to your own understanding*. In all your ways *acknowledge Him*, and He shall direct your paths." (Proverbs 3.5-6)

In this study we have omitted many details about England in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This is because they had to do with the Reformation only incidentally. Instead, we have concentrated on the main people caught up in the rapid swirl of events, and have tried to explain them as plainly as possible.

## Special Terms

**Reformation** – This term is made up of two Latin words: ‘re’ = ‘again’ and ‘formare’ = ‘to form.’ The idea is that Jesus and His apostles ‘formed’ the Christian Church; the pope, cardinals, bishops, priests, monks and nuns of Rome ‘de-formed’ the Church; and people like Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Knox and Cranmer ‘re-formed’ the Church.

**Providence** – (From the Latin ‘providere’ = ‘to see before’). It means the way God has foreseen the best way to uphold, direct and control all events for His own glory and His people’s good. It shows us His wisdom, power, goodness and justice.

**Righteousness** – (From a Hebrew word that originally meant ‘straight’) That is, God is righteous because He is ‘straight, just, fair’ in all His dealings with people; and people are righteous when they are sincere believers in Jesus who live good, holy lives.

**Sin** – This Bible word has three meanings: falling short of God’s standards, crossing His forbidden boundary lines, and being perverse. It applies to us all, for “all have sinned and come short of the glory (or standard which glorifies) God.” (Romans 3.23)

**Wicked** – Used of Satan, people and their evil plans and behaviour, this term means morally bad.

# Chapter 1

## Understanding the English Reformation

When we consider the English Reformation from this viewpoint, we find a marked difference between it and the viewpoint of ‘revisionists.’

These writers of history do not believe the Bible. As a result they do not see history from God’s viewpoint. They do not see God at work in history. So when they come to write history they fail to mention Him. Instead, they twist the *facts* and put their own *understanding* on people, events and changes. These historians are called ‘revisionists’ because they *revise* history according to their own false ideas.

We must be perfectly clear about their accounts of what happened in history: they are biased against the truth. Their history is warped. Undeniable facts are mingled with lies. You will be able to identify them by the terms they use in their writing. For example, they refer to the Reformation as a ‘Revolution’ or a ‘Revolt,’ to Bible truth as ‘heresy,’ and to Christian believers as ‘heretics.’ They inject such notions as ‘dividing Europe,’ ‘fracturing the Church,’ and ‘opposing the law’ into their accounts, to make you think that the Reformers were bad people, rebels or troublemakers. As you read, therefore, beware of their tactics. They are trying to poison your mind.

Let us look at some examples of ‘revisionist’ history, and see how wrong they are.

1. The revisionist J. J. Scarisbrick, for example, in his *The Reformation and the English People*, claims that when reforms began to take place the Roman Catholic Church was well respected.

This claim does not fit the facts. There are dozens of recorded cases of people complaining at churchmen's greed, deceit, immorality, ignorance, superstition and cruelty. Their priests were telling them to observe the outward forms of religion (such as attending church at 'Christmas' and 'Easter' and paying their 'tithes' to the Church) but neglected to tell them the Good News that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and that they must trust in Him alone for salvation.

Also, people were no longer content to be told by their priests what to believe and how to live. They wanted to read the Bible for themselves. Even before the term 'Protestant' was coined, they were Protestants in fact.

Not only that, they began to ask disturbing questions: Why should bishops and priests have such power, wealth and influence? Should they not live like Jesus, as servants of the people? Rather than respect the Roman Church, the people held it in contempt.

2. Another 'revisionist' notion is that reforming ideas were not popular in the 1520s.

This idea also does not fit the facts. Professor Lechler's study of John Wycliffe and of his 'Lollard' preachers

demonstrates that their reforming ideas were very popular right throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> century. These travelling messengers of the Gospel toured England, and could be found in market places and at village crosses telling merchants, shoppers, farm labourers and housewives of the wonderful Saviour who died to take away our sins, and who calls us to live holy lives. They also added that we must believe in Him in order to be saved from our sins, and not to try to curry God's favour by giving money to the Church. And just as "the common people received" Jesus "gladly," so too they received His messengers gladly. Why? Because if they could be saved by faith alone, they would not have to do all the works that priests imposed on them in order to be free of their sins! This Gospel that they welcomed continued to live on in the hearts of many rural folk till the time of Henry VIII. By the early 16<sup>th</sup> century there was a real hunger for reform in England.

Besides, a book shipped over from the continent of Europe was circulating among educated folk that opened their eyes to a new kind of Church. Erasmus of Rotterdam published his *Handbook to the Christian Soldier* in 1503. It not only criticized the existing Church, it also set out an attractive vision of the Church of the future. In this new Church ordinary people would play a full part, instead of leaving power in the hands of priests. Erasmus said that even the most humble ploughman as he worked his fields, and the weaver as he plied his shuttle, and the traveller as he rode on his journey, would soon be able to read his New Testament.

Erasmus did not want to get rid of the priests, even though he despised them, for, he said, they could teach the people to read and write. But their prestige and power would become a thing of the past.

Erasmus's book became a best seller in England. With friends like John Colet, Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, London, Erasmus was a scholar whom God used to increase hunger for reform, and even contribute to it in a mild way.

3. A third 'revisionist' idea is that Henry VIII's divorce was central in bringing about reform. Countless 'histories' of the Reformation foster this lie. To cite only one example: Hans Hillerbrand, in *The Reformation*, writes: "The Reformation in England began with the marital problems of King Henry VIII."

But reliable historians show us that Henry's divorce had nothing to do with the massive changes in faith and life that ushered England into a new and better era. The truth is: Henry wanted a male heir to the throne, and his first wife could not produce one. So he wished to divorce her and find someone who could! Not only so, Henry had a bad conscience. He already had a son born from a lustful relationship with another woman. This son would never have been accepted as king.

What has this to do with God changing people's hearts, making them new characters and enabling them to live upright lives? The outward events surrounding Henry's

divorce case were used by God to change the king's relationship to the pope of Rome, but they were not the *cause* of the Reformation.

4. Another 'revisionist' historian, G. R. Elton, emphasises the Reformation as an act of state, brought about by Henry VIII and his advisers, who used the Reformers' ideas to increase their wealth and power.

Two other 'revisionist' historians (Michael Collins and Matthew Price) begin their treatment of the English Reformation with the same notion: "England also experienced a Protestant upheaval [note the term used instead of 'Reformation'] – although the causes began with politics, in the form of Henry VIII (r. 1509-47)"

The church historian Williston Walker goes even further. He says that before the reign of Queen Elizabeth I "the English revolt" [note the term] did not "manifest any considerable spiritual awakening among the people. Its impulses were political and social."

Now while it is true that Henry and his officers of state turned the wealth of the Roman Church to their own advantage, this does not make this mighty work of God an act of state. The reforms that people longed for and that God sent were spiritual and moral; the social, political and economic changes followed in consequence. They were not *causes* of the Reformation, but *effects* of it.

5. Other 'revisionist' historians try to isolate England from the rest of Europe, claiming that reforms on the continent barely influenced changes in England.

This is manifestly untrue. As A. G. Dickens argues in *The English Reformation*, reforming ideas from Europe (especially from Luther's Wittenberg) were much in favour in the 1520s in London and the southeast.

As early as 1520-21, a group of young Cambridge Bible students were quietly meeting in the White Horse Tavern to discuss Luther's teachings. These had been smuggled into England by merchants. From this group sprang many of the English Reformation leaders.

Also, from an Antwerp base outside the reach of Henry's authority, William Tyndale's English *New Testament* and other Reformation writings by continental authors poured into the country after 1526. The more Bibles and good books were shipped in, and the more people in high places read them with enlightened eyes, the more demands for reform were made.

### **Conclusion**

Clearly, where the light of God's truth shines into people's hearts, a longing for reform is bound to follow, because God's standards are always higher than ours. A. G. Dickens goes so far as to claim that no European people were more deeply influenced by the Scriptures in their own language than the English.

In short, although the Reformation triggered off massive social, political and economic changes, the movement itself was a spiritual work of God among the English people. As such, it brought with it the most beneficial changes England had ever seen. As the Christian historian Merle d'Aubigné notes, the seed God sows may lie long underground; but sooner or later it will spring up and bear good fruit.

## Special Terms

**Protestants** - The Reformers were called 'Protestants,' a term that was coined in 1529 in Germany. The word is made up of two Latin words: 'pro' = 'publicly' and 'testare' = 'to bear witness.' A Protestant is someone who publicly bears witness to the truth and protests against error.

**Revolution or Revolt** – Originally meaning of moving round in a circle, or revolving, this word is often used to refer to great changes in the affairs of nations. Because of its strong association with the bloody French and Russian Revolutions, it is best not to use it of spiritual reformations.

**Heresy** – (From the Greek 'haeresis' = 'a choice.') This is a belief that a person chooses to have contrary to the teaching of the Bible. But it is widely abused to refer to beliefs held contrary to the prevailing opinions of the Church at any time, whether these opinions are true or false. 'Heretics' are those who hold such teaching.

**Roman Catholic** – The word 'Catholic' comes from the Greek 'katholikos' = 'according to the whole, universal.' It refers to the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ scattered throughout the world in all ages. 'Roman' is added to it to denote the Church that began at Rome and has now spread throughout the world.

**Gospel** - Based on an old Anglo-Saxon word 'Godspell.' It is the English translation of the Greek word 'evangelion,' which means the Good News that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Biblical Basis of the Reformation**

We may not always be aware of it, but behind everything that happens stands an underlying basis of ideas.

Behind the English Reformation were several basic ideas, all of them taken from the Bible:

1. God is in control of all the people, events and movements that influence the course of history. Everywhere in the Bible we may see evidence that “the Lord reigns” (Psalms 93.1; 97.1) and that “He does according to His will . . . among the inhabitants of the earth.” (Daniel 4.35)

It was He who moved Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to invade Israel, as a punishment for her sins. (2 Kings 24.10ff) It was He who stirred up Cyrus, King of Persia, to let her people return to their country and rebuild the temple (Isaiah 45.1,13). After all, “the king’s heart is like a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He will.” (Proverbs 21.1)

So too in the English Reformation God used the Tudor monarchs, their courtiers and churchmen to fulfil His will, even while some of them were pursuing their own ends.

This is the first truth behind the Reformation: God was in control to achieve His own holy purposes.

2. The national reformations God brought to Israel are models for all other reformations.

We will mention three of these recorded in the Bible:

King Hezekiah set himself with great vigour to reform the kingdom after his father Ahaz had left it more or less heathen, full of idolatry and superstition. He ordered the temple to be repaired and purified from abuse, caused the people to keep the Passover Feast again, broke down the idolatrous altars and images, fortified Jerusalem against invasion, and placed both himself and the nation in God's hands. He even composed a hymn of thanksgiving after his recovery from illness, and ordered his scribes to copy Solomon's proverbs for his use as king. (2 Chronicles 29-32; Isaiah 36-39; Proverbs 25.1)

(ii) When the eight-year old King Josiah came to the throne, "he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord . . . and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left." Finding in the book of God's law that the worship of God had been shamefully neglected, he ordered his subjects to celebrate the Passover (see Exodus 12). Then he gathered together the elders of Judah, his officers of state, and without using any force, caused them to renew their covenant with God: that is, to take Him again for their God, and to promise to be His people. He gave orders to destroy all fortune-tellers, magicians and sexual perverts, and to pull down every altar of superstition and statue to idols in the land. For the rest of his short life he continued to fear God and promote reformation. (2 Kings 22-23)

(iii) Nehemiah, the Governor of the Jews after their return from exile, was given the task of rebuilding ruined Jerusalem in answer to his sorrowful prayer when he was in exile. Despite persistent opposition, the work prospered: his workmen rebuilt the city walls with a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other! He then curbed the cruelty of the rich nobles, restored the ancient feasts, had God's law read and explained to the people, forced Jewish Sabbath-breakers to stop trading on that holy day, made the men who had married heathen wives put them away, decreed that the year for releasing slaves be punctually observed, and ensured that the priests were properly paid. And he did all this without demanding a salary, but maintained his family on the produce of his own fields. (Nehemiah and Ezra)

As we read about these Biblical reformations, we observe that they all had some things in common:

- (1) They were set in motion by the reading of the Word or Law of God.
- (2) They were overseen by rulers who feared God and sought to obey Him.
- (3) They abolished idolatry and restored the pure worship of God.
- (4) They enrolled the willing help of the people.
- (5) They entailed personal sacrifice, of time, energy, property and status.
- (6) They could not have taken place without the grace, wisdom and power of God.

This is the second truth behind the sixteenth century English Reformation: it was largely, though not entirely, based on the models of reformation found in the Bible.

This basis was neatly stated by Augustine of Hippo (354-430), the 'Church Father' most quoted by the Reformers: "when God commands a thing to be done, against the customs or compact of any people, though it were never done by them before, it is to be done; and if intermitted, it is to be restored; and if never ordained, is now to be ordained . . . For as among the powers in man's society the greater authority is obeyed in preference to the lesser, so must God [be obeyed] above all."

## Special Terms

**Tudor** – Belonging to the English royal line from Henry VII to Elizabeth I, so called because it was founded by Owen Tudor.

**Idolatry** – The worship of false gods or of the true God in a false way.

**Superstition** – Being ready to believe without sufficient evidence things supernatural or mysterious.

**Passover** – A Jewish feast celebrating the ‘passing over’ of the Jews’ houses by the angel of death in Egypt. (Exodus 12.23)

**Church Father** – Though Jesus told His followers to call no man ‘father’ (except, of course, one’s natural or adopted father), the term is used of several early church writers, such as Tertullian, Cyrian, Athanasius, Chrysostom, Jerome and Augustine.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Why England Needed The Reformation**

At the time of Henry VIII's coronation (1509) the Church of Christ in England was thoroughly corrupt.

1. First, its **doctrine or teaching** was opposed to that of the Lord Jesus Christ, His apostles and the New Testament Church.

If we look at the Early Church we see that its members “gladly received the Word” and “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine.” (Acts 2.41-42)

But by the time of Henry VIII the people were forbidden to read the Word and knew nothing of the apostles’ doctrine.

That doctrine is to be found in their Letters to the churches scattered around the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Read the Letters to the Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, Hebrews and Timothy and Titus. They all teach that Holy Scripture alone is able to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 3.15), and that we are saved by grace through faith, not by any works of ours. (Ephesians 2.8-9)

By Henry's day the Church taught that the Word was not enough to save us, but that we need the Church itself to

explain it to us, and that we are saved by God's grace *plus* our own works.

Other popish heresies and errors too had been foisted on the Church:

The Scriptures teaches that God alone is to be worshipped. (John 4.24; Revelation 19.10)

But the Church said that the relics (bones, items of clothing, body hair, etc.) of saints were to be worshipped (788 A.D.) and that the wafer lifted up by the priest is to be adored. (1220 A.D.)

The Bible says that ministers (who are not priests) may marry. (1 Timothy 3.2; 1 Corinthians 9.5)

But the Church said that priests were not allowed to marry. (1079 A.D.)

The Word of God promises that we are redeemed from our sins not by money but by the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1.18-19)

But the Church taught that Indulgences (paper promises of pardon) might be bought with money to shorten time in purgatory (a man-made invention anyway). (1190 A.D.)

Holy Scripture informs us that the human nature of Christ is now in heaven. (Luke 24.51; Acts 1.9-10)

But the Church taught that the communion bread and wine become the real physical body and blood of Christ

when the priest pronounces the words *Hoc est corpus meum* = This is my body. (1215 A.D.)

The Bible teaches us to confess our sins to God only. (Psalm 32.5; 1 John 1.9)

But the Church taught that sins must be confessed to a Roman priest before they could be forgiven. (1215 A.D.)  
Scripture teaches us to adore only God in Christ. (

The Word of God tells us that Mary was highly favoured to be chosen as the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But the Church taught that she is a joint Saviour with Jesus, and that the prayer *Ave Maria* = *Hail Mary* is to be prayed by all the faithful. (1508 A.D.)

Not one of these lies held by the Roman Church before the Reformation is found in Scripture.

2. Second, the entire **structure of the Church of Rome** had lost all likeness to the structure of the Early Church.

In the Early Church all the ministers (also called elders or bishops) were equal. (Acts 14.23; 20.17; 1 Timothy 3.1-7; Titus 3.5-9)

But by the time of Henry VIII the Church was like a human pyramid, with the pope at the summit, then beneath him the cardinals, then beneath them the archbishops, then beneath them the bishops, then beneath them the priests, etc., etc., down to the meanest altar boy.

3. Third, the **morals of the so-called 'clergy'** were so bad that anyone could see that they were not at all followers of "the holy child Jesus."

(A) In the New Testament Church, the ministers of Christ were sincerely holy, set apart for their work and morally upright, though they were far from perfect. (1 Timothy 1.2; Titus 1.4; Acts 2.4; 6.3; 13.9)

But the popes, cardinals, archbishops, bishops, priests and monks lived habitually sinful lives.

They fathered children when none of them were married (fornication, from the Latin 'fornix' = 'brothel').

Then again the popes and cardinals were in the habit of giving plum positions in the church to their sons and nephews (nepotism, or favouritism to one's relatives, from the Italian 'nipote' + 'ism').

Others were guilty of bribing others to obtain favours (this is called simony, after Simon Magus, who offered money to the apostles in exchange for supernatural gifts, Acts 8.18-19).

Both popes and his cardinals devoted themselves to questioning, torturing and putting to death all who persisted in rejecting their authority.

The lives of the 'lower clergy' or priests, monks and nuns were scandalous. They disgusted the people for their

gluttony, gambling, drunkenness and sheer sensuality. As Professor Blunt says: “Too often they were persons taken from the lowest of the people, with all the gross habits of the class from which they sprang – loiterers on the ale-house bench; scarce able to say by rote their *Paternoster* (i.e. the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6.9-13 and Luke 11.2-4); often unable to repeat the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20.3-17) – Mass priests, who could just read their Breviaries (books containing the ‘offices’ for each day, which they had to recite) and no more – men often dubbed by the uncomplimentary names of Sir John Lack-Latin, Sir John Mumble-Mattins, or Babbling and Blind St. John. In fact, the carnal living and general secularity (i.e. worldliness) of ministers of religion were proverbial before the Reformation.”

Perhaps the worst aspect of their lives was their habitual breaking of the 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment: “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” When herds of men and women were shut up in monasteries and convents, bound to a vow of ‘perpetual celibacy’ (i.e. never to marry), and yet allowed to confess to each other particular sins that should only be told to God, is it surprising that such immoral conduct prevailed among them?

The Report of Henry VIII’s Commissioners later recorded: “Manifest sin, vicious, carnal, and abominable living, is daily used and committed in abbeys, priories and other religious houses of monks, canons and nuns; and that albeit many continual visitations have been had, by the space of 200 years or more, for an honest and

charitable reformation of such unthrifty, carnal, and abominable living, yet that, nevertheless, little or none amendment was hitherto had, but that their vicious living shamefully increased and augmented.” This Report gave the lie once and for all to the idea that men and women become more holy by retiring into ‘holy retreats’ from the world, the flesh and the devil.

Let us never forget that wherever people go, they take their sinful natures with them, and that without their conversion to Christ, those natures are bound to assert themselves in immoral living.

The Word of God warns us that “fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness” always gives rise to sexual immorality, even that most abominable sin of sodomy. (Ezekiel 16.49)

(B) Secondly, in the New Testament Church both ministers and people knew the Word of God and strove to build up each other in the Christian Faith. (2 Timothy 3.14-17; Ephesians 4.11-16)

But in the Church of Henry VIII both priests and people were very ignorant. Although the Church abounded in wealth, its army of bishops, priests, abbots, friars, canons, monks and nuns was ignorant of Christian knowledge: of God, the Lord Jesus, and the way of salvation. It was a Church without a Bible, and a Church without the Spirit of God. Such a Church is as useless as a light-house without a light.

Typical of the ignorance of the Church were the ‘clergy’ of Gloucester. When Bishop John Hooper came to examine them in 1551, 168 out of 311 did not know the Ten Commandments, and 31 of these could not tell where in the Bible they are found!

As for the poor people, they had no true religion at all. They had no one to tell them of the love of God, the sacrifice of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, how to be right with God or how to prepare for heaven. In times of trouble or sickness, they could only send for the priest, who knew nothing himself of the comforts of the Gospel, and could tell nothing to others. At their deathbed, he pretended to give them a full pardon (called ‘absolution’), anoint them with oil (called ‘extreme unction’) and then send them on their journey into a dark eternity.

(C) In the Early Christian Church any superstition or “will-worship,” as the apostle Paul calls it (Colossians 2.23), was quickly dealt with and put away.

But in the Roman Church in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century it was let loose on the people as part of their religion.

In Worcester, for example, there stood a huge statue of the Virgin Mary which thousands went to visit every year. They did this because they were taught that while Jesus is very severe, His mother Mary is gentle and kind, and would receive them and introduce them to her Son. So they came to venerate her as a co-Saviour. They were

never taught that Mary herself expressed her need of salvation when she said: “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.” (Luke 1.46-47)

Another superstitious practice was for pilgrims to visit Repton Priory, in Derbyshire, where St. Guthlac’s bell was held in special honour. Why? Because the Church told them that all who placed their heads inside it would be cured of headache! Of course, the resident monks were paid for their wonder-working bell!

At Reading Abbey, in Berkshire, a one-winged angel was put on display by the monks on festive occasions, and was given religious honour by the poor, credulous people.

The nuns of St. Mary’s, Derby, claimed to have a piece of doubting Thomas’s shirt. (John 20.24-29) This was taken out of a large wooden chest and worshipped by pregnant women to give them hope of a healthy baby!

The poor people were directed by their religious leaders to seek spiritual and material benefit from such lying wonders for one very telling reason: these ‘spiritual directors’ could not direct them to God through the Lord Jesus Christ because they did not know Him themselves!

Yet we must not imagine that the priests believed in these things. They knew full well that they were fakes.

All they wanted was the people's money and obedience, so that they could hold on to their wealth and power.

(D) In the Early Church the Church leaders were poor, and the richer people shared their wealth with those in need. (2 Corinthians 6.10; 2 Corinthians 9; Acts 2.44-45) Indeed, no-one was to be chosen as a minister of the Church if he was seen to be "greedy of filthy lucre" (i.e. money) (1 Timothy 3.3; Titus 1.7; 1 Peter 5.2) They all tried by the grace of God to bring their life style as near as they could to that of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But in the late Medieval Church the 'churchmen' lived in great luxury. A manuscript of the day portrays a swarm of Roman priests in the house of a nobleman. They were attending a banquet he was hosting for the father of his bride-to-be. This is just one proof that they thrust themselves into every aspect of people's lives, and had a finger in every business. From the cradle to the grave they tried to control the people.

In their lust for "filthy lucre" they persuaded mourning relatives to pay them money to sing 'requiems' or 'masses for the dead.' Or they advised the pious people to go on pilgrimage to the shrine of Thomas à Becket at Canterbury, where their gifts would be credited to their names in heaven.

Sometimes they induced sinners to donate large tracts of land to the Church, in order to atone for their sins. For instance, one of the four murderers of Thomas à Becket

was persuaded to build Beauchief Abbey, near Sheffield, for this purpose.

In such ways as this, the Church gradually transferred a third of the nation's wealth into its own coffers. "In fact," says Bishop Burnet, "if some laws had not restrained them, the greater part of all estates in England had been [would have been] given to religious houses."

(E) In the Early Church, our Lord's apostles told the people that they were not lords over their faith, but helpers of their joy. (2 Corinthians 1.24) Instead of exalting themselves above others, they humbled themselves, putting themselves on the same level as the elders. (1 Peter 5.1; 2 John 1)

But in the late Medieval Church the priests did all they could to keep power in their own hands. For instance, they claimed to hold the very keys of heaven and hell; that is, to be able to let people into either eternal salvation or eternal damnation. They forced the people to confess their sins to them alone. From them alone could pardon be obtained. In fact, in 1598 a certain Italian priest took an immense sum of money out of England to Rome. Why? Because he had obtained permission from the pope to absolve people from "usury, theft, manslaughter, fornication, and all crime whatsoever, except smiting the clergy and conspiring against the pope."

Let us look at a few of the frauds that these greedy priests practised on the gullible people of England.

At Boxley, in Kent, a great crucifix (statue of Christ on the cross) was set up. It was greatly honoured and received vast offerings. Why? Because the priests had told the people of a particular miracle it could perform. What was this? When its visitors offered copper coins, its face frowned. When they offered silver, its frown disappeared. But when they offered gold, it actually smiled! This was to signify that the Saviour was displeased with small gifts, but was very pleased with great ones! And yet His very death on the cross has already paid for our salvation, as Mrs. Alexander's hymn reminds us:

‘He died that we might be forgiven,  
He died to make us good,  
That we might go at last to heaven,  
Saved by His precious blood.

There was no other good enough  
To pay the price of sin;  
He only could unlock the gate  
Of heaven and let us in.’

When Henry VIII's commissioners examined the crucifix they found wires inside it. The attendant priests moved the face of the image according to the amount of money offered!

Another disgraceful fraud existed at Hales Abbey, in Gloucestershire. Here a vial claiming to contain the blood of Christ was shown to visitors. But it could be shown only to those who offered money to the abbey! When it was examined, the vial was found to contain the blood of a duck, which was replenished every week!

The very carvings still to be seen in some old buildings tell us in wood and stone of the 'clergy's' greed. Friars are shown as foxes preaching, with a stolen goose peeping out of their hood; or as wolves granting a pardon, with a sheep stuffed in their cloak; or as apes sitting on a sick man's bed, with one hand holding a crucifix and the other in the sick man's pocket! Priestly greed must have reached shameful depths for it to be held up to such scorn!

In England, all this moral corruption, ignorance, superstition, greed and love of power was evident everywhere. It affected every town and village, every parish and almost every person in the land.

4. Fourth, they tried to cover their doctrinal, spiritual and moral nakedness with **ornate rituals and splendid shows of wealth and power.**

Once the Old Testament law had been fulfilled in the atoning work of Jesus, all its ornate rituals and ceremonies and holy days were done away with. We do not find *one* passage in the New Testament where special religious clothing is to be worn. Nor do we find

Christians told to go on pilgrimages or to join in processions. Nor do we find believers sacrificing at altars, or bowing and crossing themselves, or carrying incense, or setting apart special holy days, or building chapels to dead saints, or erecting rood screens, or carving out crucifixes, or moulding statues of Mary, to name no other practices.

But in the late Medieval Church the Gospel was smothered with rituals, ceremonies, images, 'holy places' and 'holy days.' There were pilgrimages to Walsingham, pilgrimages to Canterbury, pilgrimages to Boxley, pilgrimages to Glastonbury, pilgrimages to Tintern, pilgrimages to Battle. There were copes, and mitres, and fish-tail hats, and cassocks, and surplices, and penance stools, and confessional boxes, and all kinds of priestly paraphernalia. The list is endless.

Just look at sumptuous St. Peter's, in Rome, built on the proceeds of poor people throughout Europe who were deceived into thinking that by giving to its construction they would help relieve others of their punishment in purgatory for sin.

Look too at St. Mark's, Venice, one of the most ornate buildings in Europe. The truth is, they either had to give or to suffer mental torment over their and their loved ones' sins.

These things, and many more like them, were designed to glorify 'Holy Mother Church' and overawe the people

into submission. And by cunning priest-craft they largely succeeded.

5. Fifth, the Roman Church was notorious for **persecuting** those who disagreed with it.

During the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Albigenses, a dualistic sect who believed in two powers, good and evil, that were eternally opposed, were ruthlessly crushed by the Inquisition and monastic orders, and the brilliant Provençal civilisation of Southern France was destroyed.

The Waldensians, a mainly orthodox dissident group originating near Lyons, France (1170-80), were slaughtered in the mountains and valleys of Savoy for opposing the claims of Rome to be the only true church. In the kindness of God, however, they survived the murderous papacy under Innocent III, and their beliefs entered the mainstream of Protestantism at the Reformation.

Thousands were tortured by the Spanish Inquisition and burnt to death at the *autos-da-fé* = acts of faith (!) “After this court (the Inquisition) had subsisted for two centuries and a half, it underwent what its friends have honoured with the name of a *reform*, in consequence of which it became a more terrible engine of persecution than before . . . According to a moderate computation . . . to 1517 . . . thirteen thousand persons were burnt alive.” (Thomas M’Crie)

We do not know how many English men and women suffered in this way. But one thing is certain: English courtiers and merchants knew of the atrocities in Europe, and were either cowed into submission for fear of persecution, or they took comfort from the fact that England was far from Rome, and so was not as easy to control as other European nations.

### **Summary Conclusion**

In sum, the religion of early Tudor England was just like the religion described by Jesus when he spoke of the Jewish leaders and their people as “the blind leading the blind.” Both, he added, would fall into the ditch! It was a religion without God, without Christ, without faith, without hope, without love and without good works pleasing to God. It was a religion of fear, of superstition, of ignorance, of ‘good works.’ At best it was a meaningless round of pilgrimages, penances, masses and frightened obedience to the priests.

When poor sinners felt the need to be right with God, to draw near to Him, to enjoy His presence, the very “Church which called itself the door of entrance into God’s presence had barred the road with its priesthood . . . its sacramental system . . . its wearisome round of prescribed ‘good works.’ . . . When a man or woman felt sorrow for sin, the Church told them to go, not to God, but to a man, often of immoral life, and confess their sins to him . . . When they wished to hear the comforting words of pardon spoken, it was not from God, but from man, that the assurance came. God’s grace to help to

holy living and dying was given, they were told, through a series of sacraments which fenced man's life round . . . These were not the signs and promises of the free grace of God . . . At all points the Church stood sentry over God's presence," arrogantly claiming that sinners could only get near Him through the gates she guarded, and paying toll in sordid money. (Thomas M. Lindsay)

This is why England needed the Reformation.

## Special Terms

**Priest** – A term used in the Bible of Jewish and pagan religious office bearers, but not of Christian ministers. Because it is at root no more than ‘baptized paganism,’ the Roman Catholic religion calls its ‘on-the-ground’ office bearers ‘priests.’

**Pope** – The term derives from the Old Church Latin ‘papa’ = ‘father.’ The pope is the official head of the Roman Catholic Church.

**Clergy** – (From the Church Latin term ‘clericus’ = ‘clerk’ or person set apart to minister in the Church. In the Churches of Rome and England, the ‘clergy’ are unbiblically distinguished from the ‘laity’ (from the Greek ‘laos’ = ‘people’), those who are not ordained to this office. Strictly speaking, the ‘laity’ are the believing people of God.

**Redeemed** – This highly important Bible word, derived from the Latin ‘redimere’ = ‘to buy back,’ refers to the all-sufficient payment of His life blood by the Lord Jesus Christ in order to save His people from sin.

**Medieval** – This term (from the modern Latin ‘medium aevum’ = ‘middle age’) refers to those centuries roughly between 600 and 1500 A.D. These occupy a ‘middle age’ between the ‘ages’ of early Christianity and the modern world.

**Heresies and Errors** – Heresies (from the Greek ‘haeresis’ = ‘sect’) are serious departures from true Bible teaching, especially when they lead to divisions and separations. Errors (from the Latin ‘errare’ = ‘to err’) are mistakes in belief that are not as serious as heresies.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Causes of the English Reformation**

Christian students are usually told of five causes of the 16th century European Reformation. They all apply to the English Reformation. We may summarise them as follows:

1. People of all classes were **deeply dissatisfied** with the appalling **corruptions** in the Papacy and the Church of Rome.

This is not surprising. Even non-churchgoers can tell whether church people behave as Christians or not.

The German monk **Martin Luther** challenged these evils, eventually condemning the entire system. When he saw in Rome all the wealth and wickedness he never expected to find in 'the holy city,' and found it robbing and infecting his native Germany, he said: "the true treasure of the Church is the most holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God."

Luther's bold challenge came to the notice of many English people, who began to read his writings and see that the original apostolic Church could not be recognized in the Church of Rome. The Church had become horribly deformed. This fact is borne out by Machiavelli, a leading Italian political writer. "We Italians are more irreligious and corrupt than others," he wrote, "because

the church and its representatives set us the worst example.”

2. The turning of scholars to the **original sources** (the Latin term used at the time is *ad fontes* = *to the founts or sources*) of the Christian Church, namely, the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament.

This movement, a part of the **Renaissance** (or ‘re-birth’ of Classical ideals) was led on the continent by ‘**humanists**’ (students of the ‘humanities’).

The most prominent of these were **Conrad Pellican**, possibly the most learned Christian Hebrew scholar of the time and a future Protestant Reformer; **Johannes Reuchlin**, who was persecuted for valuing Jewish writings that the Roman Catholics were destroying; and **Desiderius Erasmus**, the leading scholar in Europe. Erasmus is famous for ridiculing the Roman priests and monks, as well as for recommending peaceful reform within the Church.

This Erasmus spent some time in England and became the close friend of **John Colet**, Dean of St. Paul’s, in London. Colet explained the Letters of the apostle Paul in clear, simple and practical language, besides preaching passionately against the faults of churchmen. Through his ministry the Londoners’ longing for reform increased.

Colet’s importance to the Reformation lies in his seeking the meaning of the original writers of Scripture. Before

him, scholars treated Bible texts not according to their plain meaning, but as proof texts for Romish doctrine. Somehow, these learned jugglers managed to extract no less than four meanings from every text!

Colet put an end to this fanciful way of explaining Scripture. He saw the Bible prophets and apostles as speaking God's words to the men of their generation. If we can understand their message, he said, that message is the same for us today, because the original meaning never changes. What a Bible text once meant, it still means. It was essential, therefore, to understand the Bible as God through the original writers intended.

So then, a whole generation before Henry VIII's breach with Rome, Colet made both Oxford and Cambridge centres of what was termed the 'New Learning.' It was in fact the 'Old Learning' of the Bible brought freshly to light.

In passing, we note that, although these humanists were trained in Italy, they were chiefly interested in the revival of the New Testament and the Greek Fathers, rather than the revived paganism of the Italian Renaissance. This, too, we believe, was the work of the Spirit of God.

We say this because these humanists were loyal Roman churchmen. They hoped to see an educated ministry, for the priests and monks were notoriously ignorant of Scripture. In addition, they wanted churchmen to teach people 'the simple Christian morals of Jesus.' They were

also keen to see ‘the higher clergy,’ such as bishops, archbishops and cardinals give up their wealth, self-indulgence and pomp.

But they did not want a Reformation. For they feared that a thoroughgoing reform of the Church would lead to chaos and anarchy. Their unwillingness to launch out into the deep of doctrinal reform sprang from their loyalty to Rome. Despite this, God used them to further His work.

The renaissance of ancient learning was greatly helped in the providence of God by the Sack of Constantinople (now Istanbul) in 1453. This last remnant of the Byzantine Empire and ‘mother’ of eastern Christianity fell to the Muslim Ottoman Turks. Its emperor was cut down, fighting to the last.

But its Greek scholars managed to escape, and many fled to such European centres as Vienna, Budapest and Prague. Here their copies of the Bible became available to western scholars. Englishmen also studied these manuscripts, and brought their knowledge of Holy Scripture back to England.

A historian of the times therefore concludes: “even before the Protestant Reformation, the Renaissance influenced the English mind.”

### 3. The **invention of printing**, especially the printing of **the Gutenberg Bible** (1451).

The blossoming demand for reading material throughout Western Europe created a huge market for books. **Johannes Gutenberg** of Mainz in Germany invented a new way of producing books quickly and cheaply. This was by transferring ink to paper through a printing press. His technique depended on his invention of movable type, that is, letters that could be re-used after printing one book. This new technology did away with the laborious process of producing manuscripts (handwritten copies) on vellum or parchment (calf- or lambskin). This discovery led to the printing of about a hundred editions of the Bible before 1500.

(A) How the invention of printing influenced the English Reformation is a long story, but the central fact is clear. Once God had made printing available, He next raised up someone to **translate His Word into English**.

Following Martin Luther's translation of the New Testament (1522), the English scholar **William Tyndale** wondered if it would be possible to equal Luther's achievement in our own language. Tyndale was by then deeply critical of the teaching he had received at Oxford University. There, he complained, it was "ordained that no man shall look into the Scripture until he be nooselled [nozelled or clamped down, like the nose at the end of a pipe] in heathen learning eight or nine years and armed with false principles with which he is clean shut out of

the understanding of Scripture.” But for Tyndale theology, or the study of God, was unworthy of the name unless it springs direct from the Bible, God’s own revelation of Himself.

Tyndale’s was very conscious of his debt to printing. Years before his translation of the New Testament, in his patron’s manor at Little Sodbury in Gloucestershire, he had argued with ignorant priests, telling them that before long he would cause ploughmen to know more of the Scriptures than they did. But then his work was done by pen or quill. The invention of the printing press made him (both as a translator and an author) keener than ever to go to Europe, find a printer who would work for him, and so bring the pure Gospel to his fellow countrymen.

Despite much opposition and several setbacks, **Tyndale printed his New Testament in English** in 1526 at Worms, Germany (the very city where Luther had made his noble stand against the corrupt, unreformed Church of Rome). Copies were quickly smuggled into England and widely read.

The translation of even part of the Word of God into the English language was a landmark in the history of the Reformation. Through reading the New Testament in a faithful English translation, people now saw that God Himself had classed as “wicked” those who enthrone sin and “frame mischief by a law” (Psalm 94.20), as the pope had done.

It is not only its “proper English” that made Tyndale’s New Testament popular (that is, it is clear and full of well-known English terms). It also accurately revealed the meaning of the original Greek in English. As it did so, it laid bare some of the frauds that the Church of Rome had committed on the text. This produced great changes in people’s thinking about what the Church should be like.

Just two examples prove this point. Roman Catholics had understood the Greek word *presbyteros* to mean ‘priest.’ This translation was used to prop up the entire Roman system of priesthood, with all its corruptions. But in the Bible ‘priest’ is *hiereus*, and refers only to Jewish or pagan priests. *Presbyteros*, however, refers to a Christian office bearer in the Church, and Tyndale made this clear. He translated the word as *senior*, and later changed it to *elder*.

Then again, the Greek term *ekklesia*, traditionally translated as *church*, now became *congregation*. As they read Tyndale’s work people began to see that instead of a massive institution calling itself ‘the Church’ the Bible refers to a gathering of believers and their families in any particular place.

Once Tyndale’s translation was widely available, there was no turning back. It had to be authorized. To everyone’s amazement, no less a person than Henry VIII himself ordered one of its revisions to be placed in every parish church throughout the land! As Alister McGrath

says: this event was “a central feature of the Reformation.” For it gave the English church and nation a treasure that “would have been unthinkable only a few years earlier – an officially sanctioned English Bible.”

(B) It was through **the printing of good books** based on the Bible that people’s hearts were weaned away from popish tyranny. A law made by Henry IV had decreed that anyone who did not believe what the pope said was to be burned to death. During the early part of the reign of Henry VIII, the pope was still regarded in the west as the head of the Christian Church, and his word was law. But after printing was discovered and books became cheaper to buy, people began to read and to think much more than before. And the more they read, the harder they found it to believe what the pope said.

This conflict sparked off the struggle for *freedom of conscience*, the truth that *God alone is Lord of the conscience*, and that *we must not obey any law that contradicts His Word*. This meant that reform did not depend on the king’s whim, but on the Spirit and Word of God at work in people’s conscience.

Jesus’s apostles, Peter and John, had exercised freedom of conscience when the Sanhedrin, or Jewish parliament, forbade them to preach in the name of Jesus. They replied: “We ought to obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5.29) And so they continued to preach, despite the law against such preaching.

#### 4. **Papal interference** in the state affairs of various European nations.

Claiming to be Christ's Vicar (or representative on earth) and head of both the Church and the world, the pope for years had humbled kings, extorted money from them (annates, or the first year's revenue paid to the pope by priests) and crushed all opposition by intrigue, interdict (forbidding them to hold services and others to feed, shelter or help them) or military force.

A famous English example from a time long before the Reformation shows the pope's power over kings. When Richard the Lionheart died (1199) his brother John became king. A dispute arose between him and the monks of Canterbury as to who should be the next archbishop. Both parties appealed to the pope. He appointed an archbishop of his own, and in anger John banished the man appointed from the realm.

The pope retorted that if he did not allow the banished archbishop to return he would lay England under an Interdict. John refused to obey him, so all the church buildings were closed. No bells were rung, no services were held, no one was baptised, or married, or buried. A pall of gloom hung over the land.

But John still refused to give in. So the pope excommunicated him; that is, put him out of the Church and off his throne. The pope told the people that John was no longer king and that they need not serve or obey

him. He lost all rights, as a man, as king and as a churchman.

Still John defied the pope. So he told the King of France to invade England and defeat John: this would be a 'good work.' The French king welcomed an excuse to invade England, and he began to prepare for war.

This forced John to give in. He found the pope and the King of France against him, besides the Scots, Irish, Welsh and many Englishmen. He was alone, hated by all.

He then did the most abject thing. He submitted to the pope, who sent a messenger to England to humble him. Kneeling before this servant of antichrist, John took the crown from his head and handed it to him. Five days later the messenger returned the crown, but only on condition that in future he would not be the free King of England, but the servant of the pope, and that he must promise to obey the pope at all times.

This famous incident opens a window into the enormous power of the Bishop of Rome in those days. Can we wonder that the people of England cried out for reform?

5. Operating through all these human factors was a **mighty outpouring of the Spirit of God.**

When Zerubbabel was called to build the second temple in Jerusalem and restore the worship of God following the people's return from Babylon (see Ezra 1-6, Haggai

1-2) the Lord told His prophet Zechariah that it would be built “not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit.” (Zechariah 4.6) That is, he would not have to oppress the people or start a war to do God’s work, but God’s Spirit within him and his fellow Jews would enable them to do it peacefully.

So it was with the English Reformation.

When we read in the Bible about the person and work of the Holy Spirit, how gracious and powerful He is, we realize that no one but He could have opened the eyes of thousands of English men and women to the rottenness of that institution which called itself ‘the Church.’

No one but He could have freed their hearts from its slavish tyranny and brought them into the freedom of the kingdom of Christ.

No one but He could have made them men and women of God, who knew their Bibles so well that their ‘learned’ accusers could not overthrow the reasons for their faith.

And no one but He could make ordinary Christian people willing to give their bodies to the flames and their souls to God for the Saviour who had given His body and soul for them.

Truly, as Philip E. Hughes observes: “The Holy Spirit was moving upon the face of England.”

## **Chapter 5**

# **The Doctrines of the English Reformers**

We might think at first that national reform has nothing to do with religion; but we would be mistaken. “In England, as in other countries, the Reformation of the sixteenth century was in its essence a spiritual movement which . . . flowed from the rediscovery of the Gospel of divine grace to which the pages of Holy Scripture bear testimony.” (Philip E. Hughes)

In order to understand it, then, we need to glance at the doctrines or teachings of the English Reformers. For in the Bible, change for the better always springs from the truth of the Gospel, and holy living from the grace of God working through faith.

In the Old Testament, every true Jew had to know God spiritually before he could serve Him aright. By faith, Moses learned to “see Him who is invisible” before he could lead God’s people out of Egypt. By faith, too, David had to know the Lord as his Shepherd before he could slay Goliath and rule God’s people as their king.

In the same way, the New Testament apostles had to be converted before they could become living witnesses to the life, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. John the fisherman had to live close to the Saviour before he could become an Evangelist and write

his wonderful Gospel. Paul the persecutor had to be humbled and taught how great is God's mercy before he could become the fearless and tireless preacher to the Gentiles.

So it was with the English Reformers.

**Hugh Latimer**, for example, described himself as the most bigoted Papist in England before 'little' **Thomas Bilney** told him of the anguish he had once felt in his soul because of sin, the strenuous but futile efforts he had made to remove it, and the peace he had felt when he believed that Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. After that life-changing encounter, when he saw that all the rules in the Roman Church could never heal his wounded conscience, Latimer had to spend years before the light of truth dawned on his mind regarding the errors of Rome and he was able to preach the Gospel of grace that he had so zealously criticized before.

Similarly, while others in the 1520s were making moves towards reform, **Thomas Cranmer** was so much involved in court politics in general, and Henry VIII's divorce case against Catherine of Aragon in particular, to be of any spiritual use to others. But during the 1530s and 1540s he gradually came to realise that the Roman Mass is not the Lord's Supper (as instituted by Christ in the Upper Room) and that we sinners are justified by God's grace alone, and not by any works or merits of ours. After the king's death in 1547 God enabled him to

pilot most of the changes that reformed the worship of the Church in England.

What then is this Gospel of divine grace that the Reformers rediscovered in the pages of Holy Scripture? Briefly, it embraces those truths that span the whole gamut of teaching revealed in the Bible for our salvation: (i) God has graciously revealed Himself in the Bible, His written Word.

(ii) Merely according to His grace, He chose a people for Himself in eternity.

(iii) In grace He sent His Son Jesus Christ to atone for their sins by His death.

(iv) In further grace He sends His Holy Spirit to give them new life and to create faith in them.

(v) We are made right with God by faith alone

(vi) God Himself sanctifies or makes us holy us mainly through the reading and preaching of His Word.

(vii) The ministry is not a priestly caste that offers mass and performs ceremonies, but an office of God-fearing servants who call people to repent of their sins and believe the Gospel.

(viii) Worship is not an elaborate, theatrical performance of rituals by the 'clergy' while the people look on, but a heartfelt service of prayer and praise by the people, aided by their ministers, who preach, baptize and administer the Lord's Supper.

(ix) The Church is not a vast pyramid of 'clerics' but the body of true believers, along with their spiritual teachers and pastoral guides.

In short, by His grace God does all that is needed to unite His people to Himself for ever.

These are the doctrines that the Saviour and His apostles lay down as a foundation in the New Testament, before proceeding to build on them the Christian way of life.

As we read the writings of the English Reformers, we find that they follow the same teachings as Jesus and His apostles. Here is a sample from them:

1. Of *the Bible*, or God's written revelation of Himself, Thomas Cranmer wrote: "this book, which is the Word of God, [is] the most precious jewel, the most holy relic that remains on earth."

Edwin Sandys wrote: "The foundation of our religion is the written Word, the Scriptures of God."

This is precisely what God Himself tells us: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul . . . The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart . . . More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold." (Psalm 19.7,8,10)

Again He says: "Now therefore ye are . . . fellow citizens with the saints . . . and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone." (Ephesians 2.19-20)

2. On *Election*, or God's choosing some to be His own people, the Reformers taught that being dead in sin, no man can save himself or contribute to his salvation in any

way; but that God has “an everlasting purpose . . . to deliver from . . . damnation those whom He has chosen in Christ . . . and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation.” (Article 17 of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion)

The Bible says the same: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world.” (Ephesians 1.3-4)

It also says: “For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thessalonians 5.9)

3. On *Justification*, or being right with God through faith alone, William Tyndale wrote: “That we say faith only justifies ought to offend no man. For if . . . Christ only redeemed us . . . bore our sins . . . then . . . trust only in Christ’s deserving . . . alone quietens the conscience and certifies [to] it that [our] sins are forgiven.”

So too the Scriptures say: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5.1)

They also tell us: “a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 2.16)

4. On *Sanctification*, or being made holy, John Jewel urges: “When we know God, let us glorify Him as our God; let us so live that our words, our deeds, and our

whole life may testify that the kingdom of God is among us.”

So too the Word of God says: “Be ye holy, for I am holy.” (1 Peter 1.16)

It also says: “Ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (1 Corinthians 6.20)

5. On *the Ministry*, John Hooper wrote: “it is every minister’s office . . . to call on the people” to amend their lives, and “to show them truly . . . repentance, which consists of . . . knowledge of sin . . . hatred of sin . . . forsaking of sin . . . believing the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake, and . . . to live in virtuous and godly life . . . to honour God, and to show . . . obedience to God’s law.” Thomas Becon wrote: “the first and principal point of a bishop’s and a spiritual minister’s office [is] to teach and preach the Word of God.”

The Lord Jesus Christ taught the same: “Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying . . . Repent ye, and believe the Gospel.” (Mark 1.14-15)

His apostle Paul also urges Timothy: “Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” (2 Timothy 4.2)

6. On *Worship*, Thomas Cranmer wrote: “It is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God’s Word written.”

So too the Bible teaches: “Ye shall not add unto the Word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it.” (Deuteronomy 4.2)

Jesus also told the Pharisees: “Ye have made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.” (Matthew 15.6)

7. On *Baptism and the Lord’s Supper*, the Reformers wrote that they are “outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace,” not holy water with power to regenerate, nor the real body and blood of Christ, which are in heaven.

So too the New Testament teaches. (Matthew 3.1-12; 1 Corinthians 11.23-26; Luke 24.50-51)

8. On *the Church*, Thomas Rogers wrote that it is both Visible and Invisible, “the invisible are all the elect,” for “the Lord, and He only knows who are His,” and “the members of the visible Church are some of them for God, and some against God.”

The apostles teach the same. (Acts 20.28; 2 Timothy 2.19; Jude 3-4)

“The rule of this Church,” wrote Nicholas Ridley, “is the Word of God . . . The Guide of this Church is the Holy Spirit.”

So says the apostle Paul (2 Timothy 3.14-17) and the Saviour. (John 16.13)

The marks of the true Church are the preaching of the Word and the faithful ministrations of the sacraments. So too say the Scriptures. (Acts 2.42; Matthew 28.18-20)

By comparing these few extracts from the Scriptures with the doctrines taught by the Reformers, we may easily see that they agree. They both teach that the Bible is the Word of God; that we are chosen, called, justified, sanctified and glorified in Jesus Christ to eternal salvation; that the Church is His, and is to be ordered according to His instructions; and that in every aspect of the Christian's life, God is to be glorified, for He alone is the Author and Applier of our salvation.

Read especially the Letters for yourself, and you will discover that doctrine, "clear, ringing doctrine" (J. C. Ryle) setting forth the sheer grace of God, lies beneath all Christian conduct and worship.

This is the full-orbed Gospel of grace that the Reformers discovered in the Bible, and sought to practice in their lives and worship. When God the Holy Spirit applied it to all classes of English society, people saw for the first time that not only were some of Rome's practices wrong, but also that her doctrine or teaching was wrong, and that the building erected on it was rotten.

In short, salvation could not be found in communion with Rome, so they must come out of her, for sooner or later she must fall. When Luther and other continental Reformers offered an alternative, the English Reformers greedily grasped it. The result was national reformation. For this we should always thank God.

# **Chapter 6**

## **The Reformation**

### **Under Henry VIII**

#### **Introduction**

Once the Holy Spirit of God begins to settle His subjects in the doctrines of His Word, He then proceeds to give them experience of its power in changed hearts and reformed lives. When these hearts belong to rulers, in both Church and State, the effect on others becomes widespread. Whole families, communities and even nations are changed.

In this chapter we will study how the Holy Spirit wrought such a change during the reign of Henry VIII.

The historian Thomas M. Lindsay believed that the rupture between the English people and the corrupt Papal Church under Henry VIII “had little or nothing in common with the Reformation.” Rather, “the work done in that reign was simply to demolish the Medieval Church in England. The real Reformation began in the reign of Edward VI, and was carried out into successful issue under Elizabeth.”

This is mainly true. Henry VIII destroyed Papal supremacy; he pulled down the rotten church framework that united the Church of England with the Western Church ruled by the Bishop of Rome, but he put nothing lasting in its place. His aim was to build up a kingly

Papacy, as despotic and worldly as the one he was destroying. The Church he tried to form did not last longer than his own lifetime; but his work was durable enough to give the later Reformation of the Church of England a character of its own. "All reformation of doctrine or worship or morals," said Lindsay, "was as hateful to Henry as to the Bishop of Rome."

### **Early Persecutions**

The early years of Henry's reign (1509-17) were marked by many persecutions in London of both men and women who had "some portion of God's good Spirit" and who "gave their lives for the testimony of His truth." (John Foxe) As individual believers came to be known by their Roman Catholic neighbours, who then told the authorities about them, their "proud, cruel and bloody" enemies taunted them with the question: "Where was this your church and religion fifty or sixty years ago?" Of course, their Church was the Church of the apostles and first New Testament believers. It flourished long before the apostate Church of Rome existed.

Between 1510 and 1527 the records of the City of London note forty citizens accused of 'heresy.' Among their 'crimes' were not giving reverence to a crucifix, criticizing pilgrimages and praying to dead 'saints', calling the priests' prostitutes their gods, despising the authority of the pope, condemning the material wealth of the Roman Church, keeping company with those suspected of 'heresy', speaking against carrying the communion wafer around to be adored, reading 'certain

heretical English books', and denying that Christ's body and blood were in the communion bread and wine.

Among the martyrs of the time were William Sweeting, John Brewster, John Stilman, Thomas Man, Robert Cosin, Christopher Shoemaker and John Brown. These, along with many others who were to die for the Lord Jesus after them, joined the "great cloud of witnesses" whose sufferings are recorded in heaven and will be avenged by God on the Day of Judgment.

The diocese of Lincoln and the Eastern counties were especially notorious for condemning believers. Foxe notes that even before they had heard of Martin Luther, men and women in these districts had begun to profess the Gospel, and that it was condemned as "a novelty." They had learned it "partly out of *Wickliff's Wicket*, partly out of the *Shepherd's Calendar*." In these two popular tracts they discovered that "the sacrament was made *in remembrance of Christ*," not as a repeated sacrifice of His body and blood, and that "Christ our Saviour sitteth on the right hand of the Father," and was not hidden in the sacramental elements.

Wholly ignorant of the Word of God at this time, Henry gave protection to John Longland, Bishop of Lincoln, and his lackeys "in executing and ministering justice to the said heretics, according to the laws of holy church."

This was the attitude towards Christian believers that Henry found when he ascended the throne, and that he wished to encourage.

The first of God's (unwitting) servants (like King Cyrus in the Bible) in His plan for reforming the Church at this time was **Cardinal Wolsey**. This lowborn lover of pomp and power became Henry's minister of war, and skilfully planned victories over the French.

By the time he was Papal Legate (or Ambassador), Wolsey had shown himself to be "the express image of the proud, vainglorious Church of Rome, how far it differs from the true Church of Christ Jesus." (Foxe) He set up a court of his own in which he 'proved' wills and heard 'causes.' His glorious apparel encouraged other churchmen, even the priests, to dress in velvet and silk. He filled his coffers with all kinds of treasure, and even stored silver and gold in barrels. Then he sent out (in the king's name but without his knowledge) orders for every man to part with a sixth of his goods. He even set about reforming the king's household. "Thus," concludes Foxe, "the legate, following the steps of his master the pope . . . under the pretext of the Church practiced great hypocrisy, and under the authority of the king used great extortion . . . so plundering the commons and merchants that every man complained, but no redress was had."

All this extravagance provoked widespread discontent among the people, and so prepared the way for reform.

Meanwhile the cardinal was “playing the persecutor” from his citadel in St. Paul’s cathedral. Seated in his pontifical robes, beneath a cloth of gold, Wolsey caused **Robert Barnes**, the head of the Augustinian priory in Cambridge, to ‘bear his fagot’ for some points that he called heresy.

Sometime between 1523 and 1525 Barnes had been “converted wholly to Christ” through the witness of ‘little’ Thomas Bilney. Not long after, he found himself among the friends of reform who met in the White Horse Inn, Cambridge. Here he enjoyed the fellowship of such men as Bilney and Stafford, Lambert and Latimer, in “the most glorious and heavenly Word of God” (his own words).

This conversion and fellowship brought him into conflict with the authorities over his newfound faith. Having taken a risky poke at the cardinal’s love of pomp and ceremony in one of his sermons, Barnes soon discovered that his enemies had drawn up a list of twenty-five articles as a basis on which to accuse him. As he read these, Wolsey was touched to the quick, and resolved to humble Barnes without expressly charging him. But Barnes refused to apologize, and so was forced to make ‘public penance’ by carrying his faggot to St. Paul’s. Bishop John Fisher of Rochester ‘absolved’ him and those with him, and Barnes returned to Cambridge a free but wiser man.

About the same time, Fisher preached a sermon against Martin Luther that was full of the pope's glory and dignity, so much so that "he forgot to speak of the Gospel which he took in hand to declare." (Foxe) This was because he had no Gospel to preach.

The second of God's unwitting servants was the accomplished lawyer and under-sheriff of London, **Sir Thomas More**. In 1515 he penned his classic book *Utopia*. Much in the mould of Erasmus's ideas for reform, it dreamed of a world of unselfish people who would prove to others the truth of Christianity by their virtue.

But More was already implicated in the 'Hunne Affair,' and so was suspected of being a persecutor of believers. In 1514 the body of Richard Hunne was found hanging in the Lollards' Tower, the Bishop of London's prison for 'heretics.' More pled that Hunne was both a heretic and a suicide, and so deserved to die. But the evidence pointed to murder.

After his leading role in suppressing the Evil May Day violence of 1517, More became a king's councillor and wielded much influence over affairs. He gained even more royal favour by editing Henry's blast against the Reformer Martin Luther (1521), and by 1525 he was found taking stringent measures against the spread of Reformed doctrines in Cambridge.

By 1527 his attitude to Evangelical ‘heretics’ became clear to all. He embarked on a bitter and cruel campaign against **Thomas Bilney**, who was later martyred, and he published a *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* that firmly indicated his final choice: to become a public defender of the Roman faith.

In 1529 More intensified his “bloody crusade” against believers, writing to confute William Tyndale and urging more severe measures against Protestants. The burning of Bilney, Bayfield and Tewksbury drew from him the remark: “there should have been more burned by a great many than have been within this seven year last passed.” Evidently, “Sir Thomas More and Stokesley [Bishop of London] were the kind of men from whom the friends of Reform could expect no mercy.” (Sir Marcus Loane)

The deceit of Romanists was evidenced by More’s use of the legal term ‘relaxed.’ Explains Brian Moynahan: “A prisoner was ‘relaxed’ after the Church had found him guilty of heresy. This did not involve a period of rest and relaxation . . . far from it. It meant that the Church authorities ‘relaxed’ their hold on him by transferring him to the secular authorities for execution. The ritual handing over was designed to preserve the principle that *Ecclesia non novit sanguinem, the Church does not shed blood*. It provided a form of ecclesiastical fig leaf (see Genesis 3.7), since laymen carried out the actual burning, but it was a singularly transparent one. No churchman exonerated the Pharisees for the death of Christ on the grounds that they had merely handed Jesus to Pilate for

sentencing, and that Roman soldiers had performed the crucifixion.”

But in the secret counsel of God More’s opposition to the Reformation brought about his own downfall. By disapproving of the whole proceedings of the English Court and Parliament, and by refusing to approve Henry’s divorce of Catherine of Aragon, and to attend the marriage and coronation of Anne Boleyn, More resigned his office of Chancellor, was condemned for refusing to swear obedience to the Statutes of Succession and Supremacy, and was imprisoned and finally beheaded.

The historian Jasper Ridley summed up the part More played in the English Reformation when he wrote: “No one was more active in persecuting the Protestants who distributed the English Bible than Sir Thomas More . . . a particularly nasty sadomasochistic pervert. He enjoyed being flogged by his favourite daughter as much as flogging heretics, beggars and lunatics in his garden . . . When he was writing as a propagandist for the Catholic Church, he was a shameless liar. On one occasion he wrote a very favourable review of his own book, pretending that it had been written by a(n) . . . eminent foreign theologian, when in fact he had written it himself.”

### **The King’s Matter**

This brings us to ‘the king’s Matter.’ God used the crisis over the king’s marriage to prepare the way for

constructive reform. When Henry ascended the throne in 1509, he married his brother's Spanish widow, Catherine of Aragon. When Catherine failed to produce a male heir to the English throne, he threatened divorce. It meant that there might be a 'succession crisis' when he died. He had a daughter Mary, who was 9 years old in 1525, but there was no precedent for a female queen. Henry even feared that there might be a civil war if he died without a son.

Mere politics were not at the forefront of Henry's worries. He believed that God was angry with him; for in fact he did have a son, Henry, who was born to his mistress Bessie Blount in 1519. The king thought that if he could have a son by her but not by his queen, then God was punishing him. By having this son, Henry had broken God's law, as spelt out in Exodus 20.14, which forbids all sexual relations outside marriage.

Furthermore, Henry had married his elder brother's widow. This too seemed to be forbidden by the Word of God: Leviticus 18.16 – "Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy brother's wife." But Henry had married the wife of a brother *who had already died*; yet he did not grasp the significance of this at the time, so he sought a solution that would salve his conscience *and* provide him with a male heir.

Sometime in the 1520s Henry felt convicted by both these texts. Indeed, he came to believe that God was angry with both himself and Catherine. Normally, Henry could have asked the pope to annul his marriage. He

could then contract a legal marriage with another woman and hopefully produce a male heir to the throne. But no pope was likely to agree to such a request. In fact, Henry did petition the pope for a divorce, but in vain. Even the high-ranking churchman Cardinal Wolsey (Henry's chief minister between 1515 and 1529) was unable to secure his wish.

To complicate matters, opponents of the divorce found a text in Deuteronomy that allowed Henry to marry his deceased brother's widow. (Deuteronomy 25.7) Boaz had done this after Ruth's husband had died. (Ruth 4.10)

There seemed to be a contradiction somewhere. The Leviticus text forbade him to marry Catherine; the Deuteronomy text encouraged him to marry her. How could the (apparent) contradiction be resolved?

Henry's campaign to obtain a divorce began in earnest in 1527. But already he was 'flirting' with Anne Boleyn, though she refused to sleep with him till 1532, when she was sure of becoming queen. As it was, she fell pregnant in December of that year; they married in the following year (without Papal approval) when her daughter, the future Queen Elizabeth, was born. This meant that in the eyes of the Roman Church Henry was either an adulterer or a bigamist, or both, but no one dared to say so in his presence.

The Sack of Rome in 1527 by mutinous troops of the emperor Charles V dealt Henry's cause a paralysing

blow. This seemed to him to be another token of God's displeasure with the Church of Rome. Could it be mistaken in claiming to be the only lawful Church of Christ on earth? And did Henry really need its approval for his divorce?

As he continued to quarrel with the Spanish-controlled Papacy over the divorce, Henry enlisted the services of **Thomas Cromwell** and **Thomas Cranmer**, both in their differing ways near-Lutherans.

Cromwell, "a discreet but highly motivated evangelical" (Diarmaid MacCulloch), could do nothing towards a solution.

But Thomas Cranmer could. At Cromwell's suggestion, in 1529 he went on a tour of several European universities to consult their theologians on the King's 'Great Matter.' On his return he persuaded Henry that a divorce would be lawful. After Henry had appointed him Archbishop of Canterbury in 1532, Cranmer proceeded to annul the marriage the following year.

How Cranmer's appointment and dissolution of the marriage advanced the cause of the English Reformation now becomes clear. Cranmer, who was all the time steadily growing in grace and Bible knowledge, was for the next twenty-four years in a position to guide the English Church through the changes it needed to become a truly Christian Church. He was chief adviser on religious affairs to both Henry VIII and Edward VI, and

so was able to put into practice some important Biblical reforms. But because Henry was an ‘absolute monarch,’ Cranmer had to move very cautiously, bide his time, and hope in God that the reforms he had so deeply thought about would one day be put in place.

### **God employs Henry to further Reform**

By the time of his divorce, however, the king was already deeply embroiled in controversies about faith. These helped to further reform in unexpected ways.

As a committed Roman Catholic, Henry was ready to condemn the German Reformer **Martin Luther**, and was actively hostile towards the Bible translator **William Tyndale** when he heard that Tyndale was ‘an early English Lutheran.’

Yet under God Henry’s opposition to both Luther and Tyndale helped on the Reformation.

#### **1. Martin Luther**

When during the ‘teen’ years of the new century the pope claimed that by paying a few coins to the Roman Church people could release their dead relatives from the pains of purgatory (a man-made fiction anyway, invented to meet the costs of building St. Peter’s, Rome), Over in Germany, Luther was bold enough to speak up against this evil of Indulgences (so-called because the pope, their deviser, and Johannes Tetzel, the peddler of these pieces of paper promising to ‘indulge’ or relax the punishment

due to offenders for their sins). A popular ‘jingle’ of the day mocked the whole ‘scam’:

‘As soon as the coin in the coffer rings  
The soul from purgatory springs.’

Luther condemned this practice as “the pious defrauding of the faithful.” When the pope excommunicated Luther for his refusal to withdraw his protests, the German Reformer burned the ‘bull’ (or parchment containing his excommunication) and began to re-organize the Church along more Biblical lines. In this move he was well supported by the German princes and people around him.

When Henry heard what Luther had done, he wrote a book against him. He then had the book bound most attractively and sent it to the pope. With much pomp and ceremony, seated on his throne, dressed in his best robes and surrounded by priests, the pope received Henry’s messenger. The messenger knelt humbly before him, kissed his toe, then his cheek, and presented him with the book. After both had made a long speech, the ceremony ended.

When he had read the book, the pope gave Henry a new title: *Fidei Defensor*, which means *Defender of the Faith*. He wrote Henry a letter of thanks, calling him “Our most dear son Henry, the illustrious King of England and Defender of the Faith.” This title remains on our coins to this day, but it no longer refers to the Roman Faith.

Henry was as proud of his new title as he was of his learning, especially about religion; so he held a solemn service in Westminster Abbey, had the pope's letter read to all present, and his new title proclaimed.

All this shows just how much the kings of Europe feared and flattered the pope. Yet God's Word tells us: "The fear of man brings a snare," and "The Lord will cut off all flattering lips." (Proverbs 29.25; Psalm 12.3)

These events, along with Luther's Biblical teachings, soon became known in England, and people wondered if they should leave the communion of Rome and worship God according to His Word and their own conscience, even though they had no official church buildings to worship in.

This movement in the hearts of the people marks the beginning of the spiritual Reformation of the nation, and despite slow progress, under the guidance of God currents were swirling beneath the surface towards massive changes for the better in England.

## **(2) William Tyndale**

Henry's opposition to Tyndale likewise became a tool in God's hand to further the cause of reform. On reading Tyndale's *Obedience of a Christian Man* he saw that the Bible itself encouraged him to oversee the life of the Church in England, and that churchmen were not outside the law of the land. (Romans 13.1-7) These are Tyndale's words: "The king ought to rid his realm from the wily

tyranny of the hypocrites, and to bring the hypocrites under his laws.” The hypocrites were, of course, “the spirituality,” or bishops and priests, “who through falsehood and disguised hypocrisy have sought so great profit, so great riches, so great authority, and so great riches.”

On reading Tyndale’s book, Henry thought he might solve his own problem, grant himself a divorce, and rid himself of troublesome greedy churchmen! Yet he was slow to take action towards becoming head of the Church in England, because he had a natural dislike of reform. Changes for the better therefore came very slowly.

### **Rapid and Momentous Changes**

But unknown to all but the Most High, a clean break with Rome was drawing nearer and nearer.

The events of 1531 contributed considerably towards a shift from the pope’s authority to that of the king. In January several ‘clergymen’ were accused of serving the pope before Henry. Although Henry realized that the pope could not be frightened into granting a divorce, he was determined to intimidate the ‘clergy.’

Cardinal Wolsey had been received as Papal Legate (or Ambassador) by the bishops and priests for some years; but in 1531 the king suddenly accused him of breaking a certain law by accepting that office. The charge included all the ‘clergy’ who had accepted him as the pope’s ambassador! As a punishment for their crime, Wolsey

and the churchmen forfeited all Church property, which according to Scripture should never have been theirs in the first place!

In September Henry was presented with historical sources that claimed to show that as king he was head of the Church in England. If he was head of State *and* Church, he could both disannul his own marriage and regulate the affairs of the Church to his own liking!

Bishop Fisher of Rochester, who opposed the divorce, only managed to secure the words “so far as the law of Christ allows” in relation to the king’s claim to absolute supremacy. Clearly, Henry’s push towards complete control was gaining ground.

By early 1532 he had succeeded in browbeating the churchmen into complete submission. With the approval of the so-called ‘Reformation Parliament’ Henry severed the national Church from Rome, and began to govern its affairs through a law guaranteeing his royal supremacy.

Then Archbishop Cranmer, speaking in the name of the Church in England and by Act of Parliament, declared the marriage to Catherine of Aragon null and void. To make his defiance of the pope clear to all, Henry married Anne Boleyn.

This rapid succession of moves separated England from the centuries-old empire of the Middle Ages. It was the most momentous change in modern English history.

Other significant events followed in quick succession. First, Sir Thomas More was condemned and executed for treason. John Fisher too was beheaded.

Then in 1536 Henry ordered the suppression of the monastic orders and the confiscation of Church lands. This proved to be a tremendous blow to the Roman Church. Within four years it forfeited a third of the property in England to the crown! While the king himself used much of the Church's money to finance his war with France, and the nobles grabbed what land they could for themselves, still God was undermining the power of Rome in the country, and was paving the way for more constructive reform later.

Comments Thomas Lindsay: "No portion of the clergy were more justly attacked than the monks . . . Their laziness, their wealth, their greed, and their bad living were notorious all over Europe."

The same year (1536) saw the introduction of the *Ten Articles*. These articles of faith asserted the authority of Scripture, of the three ancient creeds (Apostles', Athanasian and Nicene), and the first four ecumenical councils (Nicene, 325 A.D., Constantinople, 384, Ephesus, 434, and Chalcedon, 454). These creeds and councils are Catholic (common to the universal Church) but not Roman Catholic.

But the *Ten Articles* were. They were, as one writer says: "Romish, with the pope left out in the cold." Thomas

Fuller said they were meant for “weaklings scarce weaned from their mother’s milk of Rome.” In no way did they remotely approach the Protestant Faith.

They distinctly taught the errors that baptism is necessary to salvation; that penance was necessary; that Christ’s body and blood were corporally present in the Eucharist; that we are justified by faith, joined by obedience and love; that images might be used in churches; that the virgin Mary was to be honoured and saints invoked in prayer; that the various rites and ‘holy days’ of the Medieval Church, with their vestments, crucifixes and ‘holy water’, were to be retained; that there is a place called purgatory; and that prayers might be offered for the dead.

Henry was now showing all Europe who ruled the Church in England!

While these events had been taking place, Catherine of Aragon died, Anne Boleyn was beheaded on a charge of unfaithfulness [note the king’s hypocrisy, in view of his repeated unfaithfulness!] and Henry married Jane Seymour.

### **Reaction and Rebellion**

Although these massive changes did not make a Reformation, they nevertheless provoked widespread discontent. In 1536 a ‘Pilgrimage of Grace’ (more accurately, a well organized popular armed revolt against

Cromwell's and Cranmer's reforms of the corrupt Church) threatened to stop any further changes.

The rebellion was sparked off by the execution of Sir Thomas More and Bishop John Fisher. The large numbers of the king's subjects who were still devoted to Rome were embittered by their judicial murder, and in retaliation hoped to overthrow the king altogether. Government sources reported that the rebellion was coordinated with an Imperial/Papal invasion of England from the Continent. Clearly, neither emperor nor pope could tolerate the idea of Henry making himself the Head of the Catholic or Universal Church in England.

Yet despite the weakness of Henry's army, the rebellion failed. The king and Cromwell agreed to feign agreement with the rebels' demands, and invited their leaders to London under the promise of a free pardon and a parliament in the north. Henry taught them a sharp lesson. Without more ado, he easily destroyed them, then sent in the troops to execute as many rebels as they could capture. This too was the doing of the Lord.

In their efforts to promote further reform, Cromwell and Cranmer drew up *The Bishops' Book*, or *The Institution of a Christian Man*. This contained a much more Protestant form of teaching than the *Ten Articles*.

The next year Cranmer devised another creed called the *Thirteen Articles*. These were based on the Lutheran *Confession of Augsburg* after consultation with some

Wittenberg theologians. But the king refused to sanction them. Cromwell aroused Henry's anger further by advocating a scheme of Protestant Union, and by suggesting that he marry Anne of Cleves in order to cement such a union. Like More and Fisher, he too perished on the scaffold!

The trial and execution of further alleged conspirators in 1538 further strengthened Henry's hand.

The next sign of the king's determination to cling to Rome (though not to the pope) was the publication of *The King's Book*. This was a Romanist revision of *The Bishops' Book*.

In 1539 Henry showed his resolve to return to the *status quo* he inherited at his coronation by issuing the *Six Articles*. These were intended "for the abolishing of diversity of opinion." They required all Englishmen, on pain of death, to believe in transubstantiation (the falsehood that the communion bread and wine became body and blood of Jesus after being consecrated by a priest), to deny that drinking communion wine was necessary for the people (though it was drunk by the priest), to accept the celibacy of the clergy, the binding nature of vows of chastity, and the necessity of the Mass and Auricular Confession.

People called these six articles *The Bloody Statute* and *The Whip with Six Strings*. They "began a reign of terror

which ended only with the king's death.” (Thomas M. Lindsay)

### **The Case of John Lambert**

This period of Henry's reign witnessed the trial and condemnation of the Protestant **John Lambert**. It proved (if anyone needed proof) that Henry was determined to block further reform, and was anxious to kill off all Protestant 'heresy' in his realm.

[There is in fact no such thing as 'Protestant heresy.' This is a convenient term used by 'revisionist' historians and churchmen to bias people against the truth. Any one who 'protests' or 'bears witness' against evil, whether doctrines or practices, is taking a stand for the truth and right. He is not a heretic.]

The king commanded Cranmer to refute Lambert's claim that the body of Christ was not present in the wafer and wine on the altar. But Lambert answered so well that the king was deeply moved, Cranmer was entangled and the audience amazed. Nevertheless, the faithful servant of Christ was condemned and burned alive on 22 November.

John Foxe describes Lambert's martyrdom in the following words:

“Upon the day that was appointed for this holy martyr of God to suffer, he was brought out of the prison at eight of the clock in the morning . . . being admonished that the hour of his death was at hand, he was greatly comforted

and cheered . . . When the breakfast was ended, he was carried straightway to the place of execution [Smithfield, London], where he should offer himself to the Lord a sacrifice of sweet savour . . . As to the terrible manner of burning of this blessed martyr . . . there was yet none so cruelly and piteously handled as he. For after his legs were consumed and burnt up to the stumps, and the wretched tormentors and enemies of God had withdrawn the fire from him, so that but a small fire was left under him, then two that stood on each side of him with their halberds pitched him upon their pikes, as far as the chain would reach. Then he, lifting up such hands as he had, and his fingers' ends flaming with fire, cried to the people in these words: 'None but Christ! None but Christ!' and so being set down again from their halberds, fell into the fire, and there ended his life."

### **Reforms but no Reformation**

The latter years of Henry's reign seemed to bring out the worst in the king's cruel, selfish and domineering nature. Satan seemed to be using him to create havoc in the realm. He ordered the execution of both Romanists and Protestants, albeit for different reasons. Romanists were condemned for treason, Protestants for 'heresy.'

The power struggle between the conservative Roman faction and those Protestants who demanded further reform continued unabated. Cranmer's installation of the Bible in parish churches and the *Ten Articles* of 1536 had swayed the nation gently in a Lutheran direction. But the

publication of the distinctly anti-Protestant *Six Articles* of 1539 signalled a strong pro-Roman reaction.

The fall and execution of Thomas Cromwell a year later seemed ominous for Cranmer. Indeed, his enemies tried to topple him, but Henry, who trusted and respected him, protected him. In view of later developments under Cranmer, Henry's protection was a key factor in preparing for later reform.

Still, danger lurked on every corner. In 1542 Pope Paul III officially approved the **Inquisition**, extending its reach to every country. We must not imagine that Rome's inquisitors merely inquired about people's faith. They also imprisoned, tortured and killed those they called 'heretics,' whether they were Protestants, Jews or even Catholics. Cardinal Caraffa (later Pope Paul IV) actually said: "If our own father were a heretic, we would carry the wood to burn him!" Under such a threat no believer was safe.

### **Summary Conclusion**

When he died in 1547, Henry was viewed as a cruel tyrant. Yet God had used him to bring in some very important reforms.

1. In the first place, the Bible could now be heard read in many parish churches in England. This was God's answer to William Tyndale's prayer at the stake: "Lord, open the King of England's eyes." In 1537 Henry had approved the new translation of the English Bible,

produced by John Rogers, but known as Matthew's Bible. The Word of God had been given royal approval, and was authorized for general sale. From now on, the title page bore the words: "Set forth with the king's most gracious licence." Before long Henry ordered a copy of the Bible to be placed in every parish church in England.

A print exists showing a man named Porter reading it in the crypt of St. Paul's cathedral around 1540. Among his hearers were both enemies and friends of the Reformation. On the right is cruel Bishop Bonner, who is speaking to a monk. Humphrey Monmouth, Tyndale's good friend, is seated among the hearers. Beside him is Anne Askew, a lady whose faith was firmer than that of many men. She was later tortured and burned to death at the hands of Sir Thomas More. In the background on the left are Bishop Gardiner, enemy to all reform, and Thomas Cromwell, who had done much to promote the public reading of Scripture, and Miles Coverdale, the Bible translator. In the shadow of the pillar are three martyrs, who were burned with Anne Askew in the fires of Smithfield.

The public availability of the Word of God in English was the doing of the Lord, and it is marvellous to us, especially in view of Henry's hatred of Martin Luther, William Tyndale and the Protestant faith. With the Bible in their hands, people became better taught in the things of God than the priests ever were. Furthermore, the open Bible taught them that all the members of Christ's Congregation are equal in God's eyes. This doctrine of

‘the priesthood of all believers’ gives every believer the freedom to minister to his fellow believer’s needs, instead of leaving him under the power of the priest.

2. Then again, Henry had ordered the monasteries, convents, priories and abbeys, where the monks and nuns lived, to be closed, and had sent their residents out into the fields and streets, to earn a proper living and contribute something to the common good. Some of these monasteries had been very rich, even laden with jewels, wood carvings and paintings, and possessing much land.

We have already noticed that many monks and nuns lived scandalous lives. Though they made vows to remain chaste, they were sexually ‘free,’ and when Henry’s commissioners searched their haunts, they found many infant skeletons in the tunnels between men’s and women’s ‘religious houses.’ All these evils were recorded in black books, a practice that gave rise to the saying: “Better not get into his black books!”

Although the ‘dissolution of the monasteries,’ (as the closure of such religious houses is called) still makes some romantically minded and sentimental people angry, there is not a word to warrant such single sex communities in the Bible. When we remember that these places were little more than dens of vice, we should be thankful that they were ‘dissolved.’ Let us remind ourselves that God encourages us to live in ‘normal’ families (i.e. husband, wife and children) and open

communities such as cities, towns, villages and hamlets, so that we may all benefit each other and the nation at large.

3. Thirdly, in his desire to rid himself of the Papacy Henry was not alone. He had precedents in Europe. For example, Charles VIII (ruled 1483-98) of France had presented a challenge to Rome as his country grew stronger. By 1516 his successor Francis I was virtually the head of the Church in France. Henry knew of Francis's position, and may have wished to copy his example. This was a further factor in God's plan to rid England of Papal tyranny, and make His Church in England independent. Do not forget: "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, and He turns it wherever He wills." (Proverbs 21.1)

Before we leave Henry, let us remind ourselves that although he had broken with the pope, he never became a true Christian, nor did he wish the religion of England to change. The king would never have burned Protestants nor left £600 for Masses to be said for his soul if he had become a true Christian. He remained a Roman Catholic to the end.

## **Key Persons**

**Henry VIII** (1491-1547) King.

**Thomas Wolsey** (1474-1530) Roman Catholic Cardinal.

**Thomas More** (1478-1535) Lord Chancellor of England and persecutor of the true Church of God.

**Thomas Cromwell** (1485-1540) Chief adviser to Henry VIII and the one who steered the king towards involvement in the Reformation.

**Thomas Cranmer** (1489-1556) The first Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury.

## Key Events

- 1509 Henry VIII becomes King of England.
  - Monks contended with each other.
  - Persecution of Protestants continues.
- 1503 Julius II is Pope until 1513.
- 1511 Earliest martyrs in Henry's reign.
- 1513 Leo X is chosen Pope.
- 1515 Thomas Wolsey becomes Lord Chancellor and a Roman Cardinal.
- 1517 Martin Luther challenges Rome over Indulgences.
- 1519 Martyrs burned to death at Coventry.
- 1520 The Pope excommunicates Luther.
- 1521 Henry supports the Pope against Luther, and is made 'Defender of the (Roman) Faith.'
- 1522 Adrian VI chosen Pope.
- 1523 Clement VII is chosen Pope.
- 1529 Sir Thomas More becomes Lord Chancellor.
- 1529 The 'Reformation Parliament' supports Henry's 'reforms' (1529-36).
- 1531 Fall of Wolsey.
- 1532 The breach with Rome in full swing.
- 1533 Catherine prevented from appealing to Rome against the annulment of her marriage.
  - Henry marries Anne Boleyn.
- 1534 Henry severs England from Papal authority, and becomes Head of the Church of England.
  - The Act of Succession makes people take an oath agreeing to the annulment of the marriage and to the king's supremacy.
  - Sir Thomas More and Bishop Fisher of Rochester

refuse to take the oath.

The Act of Supremacy makes Henry head of the Church in England.

The Treason Act makes denial of the king's supremacy treason.

Paul III chosen Pope.

1535 Martyrdom of William Tyndale in Vilvorde, the Netherlands (now Belgium).

Execution of Sir Thomas More and Bishop Fisher for treason.

1536 Dissolution of the Monasteries (1536-40) begins.

Five hundred religious 'houses' closed.

Execution of Anne Boleyn; Henry marries Jane Seymour.

The 'Pilgrimage of Grace,' a Popish uprising in the north of England, is suppressed.

The Ten Articles imposed on the Church.

1537 Jane Seymour dies after giving birth to the future Edward VI.

1538 The Bible in English placed in parish churches.

1540 Henry marries Anne of Cleves, then Catherine Howard.

Thomas Cromwell is executed on a charge of treason.

1542 Catherine Howard is executed.

1543 Henry marries Catherine Parr.

1545 Pope Paul III opens the Council of Trent.

1547 Death of Henry VIII; Edward VI crowned king.

## Special Terms

**Evangelical** – This term comes from the Greek ‘evangelion’ = ‘Good News.’ It signifies the Gospel that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

**Mass** – Derived from the Latin ‘missio’ = ‘I send,’ this term was used by the priest to dismiss the congregation. Gradually it came to refer to the central service in the Roman Church. “Without the Mass . . . the Pope . . . and the clergy of the Western Church would have had no power for the Protestant reformers to challenge, for the Mass was the centrepiece around which all the complex devotional life of the Church revolved.” (Diarmaid MacCulloch)

**Diocese** – the territorial unit of the Church administered by a bishop. The word was adopted from the territorial divisions of the Roman Empire. In Greek, the term is ‘diokēsis’ = ‘administrative unit.’ There was no such unit in the early Christian Church. Each church or group of churches was ruled by a presbytery of elders. (Acts 20.17,28; Philippians 1.1; 1 Timothy 4.14)

**Celibacy** – the state of remaining unmarried in order to devote oneself to religion. Since the 4<sup>th</sup> century celibacy was imposed on the Roman Church, even though Peter, its supposed pope, was married. (see Mark 1.30; 1 Corinthians 9.5)

**Auricular Confession** – the Roman Catholic practice of confessing one’s sins to a priest. It is called ‘auricular’ because the confession is made through a grilled partition into his ear (from the Latin ‘auris’ = ‘ear’).

# **Chapter 7**

## **The Reformation**

### **Under Edward VI**

#### **Introduction**

Henry VIII had three children: Mary, Elizabeth and Edward. Although he was the youngest of the three, Edward was made king, because he was a boy, and in those days a female heir to the throne was unthinkable.

His mother was Lady Jane Seymour, who was a Protestant, and so was her brother Lord Somerset, who now became Protector. So Edward was brought up in the true faith; and although he had no real power in the land, he wanted the nation to become Protestant.

If his father had broken the power of the pope in England, Edward's calling was to exalt the power of Christ and His Word. Even at the tender age of nine, when he ascended the throne, he showed a love for the truth worthy of a mature Christian man. Because he so much resembled an Old Testament king in his youth, personal godliness and efforts towards reform, he was referred to as 'the English Josiah.' (See 2 Kings 21-23; 2 Chronicles 33-35; and page 17) At his coronation the three swords of state were carried before him. "But where is the fourth sword?" asked the young king. "What sword, your majesty?" asked a councillor. "The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God," Edward replied.

For the first time in the nation's history, the sword of the Word was acknowledged to be above the swords of state.

### **True Biblical Reforms**

Edward's accession brought together politicians and churchmen in a united attempt to remove all remaining abominations and promote further reform. Edward's uncle, **Edward Seymour**, Duke of Somerset and Lord Protector of the boy king, headed affairs.

The veteran Evangelical **Thomas Cranmer** was now able to put in place some of his long matured plans for reform. Together, with the consent of the young king and his counsellors, they began to implement the desired changes.

In the first year of the reign, a royal Visitation ordered all remaining images to be destroyed, the old 'heresy' laws were abolished and all chantries were dissolved. Edward's councillors also began to eliminate all elaborate choral and organ music tied to the Roman liturgy.

Cranmer then sought to provide the Church with a godly, well-educated ministry, because so few priests ever preached a sermon from the Word of God and so few people heard one. But his plans for a thorough ministerial training never materialized. Nevertheless, he did oversee the publication of the **Book of Homilies** (or Sermons) published in 1547. These set forth true Evangelical theology, and were to be read to the people wherever a

proper ministry was lacking. Cranmer wrote three of these homilies himself.

Listen to the opening of the very first sermon: “Unto a Christian man there can be nothing either more necessary or profitable than the knowledge of Holy Scripture, forasmuch as in it is contained God’s true Word, setting forth His glory and also man’s duty. And there is no truth nor doctrine necessary for our justification and everlasting salvation but that is or may be drawn out of that fountain and well of truth.”

Listen too to the description of ‘true, lively and Christian faith’: “this is not only the common belief of the articles of our faith, but it is also a sure trust and confidence of the mercy of God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and a steadfast hope of all good things to be received at God’s hand.”

Lastly, listen to one of the many stirring encouragements to be found in these sermons: “Good Christian brethren and sisters, advise yourselves; consider the dignity that ye be now set in. Let not folly lose the thing that grace hath so preciously offered and purchased. Let not wilfulness and blindness put out so great light that is now showed you. Only take good hearts unto you, and put upon you all the armour of God, that ye may stand against your enemies, which would again subdue you and bring you into their thraldom.”

Like the rest of these sermons, these extracts aim to be as faithful to the Word of God as possible.

Cranmer's most outstanding achievement was to fix the Church's order of service and worship. From the many Medieval manuals of prayer and devotion, he masterminded two successive versions of the **Book of Common Prayer** in English (1549; 1552). Instead of a variety of Latin books containing different services, he provided the Church with one book that contained services for daily, Lord's Day and Special Seasonal use, as well as the Book of Psalms and Bible readings for the whole year.

Rightly understood, this Prayer Book is thoroughly Biblical in doctrine. Its doctrines are not merely Calvinistic or Augustinian; they are Apostolic. As David N. Samuel says: "these doctrines had been present from the very beginning, and had been the mark of true authenticity and catholicity. They were restored to the Church of England at the Reformation." In other words, their teaching stretches right back to the earliest days of Christianity, and is far older than the corrupt teaching of the Church of Rome.

Cranmer's service for Holy Communion especially reveals his ability as a Christian theologian and prose writer. It contains the true Biblical understanding of both the Lord's Supper and Justification by Faith.

One of the communion prayers contains the following precious reminder that the Lord's Supper is not a sacrifice at all, but a commemoration of a once-for-all accomplished redemption: "Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who of Thy tender mercy didst give Thine only Son Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption; who made there (by His one oblation of Himself once offered) a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world; and did institute, and in His holy Gospel command us to continue, a perpetual memory of that His precious death, until His coming again: Hear us, O merciful Father, we most humbly beseech Thee; and grant that we receiving these Thy creatures of bread and wine, according to Thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ's holy institution, in remembrance of His death and passion, may be partakers of His most blessed Body and Blood . . . etc."

The Collects or Prayers of the Prayer Book too are penned in beautiful English prose and designed to serve every believers' need.

Listen to the Second Collect, for Peace: "O God, who art the Author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom, defend us Thy humble servants in all assaults of our enemies, that we, surely trusting in Thy defence, may not fear the power of any adversaries, through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Listen too to the Third Collect, for Grace: “O Lord our heavenly Father, Almighty and everlasting God, who hast safely brought us to the beginning of this day, defend us in the same with Thy mighty power, and grant that this day we fall into no sin, neither run into any kind of danger; but that all our doings may be ordered by Thy governance, to do always that is righteous in Thy sight, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Lastly, listen to the Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent: “Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of Thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which Thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.”

The Prayer Book was immensely important in settling worship of both the Church of England and the Anglican communion of churches throughout the world. Sadly, it is now replaced in many areas by alternative service books that virtually deny its great Bible truths. As Derek A. Scales says: “In the national church the Book of Common Prayer need to be restored to full use. Its present position of increasing eclipse is a disaster for the church and nation.” Yet constitutionally it remains the official liturgy of the Church of England.

Besides having the Latin prayers translated into English, Cranmer also had altars (places of sacrifice) changed to

communion tables (from which the Lord's Supper was administered); images, candles and incense banned; stained glass windows replaced with plain glass, both to let in more light and to signify the light of the Gospel that was now shining into the Church; and church music simplified, so that instead of the confusing word-settings of the Roman Mass sung only by a choir, the people could sing one note to each word as a congregation.

In introducing these reforms, Cranmer proceeded cautiously but firmly. He was anxious to retain what was good from the past, and so his reforms took hold by stages. In the kindness of God, most of them were welcomed by the nation.

[A point of interest here is the origin of the term 'Great Britain. As in 1547 Protector Somerset made his way north to pursue a war with Scotland, hoping to enforce a marriage between Mary Queen of Scots and king Edward, he spoke warmly of the religious changes taking place, and offered the prospect of a new united kingdom – Great Britain.]

Edward's government also **invited some continental Reformers to England** to aid the work of reform here. Those most congenial to their aims were **John à Lasco**, **Peter Martyr Vermigli** and **Martin Bucer**, for they shared Cranmer's new view of the Lord's Supper.

Instead of seeing the body and blood of Christ 'in, with and under' the bread and wine, as Martin Luther taught,

Cranmer now believed Christ to be in the hearts of believers when they received communion. This teaching is called 'Receptionism,' because believers *receive* the Saviour into their hearts by faith as they remember His broken body and shed blood. The Supper gives them an extra opportunity, as Robert Bruce was later to say in Scotland, to get a firmer grip of Him, to become more assured that He is theirs and they are His.

Vermigli and Bucer were given the leading theological chairs in Oxford and Cambridge. John à Lasco pastored the foreign congregation in London (1550). Thousands of Europeans and Protestant refugees followed them into England, where they proved to be a great asset to the nation, especially as skilful printers, weavers, farmers and merchants. Following the death of Bucer, the government invited Philip Melanchthon, Luther's former right hand man, to succeed him, but he remained in Wittenberg.

Edward also appointed **six royal preachers** to tour the country, declaring the true Gospel to all and sundry. Among these was **John Knox**, the Scottish Reformer. Knox had returned with other exiles from Calvin's Geneva. He was a man on fire for God. In Lancashire and Cheshire, the royal preacher was **John Bradford**, a most holy man of God who later suffered martyrdom.

The removal of Somerset by his colleagues in 1549 did not halt the progress of reform. After much thought and consultation with other Reformed theologians, by 1553

Cranmer had fixed the doctrinal basis for a Reformed Church in England in the **Forty-two Articles** (shortened to Thirty-nine Articles in 1571). These Articles anchor the Church in England to the Word of God, and link it to the early Creeds and Reformed churches everywhere. On the one hand they reject Medieval and Papal heresies and errors; on the other the fanatical extremes of the Radical Reformers or Anabaptists and other ultra-spiritual sects. This was Cranmer's second major achievement.

Though unable to achieve his desire to **reform 'canon' (or church) law** to bring it into line with Holy Scripture, Cranmer managed to produce a draft, but his scheme was not realized until half a century after his death (1604).

Finally, Cranmer did his utmost to **promote unity with other Reformed leaders** throughout Europe. He longed for greater co-operation between the reformed churches, and for greater effort by their leaders to find a common way forward. To this end he corresponded with many continental Reformers; but had little success in this area. Yet his far-seeing spirit embraced the whole Church of Christ on earth.

As a result of these changes, England began to emerge as a new potential centre for the Reformation, possibly to succeed Zurich or Geneva.

### **Reformed Preachers in England**

To obtain a glimpse of how reform affected the people of England during Edward's reign, we will recall some of

the preachers under whose ministry the Word of God “had free course, and was glorified.” (2 Thessalonians 3.1)

**John Knox** was one of several heaven-sent ministers God gave to England at this time. First as pastor of the English congregation in Geneva, then as court preacher to Edward VI, he had an influence on the English Church that few realize. “He preached constantly before the king, at Hampton, Windsor and Westminster, and was a favourite of the royal boy.” (Elizabeth Whitley)

He was offered the Bishopric of Rochester, but refused the offer because he believed that all bishops are equal, and that their office is the same as that of presbyter, as the Bible teaches.

Knox’s preaching was electric. When he mounted the pulpit, he explained the meaning of the Bible text in only a few minutes; but when he began to apply it (‘for the space of about an hour’ says a hearer) he grew so animated that he was likely to knock the pulpit to pieces! The Lord blessed this kind of preaching. The result was hundreds of converted men and women, changed for the better by the power and grace of God.

He was also filled with the Spirit of Christ. Let us hear him as he prayed publicly for the new popish queen after his beloved king’s death: “Take not from us the light of Thy Evangel, and suffer Thou no papistry to prevail in this land. Illumine the heart of our sovereign lady, Queen

Mary, with pregnant gifts of Thy Holy Ghost. And inflame the hearts of her Council with Thy true fear and love. Repress Thou the pride of those that would rebel . . . But O Lord let us never revolt or turn back to idolatry again.”

His *Admonition to England*, written soon after ‘Bloody’ Mary’s accession, is one of the most moving calls for national repentance it is possible to read. Here is a fragment of it: “O England! Now is God’s wrath kindled against you. Now has He begun to punish . . . He has taken from you the crown of your glory, and has left you without honour . . . And this appears to be only the beginning of sorrows . . . For I perceive that the heart, the tongue and the hand of one Englishman is bent against another, and division to be in the whole realm . . . O England, England! Do you not consider that your commonwealth is like a ship sailing on the sea; if your mariners and governors shall consume one another, shall you not suffer shipwreck . . . ? O England, England!”

One of the most popular preachers in England during Edward’s reign was **Hugh Latimer**. His lively, practical style was greatly blessed to the scholars and townspeople of Cambridge.

It was a ‘proverbial’ saying of the day:

‘When Stafford read, and Latimer preached,  
Then was Cambridge blessed.’

Let us hear a sample of the kind of preaching God used to stir England to the very depths: “And now I would ask

a strange question,” says Latimer. “Who is the most diligentist bishop and prelate in all England . . . ? I can tell, for I know him who it is. I know him well . . . And will ye know who it is? I will tell you – it is the devil. He is the most diligent preacher of all other; he is never out of his diocese; he is never from his cure; . . . ye shall never find him idle, I warrant you. And his office is to hinder religion, to maintain superstition, to set up idolatry, to teach all kind of popery. Where the devil is resident . . . away with books, and up with candles; away with Bibles, and up with beads; away with the light of the Gospel, and up with the light of candles, yea, at noon-days!”

Another moving preacher was **John Bradford**. He was greatly used by the Lord in his native Lancashire and its adjoining county, Cheshire. He was renowned for ripping open people’s steely consciences, and for bringing them to repent of their sins.

Here is part of the opening of his printed sermon on repentance: “The life we have at this present is the gift of God . . . For the which life we should be thankful, so we may not use it after our own fantasy, but to the end for which it is given . . . that is, to the setting forth of God’s praise and glory, by repentance, conversion, and obedience to His good will and holy laws.”

Bradford was renowned too for his deep sense of sin and prayerfulness. Here is a fragment of one of his printed prayers: “O Almighty God and most merciful Father,

Thou knowest and hast taught us also . . . to know that the weakness of man and woman is great, and that without Thy grace they can neither do nor think any good thing: have mercy upon me, I humbly beseech Thee, which am Thy most weak, frail and unworthy child. O be gracious and tender towards me; lighten my mind that I may with pleasure look upon good things only: inflame my heart with the love thereof, that I may carefully covet them; and at the last, by Thy gracious conducting, may happily attain them through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

**John Hooper** too was in great demand as a preacher. On his return from Zurich to England in 1548 Hooper preached in London, often twice, and never less than once a day. “In his sermons,” says John Foxe, “he corrected sin, and sharply inveighed against the iniquity of the world, and the corrupt abuses of the church. The people in great flocks and companies came daily to hear him, insomuch that oftentimes when he was preaching, the church would be so full that none could enter further than the doors. In his doctrine he was earnest, in tongue eloquent, in the Scriptures perfect, in pains indefatigable.”

One episode sheds light on how far reform had reached in some minds. In 1550 Hooper was nominated to the bishopric of Gloucester. But the oath for his consecration required him to swear by dead saints, which he refused to do. He was also required to wear the bishop’s vestments, which he only reluctantly agreed to do. On this point Hooper was opposed by Nicholas Ridley and Thomas

Cranmer. At Zurich he had acquired Scriptural views on both these matters, and objected to them as tending to superstition. In this connection, Hooper has been termed, with some justification, 'the first Puritan.'

A glimpse into his life as a bishop shows a marked contrast with that of the popish bishops of his day. Writes Foxe: "he left no pains untaken, nor ways unsought, how to train up the flock of Christ in the true word of salvation . . . No father in his household, no gardener in his garden, no husbandman in his vineyard, was more or better occupied than he in his diocese among his flock, going about his towns and villages, in teaching and preaching to the people there."

On entering his home, Foxe continues, the visitor would have thought he had entered some church. "In every corner there was some savour of virtue, good example, honest conversation and reading of holy Scriptures." There was no roistering (lewd or riotous behaviour) or idleness, no pomp, no lying, no swearing.

In addition, Hooper spent his bishop's revenues in hospitality. "Twice I was at his house in Worcester," says Foxe, "where in his common hall I saw a table spread with good store of meat, and set full of beggars and poor folk; and I asking the servants what this meant, they told me that every day their lord and master's custom was to have to dinner a certain number of the poor folk of the city by course, who were served with wholesome meats; and when they were served, after having been examined

by him or his deputies in the Lord's Prayer, the Articles of their faith and Ten Commandments, he himself sat down to dinner, and not before."

Such was just one scene of many from the rapidly reforming nation under godly King Edward.

### **The End of Reform**

By the Spring of 1553, however, 'the English Josiah' was showing symptoms of increasing weakness. He had never been a healthy boy, and the Duke of Northumberland suspected that he would not live long. The next heir to the throne was Mary, Edward's older sister. She was the daughter of Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife. Mary was a fanatical Roman Catholic. She hated the Protestant faith as much as Edward loved it.

Edward was saddened to think that when he was dead, Mary would undo all the work of reform that he had encouraged. Northumberland knew this, and so he persuaded Edward to make a will leaving the throne to his cousin, Lady Jane Grey. Lady Jane was only sixteen, and had a tender heart towards the Lord Jesus Christ. If she would accept the throne, then the Duke could rule as he liked. He tried to keep his plan secret, for he knew that many people in England wished Mary to be queen. He succeeded so well that even Jane herself did not know his intentions.

In 1553, soon after making his will, Edward died. One of his deathbed prayers was: “O Lord God, defend this realm from Papistry, and maintain Thy true religion.”

The martyr John Bradford deeply bewailed the young king’s death, saying that the Lord had taken him away because of England’s sins, especially the noblemen’s greed for land and power, and the people’s fondness for the superstitions of Popery.

### **Summary Conclusion**

Edward was truly a good, gentle and God-fearing boy. During his reign many reforms took place, and many fine schools were founded. Some of them still flourish, and are known as King Edward Schools.

As we try to sum up the progress of the Reformation to date, we may say that while the seed had been sown during Henry’s reign, when Cranmer could only think through the reforms he desired without seeing them come to fruition, Edward VI enabled him to do much to place the English Church on a sound Biblical basis. Still, God’s seed had not yet come to God’s harvest, as Samuel Rutherford would say.

## **Key Persons**

**Edward VI** (1537-53) King.

**Thomas Cranmer** (1489-1556) Archbishop of Canterbury. Architect of the Anglican Reformation under Edward.

### **Key Events**

- 1547 Death of Henry VIII and accession of Edward VI.  
Edward Seymour becomes Lord Protector, then Duke of Somerset.  
Act for Dissolving the Chantries passed.  
The Book of Homilies published.
- 1548 Orders for images to be removed from churches and superstitious ceremonies disused.
- 1549 Parliament passes Act of Uniformity authorizing the First Prayer Book of Edward VI.  
Act passed permitting priests to marry.  
Two Popish rebellions: Western and Kett's.  
Bonner, bishop of London, deprived of his office for opposing the Prayer Book.
- 1550 Princess Mary refuses to use the new Prayer Book.  
Julius III chosen Pope.
- 1551 Bishop Gardiner of Winchester deprived of his office.  
Duke of Somerset tried for treason.  
Duke of Northumberland replaces him as Protector.
- 1552 Execution of Somerset.  
Edward's Second Prayer Book published.
- 1553 The Forty-two Articles of Religion framed.  
Death of Edward VI.

## Special Terms

**Visitation** – The act of Church authorities in going to check up on the various places of worship in their jurisdiction. From the Latin ‘visitare’ = ‘to go to see.’

**Chantries** – Places where priests sang Mass for dead souls. It is derived from the Latin ‘cantare’ = ‘to sing.’

**Liturgy** – The form of public worship laid down by a Church. From the Greek ‘leitourgia’ = ‘public service.’

**Homilies** – Sermons on religious or moral topics. From Church Latin ‘homilia’ = ‘discourse’ or ‘speech.’

**Theologian** – A person who studies God.

**Oblation** – The act of solemnly offering something to God. In the Communion Service it refers to Christ’s offering of Himself as a sacrifice for our sins.

**Satisfaction** – The act of supplying to the full. In Christian use, it refers to Christ supplying God to the full with all the obedience and merit that we could never give. From the Latin ‘satisfacere’ i.e. ‘satis’ = ‘enough’ and ‘facere’ = ‘to make or do.’ That is, Christ has done enough to merit our salvation.

**Canon Law** – The Law of the Church that provides a rule to live by. From the Greek ‘kanon’ = ‘rule.’ In Scripture, God expects His people to make rules for worship and service only in accordance with His commandments.

# **Chapter 8**

## **Satanic Opposition to Reform**

### **Introduction**

Martin Luther once said: “Where the Lord God builds a church, Satan builds a chapel.” By this he meant that wherever a work of God takes place, Satan is sure to oppose it.

In Bible history we read of several Satanic attempts to stop Jesus the Saviour coming into the world. They all involved intrigue and/or murder.

Remembering that right from the beginning God had promised to send a Saviour (Genesis 3.15), we note that Pharaoh of Egypt tried to exterminate the Jews under his power. (Exodus 5-15) Later on, Haman planned the genocide of the entire Jewish people. (Esther 3-9) Had these plots succeeded, we would have had no Saviour, for He was born a Jew. Even after Jesus had come into the world, king Herod sought to kill Him in infancy. (Matthew 2) All these attempts to rob God of His glory, thwart His plan and prevent our salvation were the work of Satan.

We have already noticed Satan trying to suppress the Reformation during Henry’s reign. Following the death of Edward VI he fostered even more cruel measures.

## A. Lady Jane Grey Cut Off

Immediately, the Duke of Northumberland and some other nobles offered the crown to Lady Jane Grey. They knelt before her, gave her hand the kiss of allegiance and greeted her as their queen.

But Lady Jane was both sad and frightened. Like her late cousin Edward, she loved learning, trusted the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation, and could even speak and write Greek and Latin, and read a little Hebrew. But she insisted that she was not yet ready to be queen. “It is your duty,” said the Duke. “You cannot put away the duty God gives you.” Weeping, Lady Jane fell on her knees and cried: “Then if it must be so, God give me strength to bear this heavy burden. God give me grace to rule for his glory and the good of the people.” Clearly, she would have been a worthy successor to her cousin. But it was not to be. After only eight days, Lady Jane was cruelly arrested, imprisoned, and a few months later beheaded. In history she is known as ‘the eight day queen.’

Here is part of a prayer by Lady Jane Grey, composed shortly before her execution: “O Lord, Thou God and Father of my life, hear me, a poor and desolate woman, who flieth unto Thee only, in all troubles and miseries. Thou, O Lord, art the only defender and deliverer of those who put their trust in Thee; and therefore, I being defiled with sin, encumbered with affliction . . . do come unto Thee, O merciful Saviour, craving Thy mercy and help . . . O merciful God, consider my misery, best

known unto Thee; and be Thou now unto me a strong tower of defence, I humbly require Thee. Suffer me not to be tempted above my power; but either be Thou a deliverer unto me out of this great misery, or else give me grace patiently to bear Thy heavy hand and sharp correction . . . Let it . . . seem good to Thy Fatherly goodness, to deliver me, a sorrowful wretch, for whom Thy Son Christ shed His precious blood on the cross . . . Hear me, O merciful Father, for His sake, whom Thou wouldst should be a sacrifice for my sins. To whom with Thee, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory. Amen.”

## **B. 'Bloody' Mary's Martyrs**

### **Mary's Rapid Response to Edward's Reforms**

Satan raised an even greater tumult during the reign of Mary Tudor, the half sister of Edward VI who ascended the English throne in July 1553. The execution of Lady Jane Grey "was a sombre warning of what was in store for others." (Marcus Loane) As you read the following facts, bear in mind that in the Bible God calls Satan a false accuser, a liar, a murderer and a destroyer.

"Mary had been brought up from her infancy as a rigid adherent of the Romish Church. She was, in fact, a very Papist of Papists, conscientious, zealous, bigoted and narrow-minded in the extreme." (J. C. Ryle)

Though she was a fanatical Romanist, Mary at first took the advice of her cousin, the emperor Charles V, to tread cautiously in trying to re-establish the Roman religion.

As a result, some improvements were left untouched. Mary's new regime took away the lectern Bibles from the parish churches, but reading the English Bible was not forbidden. Only a few monasteries were re-opened and a few new chantries founded. Few shrines were retrieved from their ruined condition, and not much was done to revive the guilds that produced them. Preachers found it difficult to speak about purgatory, now that it had been thoroughly exposed, and the pope was not as glorified as he had been. Neither did she invite the Jesuits to come to England in person. But she made their

writings available to English bookshops, especially English adaptations of their founder's *Spiritual Exercises*.

Nevertheless, Mary believed, the process of restoring 'the old faith' might be accelerated with proper teaching. So she appointed Edmund Bonner as Bishop of London. Bonner produced a Roman catechism and a collection of homilies or sermons. Because they were not on very controversial topics, they were widely read throughout England.

Such was the moderate opening of Mary's reign. But after ratifying her mother Catherine of Aragon's marriage to Henry VIII and the execution of the Duke of Northumberland, a reversal of Edward's reforms began.

The church laws passed during his reign were repealed, and the official worship of the nation took the form it had in the last year of Henry's reign.

Reformed ministers were removed from office and imprisoned, or fled to cities of refuge in Europe, such as Strasbourg, Zurich, Emden or Geneva.

The Roman Mass was restored, the English service was taken away, people were forbidden to read the works of both English and continental Reformers, and foreign Protestants living in England were banished.

By her marriage in 1554 to Philip of Spain (soon to become Philip II) Mary brought to the nation a real threat of foreign and popish domination. Many Englishmen trembled. News of the atrocities of the Spanish Inquisition had not reached English ears in vain.

The same year Mary showed her true colours by restoring Romanism as fully as she could. Parliament voted in Papal authority. Cardinal Pole, the newly appointed Papal Legate (a deputy of the pope armed with his authority) officially absolved or pardoned the nation for its 'heresy.' In a ceremony in Westminster Hall on 30 November 1554 Pole received the 'submission' of Philip and Mary and the realm to the pope. In return he granted 'absolution' for the 'sin' of 21 years of separation from Rome, and proclaimed that the anniversary of the ceremony should be celebrated as a great religious festival, to be named the Feast of the Reconciliation, for all eternity!

The laws of the unreformed church of 1529 were then re-imposed on the land. By January 1555 the lords and members of parliament re-enacted the Acts for the Burning of Heretics of 1382, 1401 and 1414. Their 'punishment' could now begin.

In an inscrutable move of providence, only six months after England's 'reconciliation' with Rome, a new pope was elected who later turned out to be one of Mary's chief enemies! Paul IV declared war on Mary's husband, Philip II, and renewed his old vendetta against Cardinal

Pole, summoning him back to Rome for trial as a 'heretic.' Mary refused to let Pole go, and the poor man had to rely on her protection in his attempts to restructure the English Church. Thankfully, these attempts failed.

### **Mary's Reign of Terror**

The next forty-five months, between 4 February 1555 and 10 November 1558, proved to be Mary's reign of terror. England became a police state, and no less than 283 Protestant martyrs – 227 men and 56 women – were burnt alive. The queen responsible for their terrible deaths has gone down in history as 'Bloody Mary.' But the souls of the martyrs are now before the throne of God, crying: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood?" because they were "slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held." (Revelation 6.9-10) They should be remembered today, though public memory of them is rapidly fading.

### **The Procedure of the Persecutors**

The procedure of the persecutors makes chilling reading.

When a person was accused of 'heresy,' he or she was arrested and taken to the court of the bishop in whose diocese he lived. Here he was tried by the bishop himself or a judicial officer trained in the canon law of the church.

There is no doubt that the trial was hostile and harsh. The accused was put under great psychological pressure to

‘recant.’ The commissioners interrupted, browbeat and insulted the prisoner. They even promised to spare his life and remit his sins if he recanted.

If he was an artisan or labourer, his judges scorned him for presuming to dispute questions of faith with learned bishops and church lawyers. The truth is, many of the unlearned accused knew their Bibles far better than their accusers!

If, on the other hand, the accused was a learned bishop or theologian, he was rebuked for abusing the gift of learning that God had given him by arguing against the time-honoured teachings of the Church.

If he refused to ‘recant’ or repent of his beliefs, the death sentence by burning was passed, and the poor victim was handed over to the sheriff of the county to execute the sentence.

Burnings were carried out in public, usually before crowds of spectators. Many people came to enjoy the spectacle of others burning; they often brought their families with them, and fathers lifted the smaller children on their shoulders to enable them to see.

Some of the spectators were Protestants, who tried to give moral support to the sufferers. These were allowed to pay the executioner to hang a bag of gunpowder round the victim’s neck or at his feet, so that when the flames reached it the explosion would kill him immediately. But

if it had been raining, and the faggots were damp, or if it was a windy day, the flames were driven away from the victim, and his agony was prolonged.

If the victim recanted, the sentence was one of lengthy imprisonment, either in a gaol or monastery. The 'penitent' was forced to wear a 'heretic's badge' and to 'carry his faggot' of wood to the place of execution. On arrival he or she threw the faggot onto the fire, so that only the wood, and not the 'heretic,' would be burnt!

If the condemned 'penitent' was a minister, he was required to preach a sermon confessing his 'heresy' and begging the Church's forgiveness! If he 'relapsed' only once more he was not spared again, but was sent to the stake without mercy! Does not the Bible warn us: "the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel" (Proverbs 12.10)?

### **A Bouquet of Martyrs**

Lack of space forbids us to re-tell the stories of all who fought in the noble army of martyrs that died under 'Bloody Mary.' You may read about them in modern editions of John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* and in Jasper Ridley's *Bloody Mary's Martyrs*.

Roman sympathisers and 'revisionist' historians may tell you that Foxe's accounts are greatly exaggerated and 'partisan.' But in 1940 the scholar J. F. Mozley proved once and for all that, apart from a few minor factual

errors (which can easily creep into any narrative) Foxe is wholly reliable.

Among the many heart-breaking accounts of their sufferings, we will re-tell only a few of them.

**(a) Rowland Taylor**

Dr. Rowland Taylor, rector of Hadleigh in Suffolk, was a fine Christian minister: his sound teaching regulated his life, and his God-fearing life commended his teaching. He faithfully studied Holy Scripture, frequently preached to his congregation, fed and clothed the poor, readily forgave his enemies, and willingly suffered for Jesus' sake.

Yet he was thrust into prison as soon as Mary ascended the throne, and was kept there for two years. In January 1555 he was brought before the authorities, and was subjected to a lengthy examination on his beliefs. He was declared a 'heretic' for denying that the bread and wine became the body and blood of Christ, and for stating that priests should be free to marry!

Later in the month he was tried again, along with John Bradford and Lawrence Saunders, and was condemned to death for refusing to submit to the Bishop of Rome. In prison he was 'degraded' of his office of minister.

Early in February he set out on horseback to Hadleigh, to be burned before his parishioners. As he left London, he bade farewell to his wife and two of his children. "Farewell, my dear wife," he said, "be of good comfort,

for I am quiet in my conscience. God shall raise up a father for my children,” adding: “God bless thee. I pray you all stand strong and steadfast to Christ and His Word, and keep you from idolatry.” His brave wife replied: God be with thee, dear Rowland: I will, with God’s grace, meet thee at Hadleigh.”

Foxe describes in detail his journey to Hadleigh: “All the way he was joyful and merry, as one who accounted himself going to a most pleasant banquet or bridal.” Coming within two miles of the place, he alighted from his horse, and when asked by the sheriff how he was, replied: “Well, God be praised, good master sheriff, never better; for now I know I am almost at home. I lack not past two stiles to go over, and I am even at my Father’s house.”

On arriving there, the streets being full of weeping crowds, he spoke to the people, gave away some money, and continued to Aldham Common, where he was to suffer. When the crowds there saw his familiar venerable face and long white beard they burst into tears. Having prepared himself for burning, he went to the stake, kissed it, and stood in the pitch-barrel. After some delay and a few insults from ‘Popish helpers,’ he called on God: “Merciful Father, for Jesus Christ’s sake, receive my soul into Thy hands.” There he stood without moving, until some-one struck him on the head with a halberd (a combination of spear and battle-axe), and his body fell down into the fire. “Thus,” concludes Bishop J. C. Ryle, “died one of the best and bravest of the English martyrs.”

**(b) Joan Waste**

In August 1556 a young woman was burnt to death in Derby: her judicial murder aroused great sympathy and anger among growing numbers of people in England. Joan Waste was born blind. After the death of her parents, her younger brother Roger looked after her. During Edward's reign they both attended Protestant services, and she longed to learn the Bible. But being blind, she could not read, and so she saved up money from rope-making, bought a copy of Tyndale's *New Testament*, and paid an old man, who was in Derby gaol for debt, to read it to her.

When Mary became queen, Joan was denounced to the Bishop of Coventry and Litchfield, and was examined by him, his Chancellor and other officials. She told them that the bread in the Lord's Supper was not the body of Christ. They replied that because Jesus could change water into wine, He could also change the bread and wine into His body and blood. She answered: "I am a poor, uneducated blind woman, and cannot argue with you; but as Dr. Rowland Taylor was prepared to die for his beliefs, I am ready to do the same."

After being harangued as an obstinate heretic, Joan was condemned to be burnt. In the execution sermon, the Chancellor said that she was not only blind in her body but also in her soul, and would burn not only at the stake but also eternally in hell! With her brother holding her hand, she was led to the stake at Windmill Pit outside the

town, and there, her lips being seen to repeatedly utter the name 'Jesus,' her spirit went to glory.

While she was being burnt, the Chancellor went to a local inn, got drunk, and slept soundly on the lawn in front of the inn for some time!

**(c) Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley**

With the coming of summer 1555 the number of persecutions increased, and some very prominent members of the nation were condemned. Among these were Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley.

These two bishops were captured and imprisoned in the Tower of London, where they were questioned, threatened, tormented and mocked. When every effort to get them to recant had failed, they were moved to Oxford, along with Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, to be tried and sentenced. Their death was a foregone conclusion.

Ridley was questioned first. He was reprovved because he did not remove his hat when the pope was mentioned! He admitted that he had helped Lady Jane Grey (the 'eight day queen') become queen rather than Mary.

Latimer was next questioned. His response to his inquisitors was a noble one: "I thank God most heartily that He has prolonged my life to this end, that I may in this case glorify God with this kind of death." He was not

in the least afraid to condemn the errors of Rome, nor to state his faith in the Lord Jesus.

On 16 October 1555 Ridley and Latimer were both led to a site just opposite Balliol College (where the pre-Reformation Reformer John Wycliffe had been Master). A small plaque in the road marks the spot. There they were burnt to death, standing back to back at the stake. When a lighted torch was laid to the wood, the aged Latimer first prayed: "Heavenly Father, I give Thee most hearty thanks that Thou hast called me to a profession of Thee even unto death. I beseech Thee, Lord God, have mercy on this realm of England, and deliver the same from all her enemies. Into Thine hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit; Lord, receive my spirit." Then he called to his Christian "brother and companion in tribulation in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 1.9): "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out."

At the time of their martyrdoms, Latimer was about 70 years old and Ridley was 55. Their lives and deaths were heroic. Latimer's words of encouragement to Ridley have proved to be true. The candle of the Gospel has not yet been put out. By God's grace and power, it never shall. "Instead of crushing out God's light and truth, Mary was making it shine as a light which everyone might see." (H. E. Marshall) When will 'revisionist' historians and churchmen see that despite all Mary's

persecutions, God's elect shall still be converted, and no tool of Satan can stop Him working?

**(d) Thomas Cranmer**

On their way to the stake, Ridley and Latimer passed the prison where the timid Thomas Cranmer was kept, but they never saw him. He was still alive, but was broken by ill-health and the fear of death.

Because he had sworn allegiance to both Henry VIII and Edward VI as heads of the English Church, Cranmer had been forced to face a terrible dilemma. Now that Mary was sovereign, he must declare himself a Romanist or a Protestant. At first, he compromised by avowing Mary as the lawful sovereign and head of the church in England, yet kept his personal beliefs to himself. But under pressure from Mary, who sought both his recantation and his death, he renounced his former beliefs and promised submission to Rome.

But there were two further factors in his case.

(i) First, Mary hated Cranmer because he had helped Henry VIII divorce her mother, Catherine of Aragon.

(ii) Then again, he had played a leading role in helping Mary's rival, Lady Jane Grey, to the throne.

Mary therefore condemned Cranmer for treason.

As one of the nation's spiritual leaders, Cranmer was bound to suffer like his fellow Reformers. Traitor's Gate, leading to the Tower of London, was opened to receive him. In prison he shared a cell with Latimer, Ridley and

Bradford. They studied the New Testament together, and grew more convinced than ever that the Mass was a 'blasphemous fable and dangerous deceit' (as the later *Prayer Book* describes it). Latimer himself testified: "We were imprisoned in the Tower of London for Christ's Gospel preaching, and because we would not go a-massing."

When the day of his execution (21 March 1556) arrived, Cranmer was brought before a great court of accusers and a large congregation in the cathedral church of St. Mary, Oxford. When everyone expected to hear his recantation, he shocked them all by renouncing his recantation, professing his Protestant faith, and denouncing the pope as antichrist! This confession enraged his enemies, and he was soon ushered to the stake. But rather than waver again, he thrust the offending hand that had signed his recantation into the fire, crying out: "This unworthy right hand! This unworthy right hand!"

At Cranmer's death God triumphed over both His enemies and His servant's fear. This reminds us of a resolution and a confession that King David made: "What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee." "In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me." (Psalm 56.3,11) Some have said that the day of Cranmer's death was the best day in his life.

Perhaps the saying of John Philpot, another Marian martyr, speaks for the rest, and shows us the spirit in

which they gave their lives for Christ: “Shall I disdain to suffer at this stake, seeing my Redeemer did not refuse to suffer a most vile death on the cross for me?”

### **Mary’s Last Days**

Despite all these burnings, Mary remained unsatisfied. The closing years of her reign (1556-58) were marked by a personal desolation that few pitied.

Her husband had grown tired of England, where he was not allowed to rule, and returned to Spain, never to see these shores again.

She had lost Calais, in France, which had been part of English territory for 200 years. She is known to have said: “When I am dead, you will find ‘Calais’ graven on my heart.” What a tragic state of mind to approach death in: longing for a piece of earth on the far side of the English Channel!

Her fantasy pregnancy, by which she had hoped to produce a Roman Catholic successor to the throne, had deceived her.

Yet she felt that the only way to satisfy God’s justice for her sins was to burn more Protestants! In the autumn and winter of 1557 the authorities, under the direction of Bishop Bonner of London, were searching for Protestants and burning them all over southeast England and the Midlands. Surely she must have known, unless her conscience was “seared as with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4.2), that her cruelty did more harm than good to her own

religion. Yet she carried on killing as fiercely as ever. But after fretting away her life, in November 1558 Mary died on the same day as Cardinal Pole, wretched and unloved, unwanted by both husband and nation. They have both now given in their account to the Judge of all the earth.

With the accession of Elizabeth I, the Satanic persecutions of 'Bloody Mary' ended.

### **The Martyrs' Bravery**

It is difficult for us to grasp how brave, by the grace of God, these early Reformers and Protestants were. Today we are more or less free to believe what we like, but then those who disagreed with the pope were cruelly put to death. Burning at the stake is one of the most Satanic forms of cruelty.

So, we have two vital questions to ask:

1. Why did the pope not order Mary to stop the burnings? Surely it is because, as a servant of Satan, he approved of them.
2. What kind of 'Church' is it that brands people who disagree with it 'heretics' and orders them to be burned to death for so doing? It is certainly not the Church of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

### **Mary's Persecution Typical of Satan's Methods**

To show that Mary's persecution of God's people was fully in keeping with Satanic atrocities committed against

them throughout the ages, we include a note on the cruelty to the Jews of an ancient King of Syria.

In 170 B. C. (before the birth of Christ), Antiochus IV, surnamed Epiphanes, invaded Jerusalem, plundered the temple of its treasures and massacred thousands of the Jewish people. Two years later he sent a force under his general to occupy the city. He seized it by treachery, plundered it and set it on fire, massacred many of the men, sold the women and children into slavery, and made the city of David a Syrian garrison.

Antiochus then resolved to stamp out the Jewish religion. He passed an edict forbidding the practice of its ceremonies on pain of death, and ordered the people to take part in heathen rituals. The temple was desecrated: an idolatrous altar was set up in place of God's altar, and sacrifices were offered on it to Zeus Olympios. All the copies of God's law that could be found were destroyed or defaced, and possessing them was made an offence punishable by death. Many Israelites preferred death rather than deny their God. The Lord had appeared to forsake His people altogether.

So it was in Mary's reign. England's finest men and women were condemned as 'heretics' by heathens posing as Christians; the religion of the Bible was overturned in favour of idolatry; and anyone who resisted was mercilessly slaughtered. Nevertheless, as Jonathan Edwards said: "The martyrs would not undergo cruel sufferings from their persecutors, with a cheerful

prospect of going to heaven, did they not expect to be with Christ, and to enjoy God there.”

### **Four Important Points**

As we leave this sad account, let us remember four important points:

1. These Protestant Reformers were burnt for their faith, whereas Roman Catholic traitors during Elizabeth I's reign were hanged, drawn and quartered for treason.

The Reformers were tried in church courts, whereas the Romanists were tried in civil courts.

The Reformers died, not for committing any crime, but for believing the Gospel; the Romanists (and most of them were treacherous, abominable priests) died for plotting against the monarch or the realm.

Some 'revisionist' historians have placed the Reformers and the Romanists on the same level, yet they were not so. The one died for the Lord Jesus Christ, the other for their 'lord god the pope' (a term used by cardinals and bishops at the pope's 'coronation').

[It is worth recalling that in the 1960s, an 'ecumenical' project was mooted in Derby to erect a statue to the memory of two Romish traitors, the priests Ludlam and Garlick, and Joan Waste, the blind Protestant martyr. Some Christians opposed the plan to the bishop's face, and asked the Lord to prevent it. Remarkably, after wrangling for months the planning committee could not agree on the sculptor, and the project was abandoned! How thankful we should be for this divine intervention!]

2. The burning of the English martyrs brought to a close centuries of persecution in this country by the unreformed Church of Rome. They take their honoured place near the end of a long line of Hussites, Lollards and Waldensians who were slaughtered in such large numbers that their groups were almost exterminated. The Church that had dominated Europe for almost a millennium was an intolerant and persecuting church. The extermination of the Biblical faith and of true believers was unquestionably Mary's aim.

3. It is passing strange that a church that had 'absolved' the whole nation of its 'heresy' should now burn the nation's most faithful and loyal subjects to death! When God absolves from sin, He does not punish the culprits, because His own dear Son has died for them. He embraces and receives them into fellowship. When Rome absolved, she burned the absolved! Yet all the time she used the language of piety, such as 'Holy Mother Church' and 'The Spouse of Jesus Christ.' Has she not been rightly called 'Satan's Masterpiece'?

4. To both Protestant and Romanist, these terrible events took place according to the will of God. Romanists believed that if the victim took a long time to die, this was because God wished to increase his torments because his sins were greater than those of others. On the other hand, Protestants were sure that if God prolonged their sufferings, it was to show everyone His power in keeping His people faithful to the end, and to expose the cruelty of the persecutors.

## First Afternote

Those Reformers who had fled persecution to Geneva served the cause of reform in a different way. Aided by **John Calvin** and **Theodore Beza**, some of them, including **John Knox**, **William Whittingham** and **Miles Coverdale**, produced the **Geneva Bible**. This became the standard version of the Puritans for several generations. It was being used long after the Authorized Version of 1611 had been produced. In the Preface, these noble exiles placed the following poem. It is entitled *The Incomparable Treasure of the Holy Scripture*.

‘Here is the spring where waters flow  
To quench our heat of sin;  
Here is the tree where truth doth grow  
To lead our lives therein;  
Here is the judge that stints the strife  
When men’s devices fail;  
Here is the bread that feeds the life  
That death cannot assail.  
The tidings of salvation clear  
Comes to our ears from hence;  
The fortress of our faith is here,  
The shield of our defence.  
Then be not like the hog that hath  
A pearl at his desire,  
And takes more pleasure of the trough  
And wallowing in the mire.  
Read not this Book in any case  
But with a single eye;  
Read not, but first desire God’s grace

To understand thereby.  
Pray still in faith with this respect:  
To fructify therein;  
That knowledge may bring this effect –  
To mortify thy sin.  
Then happy thou, in all thy life,  
Whatso to thee befalls;  
Yea, doubly happy shalt thou be  
When God by death thee calls.’

### **Second Afternote**

Between 1647 and 1663 the Church of Rome seemed to want to reform itself through the ‘canons and decrees’ of the **Council of Trent**, a town in Süd Tyrol, N. Italy.

In the early stages of the Reformation, the Reformers had appealed to the emperor for a free council. This had been the method of the early Church for solving disputes. The early church councils were held in great esteem. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century the Councils of Basle, Pisa and Constance had met, but they reformed nothing. Indeed, the latter burned to death John Huss and Jerome of Prague. They merely curbed the power of the popes. This is why the popes did not want a council.

But the European-wide spread of reformed ideas forced Rome’s hand. Besides, Roman Catholics believed that the Holy Spirit of truth spoke through these councils, and so they expected the Council of Trent to settle the Reformation controversy for good. Protestants did not

accept the Council as lawful, because the early Church councils represented the *whole* Church, whereas Trent represented only Rome.

There were many able men at Trent. They might have been expected to push through some Biblical reforms. But instead the majority dug in their heels and merely re-asserted Rome's unreformed claims. As Thomas Lindsay says: "Roman doctrinal teaching [was] concluded and petrified (i.e. converted into stone)."

Here is a sample of Trent's teaching:

"If any one says that the sinner is *justified by faith alone* (the central Protestant doctrine) . . . let him be anathema (i.e. an object of loathing, or cursed, or devoted to evil)."

"If any one says that the grace of *justification* is shared only by those who are *predestined* to life . . . let him be anathema."

"If any one says that the *good works* of the one justified . . . are not also the *good merits* of him justified . . . let him be anathema."

The Scriptures clearly condemn this teaching:

"One is justified by faith apart from works of the law."  
(Romans 3.28)

"If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the

Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” (Romans 4.2)

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2.8-9)

Comments Robert L. Reymond: “From these verses (and there are many more like them) it is plain that Paul teaches that justification is by ‘faith alone’ (*sola fide*) in Christ’s perceptive and penal obedience (i.e. His doing and suffering). The moment the penitent sinner casts himself upon God’s mercies in Christ, God *pardons* him of all his sins (Acts 10.43; Romans 4.6-7) and *constitutes* him righteous before Him by imputing or reckoning the righteousness of Christ to him (Romans 5.1,19; 2 Corinthians 5.21).”

In sum, Trent produced no real reforms but plenty of anathemas! Was it the Holy Spirit who presided over this Council, or some other spirit?

Reymond finally notes: “Rome continues to this day to urge upon the world the teachings of Trent, thus evidencing its own apostate condition.”

## **Key Persons**

**Mary** (1516-58) Queen.

**Reginald Pole** (1500-58) Roman Cardinal and Legate to England.

**Edmund Bonner** (1500-69) Roman Catholic Bishop of London.

**Thomas Cranmer** (1489-1556) Archbishop of Canterbury and Protestant martyr.

**Hugh Latimer** (1485-1555) Bishop of Worcester. Martyr.

**Nicholas Ridley** (1500-1555) Bishop of London. Martyr.

**John Hooper** (1495-1555) Bishop of Gloucester. Martyr.

**John Bradford** (1510-1555) Royal Chaplain under Edward VI. Martyr.

## Key Events

- 1553 Eight-day 'reign' of Lady Jane Seymour (6-19 July)
  - Accession of Mary
  - Execution of the Duke of Northumberland
  - Edward's religious laws repealed
- 1554 Execution of Lady Jane Grey
  - Mary marries Philip, heir to the Spanish throne
  - Cardinal Pole arrives as Papal Legate
- 1555 Parliament restores Papal Supremacy
  - 'Heresy' laws revived
  - Burning of first Protestant martyrs
  - Bishop Hooper burned at Gloucester (February)
  - Philip leaves England
  - Latimer and Ridley burned at Oxford (October)
  - Cranmer deprived of his office of Archbishop of Canterbury, and replaced by Pole
  - Pole holds Legatine Synod in London
- 1556 Philip becomes King of Spain
  - Cranmer burned to death (March)
- 1557 Philip returns to England
  - War with France
  - Pole deprived of his legatine powers by Pope Paul IV and investigated for 'heresy' in Rome
- 1558 The English lose Calais
  - Deaths of Mary and Pole on the same day (November)

## Special Terms

**Genocide** – The intentional and systematic destruction of a national, ethnic or religious group. From the Greek ‘genos’ = ‘offspring.’ Remember that this was Pharaoh’s policy towards the Jews in Egypt. It failed because God was to bring salvation to this world out of the Jewish race in the person of Jesus.

**Exterminate** – To utterly destroy. From the Latin ‘exterminatus.’ ‘Ex’ = ‘out of’ plus ‘terminus’ = ‘boundary.’ Mildly, to put out of bounds; severely, to put out of existence.

**Regime** – A prevailing system of government. From the Latin ‘regimen’ = ‘command.’ Mary’s regime was most cruel and tyrannical.

**Purgatory** – A place and state of spiritual and moral purging, invented by the Church of Rome, where souls are purified from ‘venial’ or pardonable sins by suffering. Cardinal Newman, in his *Dream of Gerontius*, grotesquely pictures the angels letting a soul gently down into its flames! The Italian poet Dante included it in his triptych along with Heaven and Hell!

**Shrines** – Places of worship erected both in buildings and in country places, such as fields and forests. They usually contained (and still do in such Roman Catholic countries as Italy and Austria) figures of ‘Mary’ or ‘Jesus on the cross.’

**Guilds** – Societies of people who belong to the same trade, formed to promote and protect their common interests. On one of his preaching tours, the apostle Paul met members of a silversmiths’ guild. Medieval Roman

Catholic guilds carved idols for the churches and private homes.

**Jesuits** – A Roman Catholic order of priests founded in 1534 by Ignatius Loyola. Its members swore absolute obedience to the pope, and agreed to tell any number of lies, provided they would serve ‘Holy Mother Church.’

**Inquisition** – The body of Roman cardinals and lawyers appointed to investigate or search thoroughly into people’s religious beliefs. It was strongest in Spain and Italy, and was notorious for its cruel methods of torturing suspects to make them confess their ‘heresy’ or betray friends.

**Ecumenical** – Belonging to the Christian Church or World as a whole. (From the Greek ‘hē oikumenē’ = ‘the inhabited world’ or ‘the whole earth.’ The Ecumenical Movement, begun in Edinburgh in 1910, seeks to bring together all the professedly Christian churches, whether they are agreed in Bible doctrine and conduct or not. Its leaders rest their case on an unspiritual view of John 17.21 – “that they all may be one.” So far the movement has produced a mish-mash of faiths, forms of worship and social action.

## **Chapter 9**

# **Why the Reformers were Burned to Death**

### **Introduction**

Before looking at the closing years of the Reformation, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, let us briefly consider why the Reformers were burned to death. This is important, for various reasons.

1. In the first place, writes Bishop J. C. Ryle: “There are certain facts in history which the world tries hard to forget and ignore. These facts get in the way of the world’s favourite theories . . . The consequence is that the world shuts its eyes against them.” One of these facts is the burning to death of the English Protestant martyrs.

2. Then again, many people today are so cynical that they are not ashamed to say that there are no religious opinions worth dying for. Those who die for what they term ‘truth’ are seen as nothing but fools.

3. Further, others find it convenient to leave out the unpleasant things of history, and to paint everything in bright colours, as if mankind was making steady progress towards perfection.

4. Still others regard it as very bad taste to say anything against Popery and the unreformed Church of Rome. They coolly set aside Rome’s history of bloodthirsty tortures and massacres, seeing in her only the glory of a

‘spiritual’ figurehead, the pomp of power, the sensuality of worship, the appeal of numbers, and survival through the centuries.

So it is with respect to the cruel reign of ‘Bloody’ Mary. Indeed, some popular histories of the kings and queens of England barely mention her cruelties. Yet she was not called ‘Bloody Mary’ for nothing. Moreover, her programme of burnings sprang wholly from her fanatical devotion to the bloodthirsty Church of Rome.

### **Why They Were Burned**

We have recalled some of the facts of the martyrdoms of the Reformers. Though known amongst a few Protestants, they remain unknown to the majority. Here we will consider *why* they were burned to death.

It would be a great mistake to think that they suffered for refusing to obey the pope, or for wanting to maintain the independence of the Church in England, or for claiming that priests should be allowed to marry, or for demanding reforms within the Church.

The principal reason for their burning was because they refused to believe ONE of Rome’s favourite false teachings! In almost every case, on that doctrine hinged their earthly life or death. If they accepted it, they might possibly live; if they denied it, they must die.

### A. **The Real Presence**

The doctrine in question was the *Real Presence* of the body and blood of Christ in the consecrated elements of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. Did they, or did they not believe that the real body of the Lord Jesus, that had been born of the virgin Mary, was present on the altar as soon as the words 'HOC EST CORPUS MEUM' = 'THIS IS MY BODY' had been spoken by the priest?

Did they believe that, when blessed by the priest, the communion bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Christ?

The historian Thomas Fuller confirms this: "The sacrament of the altar was the main touchstone to discover the poor Protestants. This point of the real, corporal presence of Christ in the sacrament, the same body that was crucified, was the compendious (i.e. concise) way to discover those of the opposite opinion."

This false teaching had been introduced into the Church in 1215, and was (and still is) called Transubstantiation! Belief in it was demanded of everyone in the country! This was the issue on which men's and women's lives depended!

The question is: **What does the Word of God say on the matter?**

Let Jesus Himself answer. **After** blessing the bread and giving thanks for the wine, He said: "I will not drink henceforth of this **fruit of the vine**" (Matthew 26:19).

His faithful apostle Paul says the same thing (1 Corinthians 10:17): “we are all partakers of that **one bread**,” and (1 Corinthians 11:26): “as often as ye eat **this bread**.”

That is, the bread and wine remain bread and wine *after* being set apart for a special use, and are not ‘transubstantiated’ (i.e. do not change their substance) at the priest’s magic formula.

[Incidentally, the magic term ‘hocus pocus’ is derived from the Latin ‘hoc est corpus meum!']

There was also a subsidiary matter for which the Reformers were condemned. The Church of Rome believed (and still believes) that in the Mass (their name for the Lord’s Supper) Christ is re-offered as a sacrifice for sins.

But the writer to the Hebrews says that the Lord Jesus Christ “offered **one** sacrifice for sins **for ever**” (Hebrews 10.12); that He “**once** . . . appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Hebrews 9.26); that He “was **once** offered to bear the sins of many” (Hebrews 9.28); and that “by His own blood He entered in **once** into the holy place (i.e. heaven) having obtained eternal redemption for us.” (Hebrews 9.12) There is no need to repeat His sacrifice. His death was enough to pay the price of our sins and so to satisfy God.

Besides, it is the plain teaching of Scripture that the human body of the Lord Jesus Christ is now in heaven. Luke 24.51 and Acts 1.9-11 expressly say this. Neither will He be seen on earth again until He comes a second time to judge the world and receive His people to Himself. (1 Thessalonians 4.16-17; Hebrews 9.28) Indeed, He expressly instituted the Lord's Supper for His people to remember His death *till He comes again!* (Matthew 26.29; 1 Corinthians 11.26)

One more point needs to be mentioned. In relation to the Mass the Church of Rome calls on her priests to: "Bring, offer." But at the Lord's Supper our Lord said: "**Take, eat.**" This settles the matter. The Word of God is final.

### **Testimonies of Three Reformers**

But let us hear the testimony of three of our Reformers as to why they suffered death by burning.

**John Rogers** says: "I was asked whether I believed in the sacrament to be the very body and blood of our Saviour Christ . . . really and substantially. I answered: 'I think it to be false . . . Corporally Christ is only in heaven, and so Christ cannot be corporally in your sacrament.'"

**John Bradford** says: "The chief thing which I am condemned for as a heretic is because I deny in the sacrament of the altar (which is not Christ's Supper, but a plain perversion as the Papists now use it) to be a real,

natural and corporal presence of Christ's body and blood under the forms and accidents of bread and wine: that is, because I deny transubstantiation, which is the darling of the devil, and daughter and heir to antichrist's religion."

**Thomas Cranmer** says: "They (the Papists) say that Christ is corporally under or in the form of bread and wine. We say that Christ is not there, *neither corporally nor spiritually*, but in them that worthily eat and drink the bread and wine He is spiritually, and corporally in heaven."

Now, were our English Reformers right or wrong? Did they, or does Rome, believe what the Scriptures teach?

Let us be sure about this: it is no mere strife about words. "The Romish doctrine of the *Real Presence* strikes at the very root of the Gospel, and is the very citadel and keep of Popery." (J. C. Ryle)

Is it not clear that those who believe the *Real Presence* abolish the truth of *the perfection of Christ's finished work* when He died on the cross? Either Jesus paid the penalty for our sins, or He did not. The Bible teaches that He did. And so the Reformers were right.

Do they not also undercut *the High Priestly work of Christ*? If there are priests who can offer acceptable sacrifices to God besides Him, then Jesus our Great High Priest is robbed of His office and glory.

Further, do they not also pervert *the Christian ministry*? If sinful men can be exalted to the position of mediators between God and people, then teaching and preaching are rendered unnecessary.

Not only so, do they not make idols of the bread and wine, which they carry about in the streets and expect people to bow down and worship them?

Moreover, do they not distort our Lord's human nature, making it capable of being in ten thousand places at once, when it is located in the presence of God in heaven?

“Rather than admit the doctrine of the *Real Presence* of Christ's natural body and blood under the forms of bread and wine, the Reformers of the Church of England were content to be burned.” (J. C. Ryle) Well may they be described as “the noble army of martyrs.” Soldiers who die in battle are honoured as giving their lives for others. Our Protestant Reformers should be honoured for giving their lives for truth.

### **B. Justification by Faith Alone**

There was, however, a very practical doctrine underlying the Reformers' rejection of the *Real Presence of Christ* that is essential to our salvation. That doctrine is known as *Justification by Faith Alone*.

Although Rome confessed (and still confesses) “Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah, the divine Son of God, the

risen and exalted Lord, the Giver of the Spirit, in whose name is salvation,” it added (and still adds) that “a vital faith alone in the perfect obedience and finished work of Jesus Christ . . . is not sufficient for his justification or right standing before God. In addition to trusting in Christ’s saving work the sinner must himself perform good works, which . . . are . . . *meritorious* and contribute to his final justification.” (Robert L. Reymond)

Now the Reformers, along with Martin Luther and according to Scripture, believed that this doctrine of *Justification by Faith Alone* is ‘the article of a standing or falling church.’ That is, if a church believes it, that church stands; if it rejects it, it falls. Furthermore, if a sinner really believes that Christ paid for his salvation, and on the basis of that belief receives salvation from Him as a free gift, he is saved. If he does not, then he is lost. (John 3.14-16 and 18.) Acts 10.43, Romans 4.6-7, 5.1, and 5.19, to name no other Bible texts, all teach this doctrine.

This was the underlying reason why our Reformers were burned to death. They rejected Rome’s merit mongering, lock, stock and barrel, and embraced a free salvation bought with the precious blood of Christ.

J. Packer and O. R. Johnston state this well when they write: “To the Reformers the crucial question was not simply whether God justifies believers without works of law. It was the broader question whether sinners are wholly helpless in their sin, and whether God is to be

thought of as saving them by free, unconditional, invincible grace.” Erasmus and his fellow humanists opposed this doctrine of *Grace Alone through Faith Alone*, and taught the Romish error that faith must be completed by love, and that man is free to co-operate with God in his salvation before he can be justified. Thus they fell short of the Biblical Truth that God honoured to bring reformation to England.

This truth – the justification of believing penitent sinners by grace alone through faith alone – was the basic battleground of the Reformation.

### **Summary Conclusion**

In trying to sum up this whole turbulent period, we may say that:

**Henry VIII** sought to impose on the Church a type of reform based on Erasmus’ humanism, without changing the Roman Church’s doctrine and worship.

**Edward VI** sought to achieve a more Biblical reform on the basis of *Justification by Faith Alone*.

**Mary** did her utmost to exterminate this Biblical reform.

In Biblical terms, we might say that **Henry** reigned over England for thirty-eight years, and did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, yet he put away certain abominations and gave his subjects the Word of God in their own language.

**Edward** reigned for only six years, and did what was right in the sight of the Lord. He put away the idols, restored a more Biblical worship and gave his subjects freedom to go to God at His throne of grace directly.

**Mary** reigned for five years, and did what was only evil in the sight of the Lord. She restored the 'Christianized paganism' of Rome in all its outward pomp and merciless cruelty.

## Key Terms

**Consecrated** – Something or someone that is made sacred, or set apart for God. The Christian poetess Frances Ridley Havergal showed its true meaning when she wrote:

‘Take my life, and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.’

At the Lord’s Supper, the bread and wine are set apart from a common to a sacred use. In Roman Catholic worship, the wafer and wine are said to be consecrated when the priest utters the words *Hoc est corpus meum* = *This is my body*.

**Corporal Presence** – Bodily presence. From the Latin ‘corpus’ = ‘body.’ Roman Catholics taught (and still teach) that Jesus is bodily present in the wafer and wine of the Eucharist (another name for the Lord’s Supper which means ‘giving of thanks.’) Protestants teach that His body is in heaven, and will stay there until His Second Coming.

**Testimonies** – These are statements made in a court of law under oath, designed to elicit the truth from witnesses. In the Bible, testimonies are the statements of credible witnesses to such events as the miracles and resurrection of Jesus. The Reformers’ testimonies were statements or affirmations of their faith.

**Justification** – The sentence of God, acting as Judge, in which He declares someone to be righteous in the court of heaven. It is the opposite of being condemned. (Romans 5.1 with 8.1; Deuteronomy 25.1)

### **A Special Note on John Foxe (1517-87)**

Born at Boston in Lincolnshire, John Foxe studied at Brasenose and Magdalen colleges in Oxford. Although he lived a morally upright life, he was deeply attached to Popish superstitions, until he saw that the doctrines of the Church of Rome contradicted each other. This discovery “shook his blind obedience to the Church of Rome.” (David C. Relf)

Ordained into the priesthood in 1550, he taught in the Duke of Norfolk’s manor in Reigate, Surrey. Here he began to proclaim the true Gospel. On Mary’s accession, he fled to Basle in Switzerland, where Edmund Grindal, later Archbishop of Canterbury, helped him to compile his great work known as the *Acts and Monuments* or *Book of Martyrs*. This notable achievement was begun in 1552. It was Grindal who gave Foxe the details of the doings and sufferings of the Marian martyrs.

In 1563 the work was published. Such was the welcome it received that the Convocation of the Church of England ordered a copy to be placed in each cathedral and other public places, so that anyone could come and read it, or hear it read. Other editions followed later. For many years, Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* was the only book to be seen in English homes apart from the Bible. It is a book everyone should read.

During the plague of that year that struck London, Foxe stayed at his post, and wrote a rare but valuable tract

comforting the sufferers and urging the authorities to take remedial action wherever they could. Later in life he penned an exposition of Psalm 130. The words *Of free justification by Christ* stand on the title page.

We close our cameo of Foxe with a quotation from his *Preface to the Acts and Monuments*, in which he thanks the Lord Jesus for what he had been enabled to do: “I have finished my work done for Thee and by Thy grace. I thank Thee that Thou hast thus prospered me . . . The writing of this book has brought great cares, watchings and troubles; and through all Thou hast helped me. The martyrs’ names are in Thy Book of Life; nevertheless Thou didst wish thus to make them known to the world. The adversaries never expected their cruelties to come to light . . . above all we thank Thee for bringing to light the innocency of the martyrs. They should be an example to us; but alas, we their sons are unworthy of them . . . Help us to imitate them and to hold fast what they have won. Protest this book and make it fruitful. I dedicate it and myself to Thee.”

# **Chapter 10**

## **The Reformation**

### **Under Elizabeth I**

#### **Introduction**

Mary was succeeded on the English throne by her sister, the Princess Elizabeth, who was the daughter of Anne Boleyn, the second wife of Henry VIII. On her accession, a new age dawned on England, an age celebrated in such works as 'Gloriana' and such songs as 'In Good Queen Bess's Golden Days.'

Elizabeth was sitting under an oak tree in the grounds of Hatfield House, where Mary had kept her prisoner, when messengers came to tell her of the evil queen's death. She listened, looked up through the branches to the bleak November sky, then fell on her knees and exclaimed in Latin: "It is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes." (Psalm 118.23)

It was evidently God's purpose to further the cause of Reformation under her, as it had been His purpose to let Satan try to destroy it.

Let us not forget that God is always in control, and allows nothing to happen outside His secret will.

Let us also remind ourselves that in the history of His Church He has been glorified more by the deaths of the martyrs than by almost any other means. The early 'Church Father' Tertullian coined the phrase: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." And it is true.

The more people are put to death for Christ, the more others come to question the false claims of their murderers, and even turn to Christ themselves.

So it was during Mary's terrible reign. The candle that was lit in England by the deaths of the martyrs may have flickered for a while, but soon it burst into an unquenchable flame.

As soon as Elizabeth knew that she was to be queen, she hurried to London. She entered the Tower (used as a palace as well as a prison) not as a prisoner through Traitor's Gate, as she had done under Mary, but as a queen, guarded indeed, but guarded with love and honour.

As she passed through the Tower gates, the new queen paused. "Some," she said, "have fallen from being princes in this land to be prisoners in this place. I am raised from being prisoner in this place to be prince in this land. *That* was the work of God's justice. *This* is a work of His mercy. So must I be to God thankful, and to man merciful."

There was great rejoicing at Elizabeth's coronation. Bonfires blazed and church bells rang. A great pageant in the streets of London hailed her coronation. Among the characters was a man dressed as Old Father Time. He presented his daughter, dressed as Truth, to the new queen, who received from her a copy of the Bible. In front of the huge crowd, Elizabeth kissed the gift and

clasped it close to her heart. Throughout her long and prosperous reign, the Word of God gradually took possession of the heart of the nation. Indeed, England became known as ‘the land of the Bible.’

Yet Elizabeth needed all the wisdom God could give her to restore peace and happiness to the mournful land. She began her reign at a most difficult time. The nation was still divided between Romanists and Protestants. Each party hoped that the new queen would favour them. They need not have feared a continuation of Mary’s policy. At the outset Elizabeth resolved not to put any of her subjects to death for what they believed. She kept to her resolve. Throughout her long reign, no one was tortured or killed for their faith.

### **Elizabeth and the Reformation**

Of all Henry VIII’s children, Elizabeth was the only one who resembled him in ability and popularity. With a masculine force of character and helped by one of the most cautious and far-sighted statesmen England has ever seen (William Cecil, Lord Burghley) she proceeded to consolidate the gains of Edward’s reign that Mary had tried to destroy.

In 1559 Parliament passed the new Act of Supremacy. By it the authority of the pope and all payments and appeals to him were rejected. But a significant change was made to her official religious title. Instead of claiming to be ‘Supreme Head’ of the Church in England, she took the title ‘Supreme Governor.’ The

tests of heresy were now to be the Scriptures, the first four general councils, and parliament.

Meanwhile Edward's Second Prayer Book was revised. The prayer against the pope was omitted. So too was the statement that kneeling at the Lord's Supper did not imply adoration of the bread and wine. The question of Christ's bodily presence was left undetermined. These changes were clearly intended to calm the fears of Roman Catholics.

So was the Act of Uniformity (also 1559). This ordered all worship to be conducted according to the revised Prayer Book, and left the use of church ornaments and ministerial vestments as they had been in the second year of Edward VI.

To oversee these changes, Elizabeth 'ordered the election' (what a contradiction in terms!) of Matthew Parker as Archbishop of Canterbury. Soon a new Anglican 'episcopate' was in position.

In 1563 the *Forty-two Articles* were revised, and became the famous *Thirty-nine Articles* that has professed the official faith of the Church of England ever since.

Thus by 1563 the 'Elizabethan Settlement' was accomplished. But it was threatened from two sides: on the one side by Papists, on the other by Puritans.

## **1. Popish Threats**

At the beginning of her reign, Philip II of Spain ('Bloody' Mary's widowed husband) had aided Elizabeth for political reasons. But he soon became her enemy when he saw her as head of a new Protestantism that he longed to overthrow. The early part of her reign had also been surprisingly free from trouble by her Roman Catholic subjects. But Mary 'Queen of Scots,' a devoted Romanist, was heir to the throne, and became a constant focus of conspiracy to make her Queen of England. In 1569 a Popish rebellion broke out in the north of England. This was encouraged by Spain. It was soon put down.

### **A. Elizabeth's Excommunication**

The following year a Papal Bull declared Elizabeth excommunicated from the Church and deposed from her throne. It relieved her subjects of all obedience to her government, and gave them leave to murder her. This arrogant papal decree gave rise to numerous popish plots.

In 1571 the Ridolfi Plot, aiming to assassinate the queen, was uncovered in the kind providence of the Lord. This was one of several plots that failed against the queen and her parliament.

[One of the latest of these plots took place in 1586, when a new scheme was hatched against Elizabeth's life. This was the Babington Plot. Mary 'Queen of Scots' was held captive in Wingfield Manor, Derbyshire. But English spies discovered messages between her and her

accomplices hidden in wine barrels carried in and out of the manor. These messages contained plans for a Spanish invasion of England. Mary was imprisoned. After a good deal of wavering on Elizabeth's part, she was beheaded in Fotheringay Castle. As she walked to the scaffold, she held in her hands a Bible and a crucifix. At her death the Dean of Peterborough said: "So perish all Elizabeth's enemies."]

### **B. The Bartholomew Massacre**

The turn of affairs in France soon brought new fears.

In 1572 news reached English shores of a huge massacre of Protestant Christians (called Huguenots) in Paris, the capital city of France. Because it began on a popish 'holy day,' St. Bartholomew's Day, it is known to history as the Bartholomew Massacre.

In the early hours of the Lord's Day, 24 August, the bell of one of the Paris churches tolled. This was the pre-arranged signal to summon the city's Romish population to take up their weapons and set upon any Protestants they could find.

Killings began as a troop of Swiss mercenary soldiers, led by the Romish Duke of Anjou, made for the house of the Huguenot leader, Admiral Gaspard de Coligny. It was feared that Coligny was wielding a growing Protestant influence over the weak Roman Catholic King Charles IX. The soldiers quickly overcame the house guards, then seized Coligny. He begged for mercy, but a

soldier ran him through with a pike. The Admiral was then thrown half-dead out of the window down to the street below. Here another prominent Romanist, the Duke of Guise, finished him off by spearing him in the mouth! The next day, Coligny's headless corpse was dragged by little children through the gutters of Paris and then hung from a gibbet.

By then an all-out massacre of Huguenots had begun. Roadblocks were set up, and travellers who were not wearing a popish badge (such as a white cross on their caps) were killed on the spot. Over the next few days up to ten thousand Protestants were murdered throughout France. This brutal 'solution' to 'the Protestant Problem' (like all such solutions, including Hitler's 'solution' to 'the Jewish Problem') solved nothing.

In England the news of the bloodbath was received with horror. While the popish historian Camille Capilupi hailed the chief perpetrators, Catherine de Medici and Charles IX, as "chosen by our Lord the Redeemer as the instruments of His will," and the massacre itself as "this splendid deed," and while the pope was celebrating mass in Rome and ordering a medal to be cast for the occasion, English Christians began to fear. For although it occurred across the English Channel, the massacre offered enough of a threat to make England very wary again.

### **C. The Revolt of the Netherlands**

The Revolt of the Netherlands against Spanish oppression also brought a fresh threat to England.

In the same year as the St. Bartholomew Massacre, several Dutch leaders gathered in Dordrecht or Dordt, formed themselves into the States-General of the Netherlands Provinces, and invited William of Orange to lead their resistance to an imminent Spanish invasion. These Dutch leaders were decided Protestants. They had already subscribed to the *Belgic Confession* of Faith and taught their families from the *Heidelberg Catechism*. Both these documents were thoroughly Reformed in character. The brutalities of the Spanish army sickened and horrified Protestants both in the Netherlands and in England. Clearly Satan was striking back with a vengeance!

Again, in the loving-kindness of the Lord, a compromise treaty was drawn up between the Spanish and the Dutch. The Netherlands, backed by England, eventually asserted their independence and became a strong Protestant nation under the House of Orange. Nevertheless, as long as the outcome stood in doubt, English shores were always under threat.

As a result of these three events – the pope’s authorizing of Elizabeth’s assassination, the horrors of St. Bartholomew and the miseries inflicted on the Netherlands – the next few years of Elizabeth’s reign were fraught with danger and uncertainty. “It would be easy as a Protestant in the 1570s,” writes Diarmaid MacCulloch, “to ignore the achievements and successes of the Reformation, and feel that God in His

unfathomable wisdom was allowing the enemies of truth to overwhelm His little flock.”

Of course, God’s people could never believe that God would abandon them altogether, even though they knew that suffering was as much a part of their pilgrimage through this life as ‘success.’ For He has promised them: “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So there was a struggle in their hearts between fear of the enemy and hope in His protection.

Still, John Foxe, compiler of the famous *Book of Martyrs*, had expressed this mood of fear to the crowd at the open-air pulpit outside St. Paul’s cathedral in London on Good Friday 1570. The solemn commemoration of Christ’s death on the cross gave Foxe a good opportunity to remind his audience of the sufferings of Christ’s Church. Foxe even branded the “Bishop of Rome” as “more fierce and bitter against us” than “the Turk” or Muslim. For he was busy “stirring up his bishops to burn us, his confederates to conspire our destruction, setting kings against their subjects, and subjects disloyally to rebel against their princes, and all” (he tells God) “for thy name. Such dissensions and hostility Satan hath sent among us, that Turks be not more enemies to Christians than Christians to Christians, Papists to Protestants; yea, Protestants with Protestants do not agree, but fall out for trifles.”

Foxe was speaking from experience. He had lived to witness the whole sweep of the Reformation: England’s

break with Rome under Henry, the reforms of Edward's reign, the frustration of being a refugee in mainland Europe while 'Bloody Mary' was burning her subjects to death, and the promising beginnings of Elizabeth's reign.

Now he felt only apprehension. And so, in the turmoil of the day he did what all in similar circumstances must do, he prayed: "Forasmuch as Thy poor little flock can scarce have any place or rest in the world, come, Lord, we beseech Thee . . . and make an end, that this world may have no more time nor place here, and that Thy Church may have rest for ever." But that was the ultimate prospect for Christians. Meanwhile, the war against evil continued.

### **Deliverance from the Spanish Armada**

The defeat of the Spanish Armada, or naval fleet, in 1588 is traditionally hailed as a great triumph for British naval skill and power. It was, of course, much more than that. The 120 huge, well-armed and formidable Spanish galleons that anchored off Calais were defeated by a much smaller but far more manoeverable English fleet and a few old 'fireboats.' Six hundred Spaniards were killed, and eight hundred more were disabled, while not an English ship was put out of action and only a hundred men were lost.

Before the Armada had set sail, King Philip II of Spain (the same person who had been Mary's husband) had told his admiral, Medina Sidonia: "If you fail, you fail; but the cause being the cause of God, you will not fail."

Also, many sailors and soldiers on board boasted of what they would do to English women, and how luxuriously they would live on the loot of the conquered country. The Spanish invaders really believed that they were invincible.

The reasons for the invasion were clear. First, Philip hated the English people and the Protestant Faith. Then he had asked Elizabeth to marry him, but she had refused. This made him very angry and determined to punish Elizabeth and conquer England for the pope. But He who stilled the wind and waves on the Sea of Galilee now stirred up the wind to blow the Spanish fleet off Gravelines off the French coast straight into the old English fireboats. Then, when they had caught fire and become useless, the wind changed again to force the rest of the Armada into the North Sea.

A touching episode occurred when the crippled Spanish fleet entered Scottish waters. On reaching the Fifeshire coast, Admiral Medina Sidonia came ashore at Anstruther begging for mercy for his cold and hungry sailors. The minister, James Melville, and the town councillors agreed to give them hospitality, and the local gentry put them up in their own homes. Compare this kind treatment by Scottish Reformed Presbyterians to the cruelties of the slaves of Popery. This came from their obedience to Christ's command: "If your enemy hungers, feed him."

Many of those on board who managed to round the north coast of Scotland were slaughtered by their own religionists on the Sligo coast of Ireland, or hanged by English officers of the crown. Only a few shattered ships limped back to Spain. It was a remarkable deliverance for England and Protestantism.

The 'heroes' of this astonishing victory were Admiral Hawkins, Sir Frances Drake (who had read Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* on his trip round the world) and the old Devonshire captain, John Young, who had been in charge of the fireboats. But the real Author of the deliverance was God.

Both queen and country acknowledged His hand in it. Bells rang, bonfires blazed, and Elizabeth ordered a medal to be struck in commemoration of the deliverance. On it was the motto: "God blew with His breath, and they were scattered."

Though it took some time for the significance of the Armada's defeat to emerge, gradually it became clear that the balance of power in Europe had swung from the Roman Catholic south to the Protestant north. Spain's days of domination in Europe were nearing their end.

In England, the deliverance secured long-lasting safety and stability under the unflinching queen. God had delivered the nation from fear of the enemy.

#### **D. The Jesuits**

Meanwhile, Rome was preparing a 'comeback' under the Jesuits. This order of priests re-kindled Roman zeal in its efforts to regain England for its master, the pope. Drilled by a 'spiritual' manual written by their founder, Ignatius Loyola, these men set about their work with intense earnestness.

They all swore absolute obedience to their superiors, yet they were not bound to tell the truth or keep an oath if their deception and perjury would serve the pope. By educating the sons of kings, nobles and the wealthy, they wormed their way into the 'higher' ranks of society, and through the confessional they came to know many political and domestic secrets. They were feared, even by other Roman Catholics.

The Jesuits were greatly helped by **William Allen**, an English Roman Catholic exile on the continent who established a seminary in Douai, now in Belgium, for the training of 'missionary' priests for England. In 1580 they began their mission, led by Robert Parsons and Edmund Campion. Campion was soon seized and executed, but Parsons escaped to the continent. There he intrigued for a Spanish invasion of England (eventually by the Armada), the death or dethronement of Elizabeth, and a Roman Catholic uprising here. The English authorities, under the watchful eye of Sir Francis Walsingham, uncovered their plans, arrested as many priests as they could find, and executed them as traitors. (Today, Walsingham would be

regarded as the head of MI5.) The failure of these Satanic schemes saved England from another reign of terror.

Incidentally, the work of the Jesuits has been referred to as the strike force of the ‘Catholic Counter Reformation.’ Though now generally accepted, the term is a misnomer. What Christians call the Reformation was that movement that sought to re-form a Church that was de-formed. “The movement called the Counter Reformation did not arise to counter this reformation, but . . . to recover the (Roman) Catholic Church from the hammer-blows of Protestant criticism directed at her theological and spiritual penury, her secularization and her corruption.” (James Atkinson) The Roman Catholic Church remains unreformed to this day.

## **2. Puritan Threats**

The new freedom to discuss Reformation ideas and practices that English people had from the opening of Elizabeth’s reign gave rise to a new threat to her settlement of religion. This threat came from the people called Puritans.

However, the Puritan threat was not a threat to the Reformation, nor a threat to Elizabeth’s life or parliament, nor to the lives of the queen’s Roman Catholic subjects. It was only a threat to the established state of religion. For with the Bible in their hands, **the Puritans thought that Elizabeth’s reforms had not gone far enough!**

When they made their demands for further reform known in public, their enemies branded them ‘with the odious name of Puritans’ (Brook). This was because they wished to serve and worship God with greater *purity* than was established by the Church of England.

Some even feared them as revolutionaries, religious and political zealots, a threat to both church and state, turbulent and factious spirits who ‘would exclude order, that’ their ‘brain might rule’. But this was grossly unfair.

More friendly contemporaries described them as ‘those who square their life by the rule of the Word’.

Some modern historians trace the Puritans back to John Wycliffe and the Lollards; others to William Tyndale. Christopher Hill sees them as opposed to a church hierarchy (archbishop, bishops, priests and deacons) without wishing to separate from the Church of England. Kearney believes they are impossible to define. They were, he says, a mere set of cross currents - clerical and anticlerical, Presbyterian and Independent, academic and popular, ‘a flavour . . . a tone of voice . . . a loose set of assumptions’.

Despite the difficulty in defining them, there is such a thing as a Puritans ethos, or recognizable spirit. Lord Macaulay noted their total devotion to God: ‘To know Him, to serve Him, to enjoy Him, was with them the great end of existence.’

Another fine historian, John Richard Green, wrote: ‘The temper of the Puritan was eminently a temper of law. The diligence with which he searched the Scriptures sprang from his earnestness to discover the divine will, which in all things, great or small, he might implicitly obey’.

These understandings are perhaps as near as we can come to defining the essence of Puritanism.

During the whole of Elizabeth’s reign the Puritans made their demands known. We shall try to explain how they saw the situation.

During the Marian persecutions English exiles in Frankfurt and Geneva came to see that the continental Reformation was more Scriptural than the English one under Edward VI. On their return to England at the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign, they saw that her reforms did not match the European models, so they sought greater agreement with the Reformed churches abroad.

For example, in the continental Reformed churches, there were no images or saints’ names and days; but in England images and saints’ names and days were retained, though they were not worshipped. In the continental Reformed churches, all the ministers were equal; but in England a clerical hierarchy (archbishop, bishops, priests and deacons) was retained, but only for convenience and not because it was Biblical. In the continental Reformed churches, the only ministerial dress was a Genevan gown; but in England full clerical dress

for both bishops and ministers, and many ceremonies were retained, even when not too much significance was attached to them.

### **The Vestarian Controversy**

The first stage of Elizabeth's controversy with the Puritans was about vestments. Through the influence of the continental Reformers **Peter Martyr** and **Martin Bucer** (who worked in England) and **John Calvin** and **Henry Bullinger** (who corresponded with the English Reformers), and through the filling of vacant bishoprics with such Reformed men as **Matthew Parker**, **John Jewel** and **Edmund Grindal**, the Puritans demanded that caps and surplices be discarded as popish.

Among their other complaints were that the Apocrypha was retained; the Prayer Book contained some 'popish relics'; cathedral services were too pompous; church festivals or 'holy days' were being preferred to the Lord's Day; and that such ceremonies as crossing in baptism, confirming children, kneeling at the communion rail, bowing at the name of Jesus, using a ring in marriage and other 'relics of the Amorites' (as they called these things) should not be seen in a Reformed Church.

As long as such 'rags of popery' were retained, the Puritans urged, popery had a toehold from which it could push its way back into the Church. [As the events of the Stuart kings (James I, Charles I, Charles II, James II) later showed, they were right.] From the outset,

therefore, the Puritans regarded the Church of England as only half reformed.

Of these early Elizabethan 'Puritans' seeking further reform Edwyn Sandys, William Whittingham, Thomas Sampson, Thomas Becon, Gabriel Goodman and Miles Coverdale the Bible translator were notable leaders.

The heart of the Puritan manifesto was perhaps best expressed in a letter by Whittingham, asking the Earl of Leicester for help: 'I need not appeal to the Word of God, to the history of the primitive church, and to the just judgments of God poured out upon the nations for lack of true reformation. Judge ye betwixt us and our enemies. And if we seek the glory of God alone, the enjoyment of true Christian liberty, the overthrow of all idolatry and superstition, and to win souls to Christ, I beseech your honour to pity our case, and use your utmost endeavours to secure our liberty'.

Elizabeth refused all their petitions, and compelled every Church minister to wear vestments.

### **Prelacy and Erastianism**

The second stage of Elizabeth's controversy with the Puritans was over Prelacy and Erastianism. Prelacy is the system of operating the Church through archbishops and bishops. Erastianism (after Thomas Erastus) is the belief that the State has supreme rule over the Church.

**Thomas Cartwright**, Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, aided by **Walter Travers** and **William Ames**, claimed that the Bible was the only rule, not only of faith, but also of church government and discipline. He saw that in the New Testament Church officers (such as elders and deacons) are distinct from State officers. In addition, he saw that these officers were presbyters, not prelates.

Besides, Cartwright added, the things required by Elizabeth and her bishops had no warrant in Scripture, were not received by the continental churches, and smelled of Popery.

Elizabeth saw these claims as a challenge to her own authority over both Church and State. Her aim was an all-inclusive national church, 'the seamless robe of Christ', that allowed no non-conformity, and she refused to budge. She realized that England was already Lutheran and Calvinistic in doctrine. She knew too that her subjects hated Popery. These two forces would prove a safeguard to the realm. To her mind, therefore, further reform was unnecessary.

On her behalf **John Whitgift**, the archbishop, defended prelacy as 'ancient and expedient.' **Richard Bancroft**, Whitgift's chaplain, and a 'good hater of Puritans,' defended it as *de jure divino*, or 'by divine authority.'

Although, therefore, the exiles hoped to influence Elizabeth in the direction of further reform, they were

disappointed of their hopes: Elizabeth insisted on uniformity and total compliance with the law.

A reaction to their demands was bound to follow. In the 1570's persecution, first under **Archbishop Parker**, then under his successor **Edmund Grindal**, was severe. Cambridge University, 'the very nursery of Puritanism', and the London, Norfolk and Suffolk Puritans, were alienated from the Established Church, despite the godliness and learning of their leaders.

When **Archbishop Parker** was forced to impose the queen's wishes, the Puritans were driven to worship in 'conventicles' or secret meetings.

By 1583 **Archbishop Whitgift** had suppressed 'all reading, preaching, catechizing and praying in any private family'. No man was to preach unless he accepted the whole Prayer Book; all preachers were to wear the prescribed 'habits'; no-one could preach unless ordained by an Anglican bishop; no-one could be ordained until he had subscribed to the supreme authority of the sovereign in church and state, to the Prayer Book as containing nothing contrary to Scripture and to the *Thirty-Nine Articles*.

These conditions were strictly imposed, leading to the suspension of many ministers and university fellows.

Despite the formation of a Wandsworth Presbytery in 1572, and despite repeated petitions to parliament, rigid uniformity was maintained and persecution continued.

In 1592, a Puritan named Morrice boldly requested from parliament an investigation of the bishops' proceedings as contrary to the honour of God, the laws of the realm and the liberty of English subjects. Elizabeth's response was to forbid parliament to discuss the matter and to have Morrice imprisoned.

The same year an Act against non-church-goers gave them three months to conform or be deported from the country. Under this legislation the Brownists, or first Separatists suffered most. **John Penry** was even executed for his non-conformity.

[With the death of Elizabeth in 1603 the Puritan struggle for reform entered a new phase. That new phase stands outside the period we are considering. For although the Puritans continued to agitate for further reform, and despite the Gunpowder Plot and other attempts to bring back popery, England never witnessed a national Reformation, as the Scots were to do between 1638 and 1660.]

### **The Elizabethan Settlement Confirmed**

Towards the close of Elizabeth's reign, a defender of her religious settlement appeared on the scene who was to have lasting influence on the Church in this nation. His name was **Richard Hooker**.

Apart from his public controversy with the Puritan Walter Travers in 1586, Richard Hooker led an uneventful life. At first he was preoccupied with defending the Elizabethan Church of England against the claims of Roman Catholicism. His later years were devoted to writing his masterpiece *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. Hooker's aim in the book was to defend the Church against Puritan criticism.

Hooker claimed that prelacy was apostolic, and that bishops were a distinct order above presbyters. Moreover, he believed that authority resides in each independent national church, and that the reigning monarch is governor of the Church.

His own firm attachment to the Church of England as it was then settled, plus his conviction that justification by faith alone is essential to true Christianity, made him just the right man to codify the queen's 'middle way' and guarantee stability. On the one hand he viewed Roman devotion to the Papacy and false view of justification as most serious errors. On the other hand he saw Puritan reliance on Scripture alone and austerity in worship as unbalanced.

In fact, Hooker outlined a plan that was unique. His 'vision' was of a universe (and so of a nation and church) ordered by reason expressed through law. All of life, he said, should be governed by a harmonious law, extending from the law of God's own Being, through the natural

laws of creation and reason and the supernatural laws of Holy Scripture, to the man-made laws of Church and State. As all life comes from God, he taught, so all life should be regulated by God. Scripture, Reason and Tradition should work together under the guidance of Church and Political authority.

In the structure of the Church of England, Hooker's ideas retained the Roman hierarchy or pyramid of archbishops, bishops, 'priests' or ministers, deacons and people, excluding the pope and his cardinals.

In its worship, ceremonies and liturgy, Hooker's arguments against the Puritans extol the value of beauty and order, play down the role of preaching, and give a central role to Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Although his influence was not greatly felt until after his death, it pervades the Church of England to this day. That is, it upholds his ideals of moderation, in harmonizing "Scripture and tradition, faith and reason, grace and nature, church and state . . . the golden mean between Roman and Protestant extremes, and its social and political conservatism." (Richard Bauckham)

In sum, "Hooker's ideal is the *Respublica Christiana*" or Christian Republic. "In such a state, the head of the State is head of the Church. That is because there is one cultural life, one common good and one governmental mode of expressing that common way of life." (John S. Marshall) It is for the common good of the nation to

adopt the Christian way of life. There are not to be two societies – Church and State, one Christian and the other secular – but one society, ruled and guided by Christian principles. Ministers of the Crown and ministers of the Church have different functions; but both are ministers of the same Christian society. Citizens of the State are likewise to be members of the Church, fulfilling their respective duties in each sphere.

This is the Church of England, now greatly diluted, that our generation has inherited.

### **Conclusion**

Elizabeth's *via media*, or 'middle way' between Popery and Puritanism, prevented the flowering of a fully Biblical Reformation. Yet it gave England great stability.

Had the queen agreed to the Puritans' demands, she may well have seen the nation at large converted to a more robust Reformed faith, with righteousness flourishing in both Church and State, national worship reshaped more like that of the Early Church, and a distinctive Christian culture. But in the providence of God it was not to be. Besides, the marked individualism that characterized Puritan ascendancy between 1640 and 1660 split the Church of Christ in England into a thousand fragments. Unlike their Scottish counterparts, the English Puritans could not agree among themselves.

When James I inherited the English throne in 1603, he found a Church and Nation remarkably secure, yet not as

godly as Reformed Switzerland. Elizabeth's bishops had frustrated every attempt to reform the country further. When Puritan spokesmen pestered the new king for further reform, they realized that the bishops were part of the remaining problem, and not a solution, as Elizabeth had hoped.

Their long-desired Reformation never came.

## Key Persons

**Elizabeth I** (1533-1603) Queen.

**William Cecil, Lord Burleigh** (1520-98) Chief adviser to Elizabeth. Secretary of State, then Lord High Treasurer.

**John Jewel** (1522-71) Protestant Bishop of Salisbury. Exile under Mary. Personal friend of the Zurich Reformer Henry Bullinger. Author of the official defence (called an *Apology*) of the Elizabethan Settlement.

**Matthew Parker** (1504-75) Archbishop of Canterbury. He conformed to Mary's Romanism, and would have been amongst John Calvin's 'Nicodemites,' or disciples afraid to profess their faith openly, like Nicodemus in John 3 of the New Testament.

**Edmund Grindal** (1519-83) Archbishop after Parker. He has been described as a 'Puritan archbishop.' He silenced many of his Calvinistic brethren at Elizabeth's command.

**John Whitgift** (1532-1604) Archbishop of Canterbury after Grindal. A firm adherent of the Elizabethan Settlement.

**Richard Bancroft** (1544-1610) Whitgift's Chaplain. A hater of all Puritans. He believed in the 'divine right' of bishops to rule in the Church.

**Thomas Cartwright** (1535-1603) The veteran defender of Puritan Presbyterianism.

**Richard Hooker** (1554-1600) Author of the 'blueprint' for the Church of England that has survived the centuries.

## Key Events

- 1558 Elizabeth becomes queen.
- 1560 The first Puritans preach the need to purge the Church of England of all remaining ‘rags of Popery.’  
Many refugees return from the continent who had fled to avoid Mary’s persecution.  
Treaty of Berwick between Elizabeth and the Scottish Parliament.  
The Scottish Reformation officially acknowledged.
- 1562 The Romish Earl of Tyrone in Ireland leads two unsuccessful rebellions against Elizabeth.
- 1563 The Thirty-nine Articles adopted as the doctrinal standard of the Church of England.
- 1566 Mary Queen of Scots gives birth to the future James VI of Scotland and I of England.
- 1568 Mary Queen of Scots is held captive by Elizabeth because of her threat to the English throne.
- 1570 The Pope excommunicates Elizabeth I and licences anyone in England to kill her and members of her government.
- 1572 The Bartholomew Massacre of 8000 Protestants by Papists in Paris and then throughout other districts of France.  
Each English parish is allowed to levy a tax for the poor.  
Gregory XIII is chosen Pope.
- 1576 Protestantism is forbidden in France.
- 1577 England and the Netherlands form an alliance against Spain.

- 1585 Sixtus V is chosen Pope.
- 1586 Mary Queen of Scots is involved in a plot to overthrow Elizabeth.
- 1587 Mary Queen of Scots is executed for treason.  
England is at war with Spain.  
Sir Francis Drake destroys the Spanish fleet at Cadiz.
- 1588 The Defeat of the Spanish Armada.
- 1603 Death of Elizabeth I.  
James I becomes king.

### **After Elizabeth's Death**

- 1604 James bans the Jesuits from England.  
England and Spain make peace.
- 1605 The Gunpowder Plot.
- 1606 New laws are passed against Roman Catholics.
- 1611 The Authorized Version of the Bible is published.  
This may be regarded as the summit achievement of the English Reformation. Despite many new versions, it is still the most accurate translation of the original Hebrew and Greek.

## Special Terms

**Episcopate** – The recognized government of the Greek, Roman and Anglican Churches by prelates or bishops. A bishop presides over a diocese. He ranks beneath an archbishop but above ‘priests’ and deacons. The term is derived from the Greek ‘episcopos’ = ‘overseer.’ In the New Testament he is equal to the ‘elder’ or ‘presbyter.’

A bishopric is his tenure of office.

**Papal Bull** – An edict proclaimed by a pope. From the Latin ‘bulla’ = ‘seal’ or ‘sealed document.’

**Holy Day** – A day set apart for God. Originally, the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Lord’s Day. But since the Roman Church took over power in western Europe, it refers to days set apart for the remembrance of Saints. Today, both the Lord’s Day and ‘saints’ days’ are thoroughly secularised or worldly.

**Belgic Confession** – A Reformed Confession of Faith originating in the Southern Netherlands, now called Belgium. It was compiled by Guido de Brès, a Reformed minister who was martyred for the faith in 1567.

**Heidelberg Catechism** – A Reformed Catechism written in Heidelberg by Zacharius Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus. It was commissioned by the Elector of Palatine, Frederick III. It was widely used in Germany and Holland. Divided into 52 sections, it has formed the basis of weekly sermons throughout the year in many Reformed churches.

**Vestments** – Ritual garments worn by ‘clergy.’ From the Latin ‘vestimentum’ = ‘clothing.’

**Surplices** – loose flowing vestments of white linen with full sleeves, and worn by the ‘clergy’ at services of worship.

**Ceremonies** – Prescribed rituals performed in the name of religion. From the Latin ‘caerimonia’ = ‘religious worship.’ There are no religious ceremonies laid down in the New Testament.

**Clerical** – Pertaining to ‘clerics’ or the ‘clergy.’ From the Greek ‘klērikos’ = ‘belonging to the Christian ministry,’ as in Acts 1.17. Anticlerical means ‘against the clergy.’

**Presbyterian** – Government of the Church by presbyters or elders. The Early Church continued the form of Church government adopted by the Jews under Moses on God’s authority.

**Independent** – The idea that each Christian church is independent of all others, and can govern itself without external influence. In theory Independents ignore other local churches and the Universal Body of Christ, but in practice they enjoy fellowship with both.

**Apocrypha** – Writings that were never recognized as part of the Jewish canon of Scripture, and are not recognised by Reformed Protestants, but form part of the Roman Catholic canon, or rule of faith and life.

**Zealot** – Some one who is extremely fervent for certain religious or political ideas. From the Greek ‘zēlos’ = ‘jealousy’ or ‘fervour.’

**Genevan Gown** – A black gown worn by the Reformed ministers of Geneva, in Switzerland, to distinguish themselves from Roman priests. It is more or less the same as a university undergraduate’s gown.

**Brownists** – Disciples of Robert Brown, an English Independent and Separatist.

**Separatists** – Professing Christians who keep themselves apart from others. From the Latin ‘parare’ = ‘to make ready.’

**Ecclesiastical** – Pertaining to the Church. From the Greek ‘ekklēsia’ = ‘assembly,’ or ‘called out body of people.’

**Polity** – A particular form or system of government, in Church or State.

## Chapter 11

### Historical Review

Before seeking to learn some lessons for our own day from the English Reformation, we are reminded of a summary of it by **William Allen**, leader of the Roman Catholic refugees on the continent. This summary prompts us to take a brief historical review of the whole movement.

In 1584, in a book entitled *a True, Sincere and Modest Defence of English Catholics*, Allen labelled the settlement under **Henry VIII** as still Catholic but schismatic. That is, the king was still attached to the Roman faith but had broken off from Papal authority.

Reforms under the boy king **Edward VI** he identified as Zwinglian.

**Mary's** reversal he classified as again Catholic.

The settlement under **Elizabeth** he styled Calvinist.

Although this analysis comes from a man hostile to the English Reformation, it contains some elements of truth. The religion of England did change significantly under Henry VIII and his three Tudor successors. But its changes were violent swings from full-blown Romanism, into Biblical reform, back to full-blown Romanism again, then reaching the Anglican 'middle way.'

In other words, it underwent a most traumatic conflict between the power of God and the powers of darkness. We should be most thankful that the power of God triumphed.

Our own historical perspective would be something like the following:

First, the reform under **Henry** produced a kind of Humanistic Roman Catholicism. This was the Church with Latin services, but free of Papal control and without the monasteries. The influence of Luther on it was minimal. It had removed a few long-standing abuses, but was far from the Biblical model of the Church.

Next came the reforms under **Edward**, with Thomas Cranmer as its chief architect. This was the Church of the English Bible and the two English Prayer Books. It was severed from the corrupt Church of the Middle Ages, and asserted the primacy of Holy Scripture as understood by the Early Church Fathers and Councils, refined by insights from contemporary continental Reformers.

Under **Mary** the Church was once more deformed. It reverted to Medieval (i.e. idolatrous and superstitious) forms of worship, and became what the Bible terms “a synagogue of Satan.”

Last came the reforms under **Elizabeth**. Throughout her reign the queen kept firm control over the Church. She defended her policy against both the intrigues of the Papists and the demands of the Puritans.

Its early period was more defensive than creative. Its chief architects were John Jewel and John Whitgift.

In the latter part of her reign the Church became more constructive. “As Archbishop Whitgift had built the walls of defence for the Elizabethan Church, so Richard Hooker built the cathedral-like structure of Elizabethan theology.” (John S. Marshall) It was a structure with new features, but its sturdiness, doctrines and forms of worship captured the heart of the nation at large.

Despite many changes, some for the better and some for the worse, it has proved to be the durable form of Anglicanism. Yet Presbyterians think it was only half reformed, while Independents and Baptists would demolish it altogether. This is why Gordon Murray termed it ‘the unfinished Reformation.’ Its future is in the hands of God.

Let us remember too that the Reformation in England progressed much more slowly than the work of God in Germany and Switzerland. At first, it was promoted more by humanists than by fully committed Reformers.

Only later did the doctrines, worship and moral teachings of the Church in England come to resemble those of other European Reformed Churches. In fact, when we compare the settled English doctrinal formulas and forms of worship with those on the continent, especially Lutheran churches, we see a striking likeness. This is because the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ is one,

wherever it is found: she has “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in . . . all.” (Ephesians 4.5-6) As the Holy Spirit drew each Reformed Church further and further away from Rome, they grew nearer and nearer to each other, much as the spokes of a wheel become closer and closer to each other the nearer they are to the wheel hub. True, some important differences remained, but there was a family identity that could be easily recognized. We must look beneath the surface to see this unity. But one thing is certain: it was there. Wherever the true Church is:

‘Names and sects and parties fall;  
Thou, O Christ, art all in all.’

## **Special Terms**

**Zwinglian** – The type of reforms introduced into Zurich, Switzerland, by the Reformer Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531).

**Calvinist** – That form of Christian belief, worship, church government and lifestyle that most resembles early church standards. It was adopted by the Geneva Reformer John Calvin (1509-64)

**Anglican** – Pertaining to the Church of England and those churches in communion with it.

**Schismatic** – A person or movement that causes a split or division in existing communities. From the Greek ‘skhisma’ = ‘rent, cleft,’

## Chapter 12

### Reformation Blessings

The Protestant Reformation in 16<sup>th</sup> century England was the greatest watershed in the life of the nation. We have already seen how it delivered England from appalling ignorance, superstition, tyranny, fear, fraud, love of money, priestcraft and immorality. Let us now list some of the positive blessings God sent with it.

1. First, it gave us **the open Bible in our mother tongue**, with **freedom to read, believe and obey it** for ourselves.

Of all the means God used to overthrow the Church of Rome and its corruptions, the translation of the Word of God was the earliest and most powerful. It laid the axe to the very root of the Roman system of religion and morals. Before the open Bible, the vast fabric of Popery crumbled. Before the open Bible, too, every person in England was free to exercise his own private judgment.

With an English Bible in every parish church, and in many homes, every thinking person soon saw that the religion of priests, bishops, cardinals and popes has no warrant in Holy Scripture. One Roman cardinal proved this: one day he came across a Bible, not knowing what it was. "I do not know what this book is," he said, "but I perceive it is all against us." What a blessing, then, is an open Bible.

2. Second, the Reformation gave us **access to God through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

This glorious privilege had been blocked off for centuries by the rubbish of men's religious inventions. Had we felt the need of pardon and acceptance with God before the Reformation, we would have been directed to seek it through piles of priests, monks, saints, penances, masses and confessions, as if there were no such thing as a Mediator and a throne of grace.

But when this huge pile of spiritual debris was shovelled away by the truth that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone, people found peace with God, and access into His holy presence. Every guilty sinner now saw that he has the God-given right to go straight to the Lord Jesus Christ for the pardon of his sins, without waiting on pope or priest. Consequently, people began to pray at home, in the fields, on their way to work, even at leisure. To have the great barrier (of mutual hatred because of sin) between God and us removed by our Lord Jesus Christ is a blessing that has consequences for eternity.

3. Thirdly, the Reformation gave us **worship that was pure and simple.**

When people discovered from His Word that God is a spirit, and that those who worship Him may do so anywhere, so long as they worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4.24), they cleansed their houses and

churches of idolatrous monuments, images, crucifixes, candles, incense, and what not, and began to worship God without these idolatrous distractions.

4. A fourth major blessing God restored to His Church through the Reformation is **the true Christian minister**.

Before their eyes were opened by the Holy Spirit, people believed that every minister of the sanctuary was a sacrificing priest. The little preaching they did hear was that of travelling monks, who went around telling the most bawdy stories and fantastic legends and fake miracles, along with the 'virtues' of the pope, the hermits or 'desert fathers,' the Virgin Mary and the saints, but hardly anything of the true Gospel.

But when they learned that we have a Great High Priest in heaven representing them before God, they came to appreciate the gift of the true Christian minister, whose office is not to offer sacrifices on an altar, but to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ.

What a joyful sight it was to see crowds gathered at Paul's Cross in the city of London, where such mighty and moving preachers as Hugh Latimer, John Bradford, John Jewel and others held forth the Word of eternal life to poor, lost souls.

How thankful too were country people when Edward VI's chaplains visited their towns and villages, standing at their market crosses to open to them the 'Gospel

market,' where salvation could be had "without money and without price."

5. A fifth major blessing brought us by the Reformation was **the sanctity of marriage and the family**.

Before the Reformation, almost everyone believed that life in a monastery or convent was the only way of overcoming sin and becoming holy. Thousands of young men and women thought they could be more religious by becoming monks or nuns.

The Reformation cut up this terrible delusion by the roots. It did so not merely by dissolving the religious houses where they lived, but by bringing to light God's emphasis on the family. It set up in English hearts the great Biblical truth that true Christianity is not to be sought behind convent walls or in monastic cells, but in our families and daily callings or employment.

When young people read in the Bible that none of the early Christians left their families to live in a monastery or convent or abbey or priory, but that whole families lived and worshipped and even worked together, they stayed at home, and served there, helping mother do household chores or father dig the garden and do repairs, and learning to look after the sick or ailing grandparents.

Not only that: families began to pray together and learn the catechism together. Here father took on himself the responsibility of leading his wife and children to God and

of teaching them His ways. He felt himself privileged to be a 'son of Abraham,' of whom God said: "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord." (Genesis 18.19)

The Reformers ordered the Ten Commandments to be taught to every child, and our duty to God and others to be learned from the catechism. Those who could afford it employed Reformed ministers as family chaplains, to teach their sons the Reformed Faith and expound the Scriptures to the whole family (including the servants) in their private chapels.

This 'new' practice in time had a most uplifting effect on English morals. If England had higher moral standards than Popish countries, she owed it under God to the Reformation.

6. A sixth major blessing brought to us by the Reformation was **the Protestant work ethic**.

This was the rediscovery of God's original 'creation mandate' to "replenish the earth and subdue it" for His glory and our good. It gave people a new sense of the dignity of work and the value of the meanest labour.

The Church of Rome had divided people into two classes: 'clergy' and 'laity.' It taught that only the clergy were important.

By contrast, the Reformation taught people that God places great value on individual people and their lawful callings. Martin Luther, a former monk, taught England this truth. “The Bible abounds with examples of hard work,” he said. “Christ was a carpenter. Mary kept a clean house. Even the shepherds returned to their flocks after seeing the babe in the manger.” “Surely,” he quipped, “that must be wrong. We should correct the passage to read: ‘They went and shaved their heads, fasted, told their rosaries, and put on cowls.’ Instead we read: ‘The shepherds returned.’ Where to? To their sheep. The sheep would have been in a sorry way if they had not!”

Abraham Kuyper pointed out that it was when the Dutch peasants began to realize that they were chosen by God to salvation they saw themselves as members of the Body of Christ, called to serve each other, and their toil in the fields as important both to God and the community.

The American people, heirs of the Puritans, are noted for their diligent attitude to their daily jobs. This is the fruit of the Protestant work ethic.

What an incalculable blessing is lawful, useful work!

7. A seventh blessing brought to us by the Reformation is **the true way to keep the Lord’s Day.**

This day, called the Sabbath by Jews and Sunday by heathens, is the day God has appointed to remind us of three things: Himself resting after His work of creation,

the Lord Jesus resting after finishing the work of redemption His Father gave Him to do, and the eternal rest that remains for the people of God after their work in this present life. It is a creation ordinance. But it is also a Christian holy day. Like the ordinances of marriage and work, it comes directly from God, and is meant to be kept by everyone.

The Medieval Church of Rome invented so many saints' and feast days that the Lord's Day had become quite neglected, except by the faithful who regularly attended church.

But the Reformers rediscovered it, and viewing it in the light of Christ's resurrection, spent it as a day of joy and gladness, of rest and praise, in anticipation of their eternal rest with God in heaven.

8. An eighth blessing we have received through the Reformation is a **true appreciation of God's handiwork in nature.**

Again, God used Martin Luther to open our eyes to the wonders of creation. "We now look deeper into creation than we did under the Papacy," he said. "They used to pass it by, looking at nature with the interest of a cow."

For example, under Rome's rule, Medieval artists were patronised almost exclusively by the Church. It commissioned them to paint religious scenes and religious people. The churches of Italy are full of such

paintings. *Madonna of the Meadow* (meaning ‘My Lady of the Meadow’) is a typical example of how landscapes were used merely as a backcloth to a venerated religious figure, such as Mary, the mother of Jesus.

The Reformation completely changed this approach. People began to delight in God’s creation as a glorious expression of His wisdom, power, goodness and beauty. Cox’s *Returning from the Hayfield* is only one of numerous fine English landscapes springing from Reformation principles.

How privileged we are too, when we visit the Bernese Oberland in Switzerland, to see plaques containing Bible texts placed at various panoramic viewpoints around the Alps. These texts call on the mountain hiker to pause and praise God for His wonderful works in nature. By contrast, the mountain summits of Roman Catholic Austria are furnished with crosses.

It was the unlocking of the secrets of nature that has led to countless other blessings, in the science of medicine, astronomy, and other disciplines.

Under popish principles, the astronomer Galileo was severely persecuted by the Church for challenging its unscientific dogmas. They impeded his inquiries into the physical heavens with a Pharisaic blindness. Indeed, it was not until 1926 that the Church of Rome admitted that the earth revolves round the sun! Did they never read:

“He hangeth the earth upon nothing” (Job 26.7) and “He sitteth upon the circle of the earth” (Isaiah 40.22)?

With the advent of the Reformation, a spirit of reverent inquiry led men of science into realms where the worship of the Creator is the only appropriate response. “In truly religious awe,” said Dr, John Gresham Machen, “the man of science stands at length before a curtain that is never lifted, a mystery that rebukes all pride.”

### **Conclusion**

Such are some of the blessings that God has conferred on us through the Reformation. In sum, He gave us an open Bible, free access to Himself, pure and simple forms of worship, a true Christian ministry, the sanctity of marriage and the family, the Protestant work ethic, the special sanctity of the Lord’s Day, a finer appreciation of His handiwork in nature, scientific endeavour unhampered by a mole-blind church, and Christian principles to live by.

Though we are familiar with these blessings every day, we must never forget that they were not won without much prayer, effort, suffering and even bloodshed.

So then, let us realize afresh our immense debt to the God of all grace for visiting England with the Protestant Reformation. It is our true and precious heritage.

## Special Terms

**Eternity** – The realm outside time that has no beginning or ending. It is one of the qualities attributed to God, and the state into which we all must enter at death.

**Catechism** – A form of instruction by way of question and answer. There are many catechisms that have been authorized as teaching manuals of the Christian Church.

**Chaplains** – Ministers who officiate in private chapels. The term now covers those who serve as Christian ministers in the armed forces and hospitals.

**Expound** – To set out the meaning of a text in some detail. From the Latin ‘exponere’ = ‘to explain.’

**Rosaries** – Roman Catholic beads used as aids to remember certain prayers, such as the *Paternoster* (Our Father) and *Ave Maria* (Hail Mary). The idea sprang from the Latin ‘rosarium’ = ‘rose garden,’ thus leading to the notion of a ‘garden’ of prayers.

**Cowls** – Hooded garments worn by monks. From the Latin ‘cucullus’ = ‘hood of a cloak.’

## **Chapter 13**

### **Why England Needs Another Reformation**

We conclude our study of the English Reformation by showing the bearing of the whole subject on our own times. Let us look away from the momentous events of the sixteenth century and turn the searchlight on today.

We live in depressing times. The prospects for the Church of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ appear dark.

1. In the first place, **High Church Ritualists**, doing the work of Roman Catholics for them, are rapidly **turning the Church of England back to Romanism**. Even many Evangelicals and Nonconformists have succumbed to Rome's charms, and regard loyal Romanists as true Christians.

Visit a **parish church** anywhere in the land, and with few exceptions you will find an altar, a lady chapel, priestly vestments, candles and flowers, bowings and crossings, stained glass windows 'depicting God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit,' crucifixes and 'statues of Mary.'

One parish church in Hereford I visited expressly denied being a Protestant church. It contained a huge statue of Mary with candles to be lit as people prayed for their dead.

Another parish churches I know that was once evangelical now celebrates Mass, for both the living and the dead.

Yet another parish church nearby contains a notice by its chancel rails, warning people not to tread inside the rails because beyond them is holy ground!

When I visited the **cathedral** in Ripon, it had a 'confessional,' where troubled consciences could apply for counsel and pardon.

In the cathedral bookshops in Norwich and Truro I looked in vain for a Biblical treatment of the Gospel. Yet there were plenty of books on the Medieval Mystics!

In York Minster a book was sold that denies the very deity and miracles of Christ.

In Derby cathedral leaflets were available recommending the priesthood and the value of 'retreats.'

The **priory** in Christchurch, Dorset, boasted an 'angelic beam.' Apparently the original workmen cut the beam too short. When they returned to the site the next morning, the beam was in place. In fact, it is about a metre too long! Is this angels' work, or a pious fraud?

The superstitious veneration of '**holy places**,' of **Mary** and the '**saints**' is going on apace. Niches in church walls that were once empty are now being filled with crude figures purporting to be parish patron saints. Prayers to St. Jude are posted daily to the *Times* and *Telegraph* newspapers. Do the senders not know that he is the patron saint of lost causes? Such meaningless

names as St. Cross and St. Saviour's are also given to certain churches or colleges.

When certain Protestant Christians wrote to the professing Evangelical Bishop of Norwich, Maurice Wood, asking him to close down the **shrine** at Walsingham, he merely replied that it was just another place of worship in his diocese, and could do nothing about it!

Professing ministers of Christ still call themselves **bishops and priests**.

Some of them are behaving like their Medieval forbears. When I lived in rural Lincolnshire the '**vicar**' of Wrawby was often seen sitting at his church gate with a begging bowl, just like a Medieval monk.

The **Bishop** of Lincoln, in full regalia and accompanied by his acolytes, one bearing a silver cross, visited the village of Barnetby-le-Wold in order to bless the fields and the villagers' gates! But he never preached the Gospel there!

All this (and much more) points to a dark, Satanic effort to unreform, unprotestantize the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ in England.

Bishop Ryle observed in his day: "A sapping and mining process has been long going on under our feet, of which we are beginning to see a little. We shall see a good deal more by and by." We are witnessing the same undermining process.

Even Her Majesty the Queen has expressed dissatisfaction with the Church of England, of which she is the official Governor, and has welcomed the Pope to her home, while the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, has publicly admitted his perplexity about the future of the Anglican Communion.

These are only a tiny sample of the symptoms of a return to Romanism. They signify a deep dissatisfaction with our Reformation heritage and a feverish yearning for a return to the benighted religion of the Middle Ages.

In short, we are in imminent peril of re-union with Rome. So, as good bishop Ryle urges us: “In the name of the Lord let us set up our banners. If ever we would meet Ridley and Latimer and Hooper in another world without shame, let us ‘contend earnestly’ for the truths they died to preserve . . . Let us not talk only, but act. Let us not act only, but pray . . . There is a voice in the blood of the martyrs. What does that voice say? It cries from Oxford, Smithfield and Gloucester: ‘Resist to the death the Popish doctrine of the Real Presence, under the forms of the consecrated bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper!’”

2. In the second place, we are under very serious threats from **secularism**, or **sheer worldliness**.

One area where man’s religious instincts cannot help poking through is that of **sport**. In football alone, the grounds of various teams are referred to as ‘The Church.’ Their players are hailed as gods. One was spoken of as

God Himself, “because he can do anything.” Three others playing in the same team as each other were described as ‘The Holy Trinity.’ When players shoot for goal instead of passing the ball to other players, the commentators shout: “He’s going for glory.” When a player scores after fouling an opponent, the commentators say: “He’s now atoned for his sin.” When the whole team sweeps into attacking action, the terraces flow with a ‘Mexican Wave’ of worship. And so on. These are all religious terms. They prove without question that if we do not have the pure religion of genuine, Reformed Christianity, we shall cultivate a false one, making creatures our gods. (Romans 1)

On church notice boards all kinds of **worldly activity** are advertised: raffles, dances, Victorian markets, Lenten lunches, concerts, organ recitals, playgroups, meditation sessions, strawberry fairs, bridge days (for playing cards), scrabble sessions, tramps’ suppers, Christmas parties, craft displays, sleepovers and coffee mornings. The list could be extended indefinitely.

In Truro Cathedral the antique **auction** show ‘Flog It’ took place.

In Coventry Cathedral silly ‘clergymen’ **danced** down the aisle.

In Lincoln Cathedral Italian **opera** was performed. When I asked a man at the cathedral door what Italian opera was doing in a house supposedly set apart for worship, he replied: “What’s wrong with Italian opera? It’s no worse than German or French or English opera!”

Are churches and cathedrals places for prayer, or museums, theatres and secular community halls?

There seems to be no end to the giddy craving for worldly entertainment. And the world looks on and is disgusted. Meanwhile the people of God are grieved.

In addition to these abominations, we are experiencing the breakdown of marriages and families, increase in community strife and gang warfare, violent robberies and lust-inflamed murders. Much of this is related to alcohol, drug abuse and gambling, all three the fruit of sheer unrestrained human wickedness.

3. In the third place, the spectre of **Islam** hangs ominously over our land.

When he penned the first part of the Koran, Mohammed advocated peace. But when he found his message was ignored, he recommended converting others by the sword. This appears in the latter part of his book, and gave rise to the idea of Jihad, or 'Holy War.'

Christians prefer John Bunyan's title of the same name! It describes the *spiritual war* between Diabolus and Prince Immanuel over man's soul!

With the flood of Muslim immigrants overflowing Western Europe, especially Germany, Holland, France and England, and with their aggressive demands for

Islamic law to rule the nations, what may we expect if the Lord does not intervene?

### **Some Modern Reformed Assessments**

Yet we should be thankful that throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a revival of interest in the Reformation has taken place. That interest is still growing.

To indicate the view of a few modern Reformed preachers, we shall quote some of their reflections on this mighty work of God. In this connection they agree with J. C. Ryle, who said: “The Reformation was the greatest blessing God ever gave to this land.”

Says R. C. Sproul: “The Reformation brought light out of darkness. That light must shine anew to dissipate the darkness that encroaches on the Gospel in our age.”

Says Joel Beeke: “The Reformation sought to restore true religion . . . It broke away from a Roman Catholicism that was mired in superstition, corruption and legalism.”

Says Gordon Murray: “The Reformation . . . re-established the authority of the Bible in the Church of England. It opened those Scriptures to the English people in a way they could understand. It recovered the Gospel of the grace of God, leading many into an experience of personal salvation. It produced congregational worship in which the people could take part. It also challenged and overcame papal claims to supreme and universal

sovereignty in the Church and even over the nations. These are just some of the great benefits that God bestowed on this country through the Reformation.”

Says Terry L. Johnson: “*Socially*, the Protestant Reformation broke down the wall between the sacred and the secular, leading to a fresh appreciation for marriage, family, and the ordinary tasks of life.

*Politically*, it led to the recognition of an essential equality among all people, a recognition of basic human rights, and accordingly the creation of representative forms of government.

*Economically*, it promoted free market economics and gave workers a new sense of dignity in their labours.

*Educationally*, it gave impetus to universal literacy, as the common people learned to read the Bible for themselves.

In a word, the Reformation led to freedom: personal, political, economic and intellectual.

The Protestant Reformation had profound effects on all aspects of society, but its chief effects were *religious*.”

Johnson includes in these religious fruits *congregational singing*, hearing *the Bible read and preached* in our own language, receiving both the bread *and the wine* at the Lord’s Supper, and the *every member ministry* of the Church, or *priesthood of all believers*.

For all these blessings we should be deeply thankful.

Johnson concedes that since Vatican II the Church of Rome has embraced some of these reforms. But on the fundamental issues, such as the sacrificial nature of the Mass, Justification by Faith *and* Works, the Priestly nature of the minister's office, and the *Magisterium* or the Teaching Function of the Church as the final source of authority for both faith and life, he reminds us, it reaffirms the decrees of the Council of Trent.

For this reason, "there can be no compromise with Rome . . . We must be obedient to Scripture . . . The need for continued reformation springs from loyalty to the Gospel that is the power of God unto salvation." (Gordon Murray)

### **A Model Prayer for Our Day**

Our only hope, now, as always, is in the Lord. When the ancient Church of God lay helpless under threat from their surrounding enemies, their good king, Jehoshaphat gathered his people together, and "stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord, before the new court," and prayed. His prayer is a model for us today.

First, he acknowledged the sovereignty of God: "O Lord God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? And rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? And in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?" So we should bow low before His awesome sovereignty.

Then, he acknowledged the Lord to be their covenant God who had once driven out their enemies and given them the land: “Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever? And they dwell therein, and have built thee a sanctuary therein for thy name . . .” We too should remember the covenant God made with us in 1643 at Westminster, and plead it before Him.

Next, he called on God to look on Israel’s enemies and judge them: “And now, behold the children of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir . . . Behold, I say, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of thy possession, which thou hast given us to inherit. O our God, wilt thou not judge them? So also we should beg Him to arise and scatter His enemies.

Finally, he acknowledged his and his people’s weakness, helplessness and perplexity, and avowed their faith and hope in Him alone: “For we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee.” (2 Chronicles 20.5-13) This is our only resource. May God come to our rescue before it is too late.

### **Afternote**

Perhaps some who have just read this account are still ‘strangers to grace and to God,’ as Robert Murray M’Cheyne says he was before ‘free grace’ awoke him

‘by light from on high.’ If so, you too need to be converted and re-formed. In His office of Mediator between God who is holy and men who are sinful, the Lord Jesus Christ issues this gracious invitation: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” (Matthew 11.28-29) This invitation is for you.

O that you would hear His voice in it! He says: “Come unto me,” not ‘Go to the church, or the priest, or the saints, or Mary, or the psychiatrist.’ Only He can relieve your guilty conscience and wash away your sin. Only He can set you right with God. Only He can give you peace in your troubled heart. Only He can bear you through every crisis of life. Only He can carry you through the solemn door of death.

And though you have nothing to take with you, take your sinful heart, and your sinful life, and place them in His hands. And believe that when He gave His life as a ransom for many on the cross, it was for sinners such as you. Which would you rather bear, the heavy burden of a guilty conscience and the fear of death, judgment and hell, or the easy yoke of Christ, a cleansed conscience and the joyful prospect of heaven? O “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” (Acts 16.31)

## Special Terms

**High Church** – That aspect of Anglicanism that emphasizes ritual and ceremony, as distinct from Broad Church, which is liberal, and Low Church, which is evangelical.

**Ritualists** – Those who love to adhere strictly to humanly prescribed ways of performing ‘divine service.’

**Evangelicals** – Those who adhere to the original Gospel or Evangel.

**Nonconformists** – Those Protestants who conscientiously do not conform to the Church of England.

**Chancel** – The eastern part of a church building. It is separated from the nave or main part by a screen or steps. From the Latin ‘cancelli,’ altered from ‘carcer’ = ‘barrier.’

**Confessional** – A box in which priests, separated from the person confessing sin by a lattice, hear confessions and grant absolutions or pardons. From the Latin ‘confitere’ = ‘to acknowledge’ or ‘declare.’

**Mystics** – People who claim to be specially initiated into the mysteries of God. They base their claims on visions and extasies, etc. From the Latin ‘mysticus’ and then Greek ‘mustēs’ = ‘initiated person.’

**Retreats** – Places where people can ‘move back’ from their busy lifestyles, especially in order to meditate, either alone or with others. From the Latin ‘retrahere’ = ‘to retract.’

**Priory** – A monastic house.

**Shrine** – Originally, a chest or casket in which religious relics were deposited. Later, any place of worship set up in a building or in the countryside.

**Diocese** – The district under the jurisdiction of a bishop, whether Greek, Roman or Anglican. From the Greek ‘dioikein’ = ‘to keep house.’ ‘Oikos’ = ‘house.’

**Vicar** – The priest or minister in charge of a parish. From the Latin ‘vicarius’ = ‘substitute.’ The parish vicar is falsely said to stand in relation to his parishioners as Christ’s substitute. As the Holy Spirit is Christ’s substitute on earth, the term is a remnant of the system that denies individuals direct access to Christ.

**Regalia** – Emblems worn as signs of royalty.

**Acolytes** – Persons assisting priests or bishops in processions or services. From the Greek ‘akolouthos’ = ‘follower.’

**Secularism** – The worldview that relates everything only to this present age, without any reference to spiritual, sacred or eternal things. From the Latin ‘saeculum’ = ‘generation’ or ‘age.’

**An Introduction to  
The English Reformation**

**For Young People  
(Aged 10-15)**

**By  
John M. Brentnall**

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## Introduction

The history you are about to read concerns a work of God that took place in England almost five hundred years ago.

It is worthwhile to study it because it made us the nation we are.

It is also worthwhile because we are in danger of forgetting who we are. There are people in our society who do not want us to be English, but Europeans. But God has given us ‘this blessed plot,’ and at root we are a very patriotic people.

It is also worthwhile, because many people today do not believe in God. Yet the God who did wonders five hundred years ago is still God. What He did then was amazing, and we should thank Him for doing it. The big difference between now and then is that as a nation we have forgotten Him.

But I hope you do not wish to study England’s past only to feed your mind. When you read this account you must be spurred into action. For we are badly in need of another Reformation, and we need Him to stir up our spirits to pray and protest against the evils of our day till, if He pleases, He sends one.

Then we shall be like King David the Psalmist, who cried: “O God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers

have told us, what deeds you performed in their days, in the days of old: . . . you set them free; for not by their own sword did they win the land . . . but [by] your right hand . . . and the light of your face; for you delighted in them.” (Psalm 44.1-3) This is our prayer for you as you grow up in our Godless society.

Before setting out on our journey through the English Reformation, we shall make clear our viewpoint. We do this for three reasons.

1. First, because the way we look at the past determines what we say and write about it.

Those of us who believe that the world exists because God made it, and that it steers a certain course because He directs it, will try to see God at work in history, either in mercy or in judgment. This is what the Bible commentator Matthew Henry meant when he wrote that God’s dealings with His people are commonly mixed: *mercy* and *judgment*. God has set the one over against another . . . like showers and sunshine.” Mrs. Anne Ross Cousin did the same in her beautiful poem based on the sayings of the Scottish Christian, Samuel Rutherford:

‘With *mercy* and with *judgment*  
My web of time He wove.’

Seeing our nation’s history in this light, we will not survey the past from *our* point of view, but from *God’s*. We will try to see people, events and changes as God sees them.

2. Second, we adopt God's view of history because we believe in truth. He is the God of truth, and in His Word He has shown that truth is made up of *facts* plus a right *understanding* of those facts.

For example, just before Christ was born, God sent an angel to tell Joseph, Mary's husband-to-be, that she was to be His mother. The message was this: "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1.21)

Notice: "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus." These are the *facts*. Then God gives us His *understanding* of the facts: "For he will save his people from their sins." The name "Jesus" means "Jehovah is salvation." As Jehovah is one of God's names, the text tells us that the son of Mary is no less than God, and that as God He will save a certain number, called "His people", from their sins.

Here is another example: "Christ *died*:" that is a *fact*. He did not faint. His disciples did not steal and hide His body, then falsely claim that He had risen from the dead. He really died. Then we read: "Christ died *for our sins*:" that is God's *understanding* of the fact. (See 1 Corinthians 15.3) The little word "for" explains to us that He took our place and suffered the punishment we deserve for our sins.

Now if we are to read history as God has interpreted it for us in the Bible, we must seek out the *facts*; then we

must *understand* the facts aright. In this way we will arrive at the truth, and the truth will keep us on the right lines. It will keep us from personal bias or wrong thinking. The process is what the astronomer Tycho Brahe once called ‘thinking God’s thoughts after Him.’

3. Third, we adopt the Bible’s view of history because God’s dealings with His chosen people and their enemies in the Bible show us how He deals with every nation.

As He dealt with the Jews, so He deals with other nations. As a holy God, He loves holiness and freely rewards it. And as a holy God He hates sin and justly punishes it. When we study history we are to observe this work of God in action. We are to ask God to show us who are the righteous and who are the wicked. We must also learn how He rewards His people and punishes His enemies. The more light we get from the Bible, which is God’s Word, about these matters, the more we will see God at work in both individuals and nations.

Our viewpoint, then, is the one that seeks to see God at work in history, and to understand characters, events and changes through His eyes. He Himself expects us to take our stand here, because He says: “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean to your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.*” (Proverbs 3.5-6)

In our study we have omitted many details about England in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This is because we wish to

concentrate on the people God used in the swirl of events that formed the Reformation.

The Bible translation we quote from is the English Standard Version of 2002. Though it is not as accurate as the Authorized Version of 1611, it is probably the best of the modern translations.

# Chapter One

## What Was the English Reformation?

When we try to see the English Reformation through God's eyes, we find a marked difference between it and the viewpoint of many writers of history.

Some of them do not believe the Bible. As a result they do not see God at work in history. So when they come to write history they fail to mention Him. Instead, they twist the *facts* and put their own *understanding* on people, events and changes. They *revise* history according to their own false ideas. Their history is warped. Undeniable facts are mingled with lies.

You may identify them by the terms they use in their writing. They refer to the Reformation as a 'Revolution' or a 'Revolt,' to Bible truth as 'heresy,' and to Christian believers as 'heretics.' They speak about Reformers 'dividing Europe,' 'splitting the Church,' and 'opposing the law,' to make you think that they were bad people, rebels or troublemakers. As you read, therefore, beware of their tactics. They are trying to poison your mind.

Let us look at some examples of their 'history,' and see how wrong they are.

1. One of them claims that when reforms began to take place the Roman Catholic Church was well respected.

This claim does not fit the facts.

People were always complaining of churchmen's bad behaviour: their greed, deceit, immoral conduct, ignorance, superstition and cruelty.

Besides, their 'priests' never told them the Good News that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and that they must trust in Him alone for salvation.

Also, people were no longer content to be told by their priests what to believe and how to live. They wanted to read the Bible for themselves. Yet the Church of Rome would not let them have a Bible in English.

Not only that, the people began to ask disturbing questions: Why should bishops and priests have such power and wealth? Why did they not live like Jesus? Rather than respect the Roman Church, then, people were thoroughly dissatisfied with it.

2. Another false notion is that reforming ideas were not popular in the 1520s.

This idea also does not fit the facts.

John Wycliffe and his 'Lollard' preachers had made reforming ideas very popular right throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> century. These travelling messengers of the Gospel could be found in market places and at village crosses telling merchants, shoppers, farm labourers and housewives of the wonderful Saviour who died to take away our sins, and who calls us to live holy lives. They also added that we must believe in Him in order to be saved from our

sins, and not to try to curry God's favour by giving money to the Church. And just as "the common people received" Jesus "gladly," so too they received His messengers gladly.

Why? Because if they could be saved by faith alone, they would not have to do all the works that priests imposed on them in order to be freed from their sins! This Good News that they welcomed lived on in the hearts of many country folk till the time of Henry VIII. By the early 16<sup>th</sup> century there was a real hunger for reform in England.

Besides, a book shipped over from the continent opened people's eyes to a new kind of Church. Erasmus of Rotterdam published his *Handbook to the Christian Soldier* in 1503. It not only criticized the existing Church, it also set out an attractive vision of the Church of the future.

In this new Church ordinary people would play a full part, instead of leaving power in the hands of priests. Erasmus said that even the most humble ploughman as he worked his fields, and the weaver as he plied his shuttle, and the traveller as he rode on his journey, would soon be able to read his New Testament.

The value that Erasmus' book placed on ordinary people made it very popular. It became a best seller in England.

3. A third wrong idea is that Henry VIII's divorce was central in bringing about reform. Countless 'histories' of the Reformation foster this lie. One of them writes: "The Reformation in England began with the marital problems of King Henry VIII."

But Henry's divorce had nothing to do with the massive changes in faith and life that ushered England into a new and better era. The truth is: Henry wanted a male heir to the throne, and his first wife could not produce one. So he wished to divorce her and find someone who could! Not only so, Henry had a bad conscience. He already had a son born from a lustful relationship with another woman. This son would never have been accepted as king.

What has this to do with God changing people's hearts, making them new characters and enabling them to live upright lives? The outward events surrounding Henry's divorce case were used by God to change the king's relationship to the pope of Rome, but they were not the *cause* of the Reformation.

4. Another wrong idea is that the Reformation was merely an act of state. That is, Henry VIII and his courtiers used the Reformers' teachings to increase their wealth and power.

"The causes [of the Reformation] began with politics," says one book on the period. Another goes even further.

It says that before the reign of Queen Elizabeth I “the English revolt” [note the term] did not show any signs of “spiritual awakening among the people. Its impulses were political and social.”

Now, it is true that Henry and his officers of state turned the wealth of the Roman Church to their own advantage. They plundered the monasteries and converts of their treasures. But this does not make a mighty work of God an act of state. Their greed was not the *cause* of the Reformation, but an *evil side effect* of it. The Reformers wanted to spend the Church’s money on schools and colleges and hospitals, not on themselves.

5. Other historians claim that reforms on the continent of Europe barely influenced changes in England.

This is untrue. Reforming ideas from Europe poured into London and the southeast in the 1520s. As early as 1520-21, a group of young Cambridge Bible students were meeting in the White Horse Tavern to discuss the German Reformer Martin Luther’s teachings. These had been smuggled into England by merchants.

Also, from an Antwerp base (now in Belgium), William Tyndale’s English *New Testament* and other Reformation writings were carried as far north as the Midlands after 1526. The more Bibles and good books were shipped in, and the more people read them with enlightened eyes, the more demands for reform were made.

## **Conclusion**

Clearly, when God's truth shone into people's hearts, a longing for reform naturally followed. This is because God's standards are always higher than ours. When people compared the standard of Christian living in the New Testament Church with the low moral standards of their own day, they longed to be like the early Christians.

In fact, before long, so popular were Christian ideas in England that no European nation was more deeply influenced by the Bible than the English.

In short, the Reformation was a spiritual work of God. And it brought with it the most beneficial changes England had ever seen.

As the Christian historian Merle d'Aubigné notes, the seed God had sown lay long underground; but in His good time it sprang up and bore good fruit.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Some Bible Reformations**

As we compare the English Reformation with certain Reformations in the Bible, we notice a striking resemblance. This should not surprise us, because God was the Author of both.

We must never forget that God is in control of all the people, events and movements that influence the course of history. Everywhere in the Bible we may see evidence that “the Lord reigns” (Psalms 93.1; 97.1) and that “He does according to His will . . . among the inhabitants of the earth.” (Daniel 4.35)

It was He who moved Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to invade Israel, as a punishment for her sins. (2 Kings 24.10ff) It was He who stirred up Cyrus, King of Persia, to let her people return to their country and rebuild the temple (Isaiah 45.1,13). After all, “the king’s heart is like a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He will.” (Proverbs 21.1)

So too in the English Reformation God used the Tudor monarchs, their courtiers and churchmen to fulfil His sovereign will.

But we also discover that the national reformations God brought to Israel had the same features as the English Reformation.

We will mention three of these:

King Hezekiah found his kingdom full of idolatry and superstition. So he ordered the temple to be repaired and purified from abuse, caused the people to keep the Passover Feast again, broke down the idolatrous altars and images, fortified Jerusalem against invasion, and placed both himself and the nation in God's hands. He even composed a hymn of thanksgiving after his recovery from illness, and ordered his scribes to copy Solomon's proverbs for his use as king. (2 Chronicles 29-32; Isaiah 36-39; Proverbs 25.1; Deuteronomy 17.18-20)

(ii) When the eight-year old King Josiah came to the throne, "he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord . . . and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left." Finding in the scroll of God's law that the worship of God had been shamefully neglected, he ordered his subjects to celebrate the Passover (see Exodus 12). Then he gathered together the elders of Judah, his officers of state, and made them renew their covenant with God: that is, to take Him again for their God, and to promise to be His people. He gave orders to destroy all fortune-tellers, magicians and sexual perverts, and to pull down every altar of superstition and statue to idols in the land. For the rest of his short life he continued to fear God and promote reformation. (2 Kings 22-23)

(iii) Nehemiah, the Governor of the Jews after their return from Babylon, was given the task of rebuilding ruined Jerusalem. Despite persistent opposition, his

workmen rebuilt the city walls with a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other! He then curbed the cruelty of the rich nobles, restored the ancient feasts, had God's law read and explained to the people, forced Jewish Sabbath-breakers to stop trading on that holy day, made the men who had married heathen wives put them away, decreed that the year for releasing slaves be punctually observed, and ensured that the priests were properly paid. And he did all this without demanding a salary, but maintained his family on the produce of his own fields. (Nehemiah and Ezra)

As we read about these Biblical reformations, we observe that they all had some things in common:

- (1) They were set in motion by the reading of the Word or Law of God.
- (2) They were supervised by rulers who feared God and sought to obey Him.
- (3) They abolished idolatry and restored the pure worship of God.
- (4) They enrolled the willing help of the people.
- (5) They entailed personal sacrifice, of time, energy, property and status.
- (6) They could not have taken place without the grace, wisdom and power of God.

This was true also of the sixteenth century English Reformation. It brought in Biblical reforms.

## Chapter Three

### Why England Needed the Reformation

At the time of Henry VIII's coronation (1509) the Church of Christ in England was thoroughly corrupt.

1. First, its **teaching** was not that of the Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles.

a. In the Early Church its members “gladly received the Word” and “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine.” (Acts 2.41-42)

But in 1509 people were forbidden to read the Word and knew nothing of the apostles’ teaching.

That teaching is to be found in their Letters to the New Testament churches. It shows us that the Bible alone is able to make us wise to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 3.15), and that we are saved by grace through faith, not by any works of ours. (Ephesians 2.8-9)

By Henry's day the Church taught that the Word was not enough to save us, but that we need the Church itself to explain it to us, and that we are saved by God's grace *plus* our own works.

b. The Scriptures teaches that God alone is to be worshipped. (John 4.24; Revelation 19.10)

But in Henry's day the Church said that the bones, items of clothing and body hair of saints (called relics) were to be worshipped (788 A.D.) and that the communion wafer lifted up by the priest is to be adored.

c. The Bible says that ministers (who are not priests) may marry. (1 Timothy 3.2; 1 Corinthians 9.5)  
But the Church said that priests were not allowed to marry. (1079 A.D.)

d. The Word of God promises that we are redeemed from our sins not by money but by the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1.18-19)  
But the Church taught that Indulgences (paper promises of pardon) might be bought with money to shorten time in purgatory (a man-made invention anyway).

e. Holy Scripture informs us that the human nature of Christ is now in heaven. (Luke 24.51; Acts 1.9-10)  
But the Church taught that the communion bread and wine become the real physical body and blood of Christ when the priest pronounces the words *Hoc est corpus meum = This is my body*.

f. The Bible teaches us to confess our sins to God only. (Psalm 32.5; 1 John 1.9)  
But the Church taught that sins must be confessed to a Roman priest before they could be forgiven.

g. The Word of God tells us that Mary was highly favoured as the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. But the Church taught that she is a joint Saviour with Jesus, and that the prayer *Ave Maria* = *Hail Mary* is to be prayed by all the faithful.

Not one of these lies held by the Roman Church before the Reformation is found in Scripture.

2. Second, the entire **structure of the Church of Rome** had lost all likeness to the structure of the Early Church.

In the Early Church all the ministers (also called elders or bishops or presbyters) were equal. (Acts 14.23; 20.17; 1 Timothy 3.1-7; Titus 3.5-9)

But by the time of Henry VIII the Church was like a human pyramid, with the pope at the summit, then beneath him the cardinals, then the archbishops, then the bishops, then the priests, down to the altar boy.

3. Third, the **morals of the 'clergy'** were so bad that anyone could see that they were not at all followers of "the holy child Jesus."

a. In the New Testament Church, the ministers of Christ were sincerely holy, set apart for their work and morally upright, though they were far from perfect. (1 Timothy 1.2; Titus 1.4; Acts 2.4; 6.3; 13.9)

But the popes, cardinals, archbishops, bishops, priests and monks lived appallingly sinful lives.

They fathered children when none of them were married.

They were in the habit of giving plum positions in the church to their sons and nephews.

They were guilty of bribing others to obtain favours (this is called simony, after Simon Magus, who offered money to the apostles in exchange for supernatural gifts, Acts 8.18-19).

The lives of the 'lower clergy' or priests, monks and nuns were scandalous. They disgusted the people by their gluttony, gambling, drunkenness and sensuality. Too often they were persons taken from the lowest of the people – loiterers on the ale-house bench; hardly able to say their *Paternoster* (i.e. the Lord's Prayer); often unable to repeat the Ten Commandments – Mass priests, who could just read their service books and no more – men often dubbed by the names Sir John Lack-Latin, Sir John Mumble-Mattins, or Babbling and Blind St. John! In short, the sensual lives of ministers of religion were a scandal!

The Report of Henry VIII's Commissioners later recorded: "Manifest sin, vicious, carnal, and abominable living, is daily used and committed in abbeys, priories and other religious houses of monks, canons and nuns . . . by the space of 200 years or more!" This Report gave the

lie once and for all to the idea that men and women become more holy by retiring into 'holy retreats' from the world, the flesh and the devil.

The trouble was, they took their sinful natures with them. And those natures were bound to assert themselves in immoral living.

The Word of God warns us that "fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness" always gives rise to sexual immorality. (Ezekiel 16.49)

b. Secondly, in the New Testament Church both ministers and people knew the Word of God and strove to build up each other in the Christian Faith. (2 Timothy 3.14-17; Ephesians 4.11-16)

But in the Church of Henry VIII both priests and people were very ignorant. Although the Church abounded in wealth, its army of bishops, priests, abbots, friars, canons, monks and nuns was ignorant of God, the Lord Jesus, and the way of salvation. It was a Church without a Bible, and a Church without the Spirit of God. Such a Church is as useless as a light-house without a light.

As for the poor people, they had no true religion at all. They had no one to tell them of the love of God, the sacrifice of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, how to be right with God or how to prepare for heaven. In times of trouble or sickness, they could only send for the priest, who knew nothing himself of the comforts of the Gospel,

and could tell nothing to others. At their deathbed, he pretended to give them a full pardon (called 'absolution'), anoint them with oil (called 'extreme unction') and then send them on their journey into a dark eternity.

c. In the Early Christian Church any superstition or "will-worship," as the apostle Paul calls it (Colossians 2.23), was quickly dealt with and put away.

But in the Roman Church in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century it was let loose on the people as part of their religion.

In Worcester, for example, there stood a huge statue of the Virgin Mary which thousands went to visit every year. They did this because they were taught that while Jesus is very severe, His mother Mary is gentle and kind, and would receive them and introduce them to her Son. So they came to venerate her as a co-Saviour. They were never taught that Mary herself expressed her need of salvation when she said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour." (Luke 1.46-47)

Another superstitious practice was for pilgrims to visit Repton Priory, in Derbyshire, where St. Guthlac's bell was held in special honour. Why? Because the Church told them that all who placed their heads inside it would be cured of headache! Of course, the resident monks were paid for their wonder-working bell!

At Reading Abbey, in Berkshire, a one-winged angel was put on display by the monks on festive occasions, and was given religious honour by the poor people.

The nuns of St. Mary's, Derby, claimed to have a piece of doubting Thomas's shirt. (John 20.24-29) This was taken out of a large wooden chest and worshipped by pregnant women to give them hope of a healthy baby!

These are some of the 'lying wonders' to which poor people were sent by their religious leaders for their spiritual benefit. The truth is, their 'spiritual directors' could not direct them to God through the Lord Jesus Christ because they did not know Him themselves!

d. In the Early Church its leaders were poor, and the richer people shared their wealth with those in need. (2 Corinthians 6.10; 2 Corinthians 9; Acts 2.44-45)

Indeed, no-one was to be chosen as a minister of the Church if he was seen to be "greedy of filthy lucre" (i.e. money) (1 Timothy 3.3; Titus 1.7; 1 Peter 5.2) They all tried by the grace of God to bring their life style as near as they could to that of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But in the Church of Henry's day the 'churchmen' lived in great luxury. A manuscript of the day portrays a swarm of Roman priests in the house of a nobleman. They were attending a banquet he was hosting. This is just one proof of many that they thrust themselves into every corner of people's lives, and had a finger in every

business. From the cradle to the grave they tried to control the people.

In their lust for “filthy lucre” they persuaded mourning relatives to pay them money to sing ‘requiems’ or ‘masses for the dead.’ Or they advised the pious people to go on pilgrimage to the shrine of Thomas à Becket at Canterbury, where their gifts would be credited to their names in heaven.

Sometimes they induced sinners to donate large tracts of land to the Church, in order to atone for their sins. For instance, one of the four murderers of Thomas à Becket was persuaded to build Beauchief Abbey, near Sheffield, for this purpose.

By the time of Henry’s coronation, the Church had transferred a third of the nation’s wealth into its own coffers!

e. In the Early Church, our Lord’s apostles told the people that they were not lords over their faith, but helpers of their joy. (2 Corinthians 1.24) Instead of exalting themselves above others, they humbled themselves, putting themselves on the same level as the elders. (1 Peter 5.1; 2 John 1)

But in the late Medieval Church the priests did all they could to keep power in their own hands. For instance, they claimed to hold the very keys of heaven and hell;

that is, to pardon or condemn people. They forced people to confess their sins to them alone.

Let us look at a few of the frauds that these greedy priests practised on the gullible people of England.

At Boxley, in Kent, a great crucifix (statue of Christ on the cross) was set up. It was greatly honoured and received vast offerings. Why? Because the priests had told the people of a particular miracle it could perform. What was this? When its visitors offered copper coins, its face frowned. When they offered silver, its frown disappeared. But when they offered gold, it actually smiled! This was to signify that the Saviour was displeased with small gifts, but was very pleased with great ones!

And yet His death on the cross has already paid for our salvation, as Mrs. Alexander's hymn reminds us:

‘He died that we might be forgiven,  
He died to make us good,  
That we might go at last to heaven,  
Saved by His precious blood.

There was no other good enough  
To pay the price of sin;  
He only could unlock the gate  
Of heaven and let us in.’

When Henry VIII's commissioners examined the crucifix they found wires inside it. The attendant priests moved

the face of the image according to the amount of money offered!

Another disgraceful fraud existed at Hales Abbey, in Gloucestershire. Here a vial claiming to contain the blood of Christ was shown to visitors. But it could be shown only to those who offered money to the abbey! When it was examined, the vial was found to contain the blood of a duck, which was replenished every week!

The very carvings still to be seen in some old buildings tell us in wood and stone of the 'clergy's' greed. Friars are shown as foxes preaching, with a stolen goose peeping out of their hood; or as wolves granting a pardon, with a sheep stuffed in their cloak; or as apes sitting on a sick man's bed, with one hand holding a crucifix and the other in the sick man's pocket! Priestly greed must have reached shameful depths for it to be held up to such scorn!

In England, all this moral corruption, ignorance, superstition, greed and love of power was evident everywhere. It affected every town and village and hamlet, and almost every person in the land.

4. Fourth, they tried to cover their spiritual nakedness with **ornate rituals and splendid shows of wealth.**

Once the Old Testament law had been fulfilled in the atoning work of Jesus, all its ornate rituals and ceremonies and holy days were done away with. We do

not find *one* passage in the New Testament where special religious clothing is to be worn. Nor do we find Christians told to go on pilgrimages or to join in processions. Nor do we find believers sacrificing at altars, or bowing and crossing themselves, or carrying incense, or setting apart special holy days, or building chapels to dead saints, or erecting rood screens, or carving out crucifixes, or moulding statues of Mary, to name no other practices.

But in the late Medieval Church the Gospel was smothered with rituals, ceremonies, images, 'holy places' and 'holy days.' There were pilgrimages to Walsingham, pilgrimages to Canterbury, pilgrimages to Boxley, pilgrimages to Glastonbury, pilgrimages to Tintern, pilgrimages to Battle. There were copes, and mitres, and fish-tail hats, and cassocks, and surplices, and penance stools, and confessional boxes, and all kinds of priestly paraphernalia! The list is endless.

These things, and many more like them, were designed to glorify 'Holy Mother Church' and overawe the people into submission. And by cunning priest-craft they largely succeeded.

5. Fifth, the Roman Church was dreaded for **persecuting** those who disagreed with it.

On the continent, the Albigenses were ruthlessly crushed by the Inquisition and monastic orders, and the brilliant

civilisation of Provence in Southern France was destroyed.

The Waldensians were slaughtered in the mountains and valleys of Savoy for opposing the claims of Rome to be the only true church.

Thousands were tortured by the Spanish Inquisition and burnt to death at the *autos-da-fé* = acts of faith (!) For the two centuries before 1517, about thirteen thousand persons were burnt alive.

We do not know how many English men and women suffered in this way. But one thing is certain: English courtiers and merchants knew of the atrocities in Europe, and they feared that England might suffer in the same way.

### **Conclusion**

In sum, the religion of early Tudor England was just like the religion described by Jesus when he spoke of the Jewish leaders and their people as “the blind leading the blind.” Both, he added, would fall into the ditch!

It was a religion without God, without Christ, without faith, without hope, without love and without good works pleasing to God. It was a religion of fear, of superstition, of ignorance, of ‘good works.’ At best it was a meaningless round of pilgrimages, penances, masses and frightened obedience to the priests.

When poor sinners felt the need to be right with God and draw near to Him, the very Church that called itself the door into God's presence barred the way. At every point it stood sentry, arrogantly claiming that sinners could only get near Him through the door it guarded, and by paying toll money for the privilege.

This is why England needed the Reformation.

## Chapter Four

### What Caused the Reformation?

There are five causes of the 16th century European Reformation. They all apply to the English Reformation. They are the following:

1. People of all classes were **deeply dissatisfied** with the appalling **corruptions** in the Papacy and the Church of Rome.

This is not surprising. Even non-churchgoers can tell whether church people behave as Christians or not.

In 1517 the German monk **Martin Luther** began to challenge these evils, eventually condemning the entire system. When he saw the wealth that the Church had amassed, he said: “the true treasure of the Church is the most holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God.”

Luther’s bold challenge came to the notice of many English people, who began to read his writings and see that the original Church could not be recognized in the Church of Rome. It had become horribly deformed.

2. The turning of scholars to the **original sources** of the Christian Church, namely, the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament.

This movement, a part of the **Renaissance** (or ‘re-birth’ of Classical ideals) was led on the continent by **‘humanists.’**

The most prominent of these was **Erasmus**. He is famous for ridiculing the Roman priests and monks, as well as for recommending peaceful reform within the Church.

This Erasmus spent some time in England and became the close friend of **John Colet**, Dean of St. Paul’s, in London. Colet explained the Letters of the apostle Paul in clear, simple and practical language, besides preaching passionately against the faults of churchmen. Through his ministry the Londoners’ longing for reform increased.

Colet made both Oxford and Cambridge centres of what was termed the ‘New Learning.’ It was in fact the ‘Old Learning’ of the Bible brought freshly to light.

This rebirth of ancient learning was greatly helped by the **Sack of Constantinople** (now Istanbul) in 1453. This last remnant of the Byzantine Empire and ‘mother’ of eastern Christianity fell to the Muslim Ottoman Turks. But its Greek scholars managed to escape, and many fled to such European centres as Vienna, Budapest and Prague. Here their copies of the Bible were studied by western scholars, including Englishmen, who brought their knowledge of Holy Scripture back to England.

3. The **invention of printing**, especially the printing of **the Gutenberg Bible** (1451).

**Johannes Gutenberg** of Mainz in Germany invented a new way of producing books quickly and cheaply. This was by transferring ink to paper through a printing press with movable type, that is, letters that could be re-used after printing one book. This new technology did away with the laborious process of producing handwritten copies on vellum or parchment.

a. How the invention of printing influenced the English Reformation is a long story, but the central fact is clear. Once God had made printing available, He next raised up someone to **translate His Word into English**.

This was **William Tyndale**. Years before his translation of the New Testament, in his patron's manor at Little Sodbury in Gloucestershire, Tyndale had argued with ignorant priests, telling them that before long he would cause ploughmen to know more of the Scriptures than they did. The invention of the printing press made him keener than ever to go to Europe, find a printer who would work for him, and so bring the pure Gospel to his fellow countrymen.

Despite much opposition and several setbacks, **Tyndale printed his New Testament in English** in 1526 at Worms, Germany (the very city where Luther had made his noble stand against the corrupt, unreformed Church

of Rome). Copies were quickly smuggled into England and widely read.

It was not only its “proper English” that made Tyndale’s New Testament popular. It also accurately revealed the meaning of the original Greek. As it did so, it laid bare some of the frauds that the Church of Rome had committed on the text. This produced great changes in people’s thinking about what the Church should be like.

For example, Roman Catholics had understood the Greek word *presbyteros* to mean ‘priest.’

But in the Bible ‘priest’ is *hiereus*, and refers only to Jewish or pagan priests. *Presbyteros* refers to a Christian office bearer in the Church, and Tyndale made this clear. He translated the word as *senior*, and later changed it to *elder*.

Then again, the Greek term *ekklesia*, traditionally translated as *church*, now became *congregation*. As they read Tyndale’s work people began to see that instead of a massive institution calling itself ‘the Church’ the Bible refers to a gathering of believers and their families in any particular place.

Once Tyndale’s translation was widely available, there was no turning back. It had to be authorized. To everyone’s amazement, no less a person than Henry VIII himself ordered one of its revisions to be placed in every parish church throughout the land! This event was a central feature of the Reformation. For it gave the

English church and nation a treasure that would have been unthinkable only a few years earlier – an officially sanctioned English Bible.

b. It was through **the printing of good books** based on the Bible that people's hearts were weaned away from popish tyranny. A law made by Henry IV had decreed that anyone who did not believe what the pope said was to be burned to death. He was regarded as the head of the Christian Church, and his word was law. But after printing was discovered and books became cheaper to buy, people began to read and to think much more than before. And the more they read, the harder they found it to believe what the pope said.

#### 4. **The pope's interference** in affairs of state.

Claiming to be Christ's Vicar (or representative on earth) and head of both the Church and the world, the pope for years had humbled kings, extorted money from them and crushed all opposition.

A famous English example from a time long before the Reformation shows the pope's power over kings. When Richard the Lionheart died (1199) his brother John became king. A dispute arose between him and the monks of Canterbury as to who should be the next archbishop. Both parties appealed to the pope. For refusing to obey the pope's ruling, the pope told the people that John was no longer king and that they need not serve or obey him. He lost all rights, as a man, as

king and as a churchman. He also told the King of France to invade England and defeat John: this would be a 'good work.' The French king welcomed an excuse to invade England, and he began to prepare for war. This forced John to give in.

He then did the most abject thing. He submitted to the pope, who sent a messenger to England to humble him. Kneeling before this servant of antichrist, John took the crown from his head and handed it to him. Five days later the messenger returned the crown, but only on condition that in future he would not be the free King of England, but the servant of the pope, and that he must promise to obey the pope at all times.

This famous incident opens a window into the enormous power of the Bishop of Rome in those days. Can we wonder that the people of England cried out for reform?

5. Operating through all these human factors was a **mighty outpouring of the Spirit of God.**

When Zerubbabel was called to build the second temple in Jerusalem and restore the worship of God (see Ezra 1-6, Haggai 1-2) the Lord told His prophet Zechariah that it would be built "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit." (Zechariah 4.6) That is, he would not have to oppress the people or start a war to do God's work, but God's Spirit within him and his fellow Jews would enable them to do it peacefully.

So it was with the English Reformation. No one but the Holy Spirit could have opened the eyes of thousands of English men and women to the rottenness of that institution which called itself 'the Church.'

No one but He could have freed their hearts from its slavish tyranny and brought them into the freedom of the kingdom of Christ.

No one but He could have made them men and women of God, who knew their Bibles so well that their 'learned' accusers could not overthrow the reasons for their faith.

And no one but He could make ordinary Christian people willing to give their bodies to the flames and their souls to God for the Saviour who had given His body and soul for them.

Truly, as Philip E. Hughes observes: "The Holy Spirit was moving upon the face of England."

## **Chapter Five**

### **What the Reformers Taught**

You might think that national reform has nothing to do with religion; but you would be mistaken. In England, as in other countries, the Reformation flowed from the rediscovery of the Gospel. This Gospel is the Good News that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners [or those who have broken God’s law]” (1 Timothy 1.15) and that we are “saved by grace [or unmerited favour] through faith [or trusting in Jesus].” (Ephesians 2.8)

This is the message of the whole Bible. It may be summed up in this way:

- (i) God has graciously revealed Himself in the Bible, His written Word.
- (ii) In His grace to mankind, He chose a people for Himself before He made the universe.
- (iii) In grace He sent His Son Jesus Christ to atone for their sins by His death.
- (iv) In further grace He sends His Holy Spirit to give them new life and to create faith in them.
- (v) We are made right with God by faith alone.
- (vi) God Himself makes us holy us through the reading and preaching of His Word.
- (vii) Christian ministers are God-fearing servants who call people to repent of their sins and believe the Gospel.
- (viii) Worship is a heartfelt service of prayer and praise by the people, aided by their ministers, who preach, baptize and administer the Lord’s Supper.

(ix) The Church is the body of true believers, along with their spiritual teachers and pastoral guides.

In short, by His grace God does all that is needed to unite His people to Himself for ever.

These are the teachings that the Saviour and His apostles lay down as a foundation for faith and life.

As we read the writings of the English Reformers, we find that they follow the same teachings. Here is a sample from them:

1. Of *the Bible*, Thomas Cranmer wrote: “this book, which is the Word of God, [is] the most precious jewel . . . on earth.”

Edwin Sandys wrote: “The foundation of our religion is the written Word, the Scriptures of God.”

This is precisely what God Himself tells us: “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul . . . The precepts [commands] of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart . . . More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold.” (Psalm 19.7,8,10)

Again He says: “Now therefore you are . . . built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone.” (Ephesians 2.19-20)

2. On *Election*, or God’s choosing some to be His own people, the Reformers taught that because we are dead in sin, we cannot save ourselves, but that God has “an

everlasting purpose . . . to deliver from . . . damnation those whom He has chosen in Christ . . . and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation.” (Article 17 of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion)

The Bible says the same: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.” (Ephesians 1.3-4)

It also says: “For God hath not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thessalonians 5.9)

3. On *Justification*, or being right with God through faith alone, William Tyndale wrote: “That we say faith only justifies ought to offend no man. For if . . . Christ only redeemed us . . . bore our sins . . . then . . . trust only in Christ’s deserving . . . alone quietens the conscience and certifies [to] it that [our] sins are forgiven.”

So too the Scriptures say: “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5.1)

They also tell us: “a person is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 2.16)

4. On *Sanctification*, or being made holy, John Jewel urges: “When we know God, let us glorify Him as our God; let us so live that our words, our deeds, and our whole life may testify that the kingdom of God is among us.”

So too the Word of God says: “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” (1 Peter 1.16)

It also says: “You were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (1 Corinthians 6.20)

5. On *the Ministry*, John Hooper wrote: “it is every minister’s office . . . to call on the people” to amend their lives, “to . . . believe the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake, . . . to honour God, and to show . . . obedience to God’s law.”

Thomas Becon wrote: “the first . . . point of a . . . spiritual minister’s office [is] to teach and preach the Word of God.”

The Lord Jesus Christ taught the same: “Jesus came into Galilee, . . . saying . . . Repent ye, and believe the Gospel.” (Mark 1.14-15)

His apostle Paul also urges Timothy: “Preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke and exhort.” (2 Timothy 4.2)

6. On *Worship*, Thomas Cranmer wrote: “It is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God’s Word written.”

So too the Bible teaches: “You shall not add to the Word that I command you, nor take from it.” (Deuteronomy 4.2)

Jesus also told the Pharisees: “For the sake of your tradition you have made void the Word of God.” (Matthew 15.6)

7. On *Baptism and the Lord’s Supper*, the Reformers wrote that they are “outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace.”

This too is what the New Testament teaches. (Matthew 3.1-12; 1 Corinthians 11.23-26; Luke 24.50-51)

8. On *the Church*, Thomas Rogers wrote that it is both Visible and Invisible, “the invisible are all the elect [God’s chosen ones],” for “the Lord, and He only knows who are His,” and “the members of the visible Church are some of them for God, and some against God.”

The apostles teach the same. (Acts 20.28; 2 Timothy 2.19; Jude 3-4)

“The rule of this Church,” wrote Nicholas Ridley, “is the Word of God . . . The Guide of this Church is the Holy Spirit.”

So says the apostle Paul (2 Timothy 3.14-17) and the Saviour. (John 16.13)

The marks of the true Church are the preaching of the Word and the faithful ministry of the sacraments. So too say the Scriptures. (Acts 2.42; Matthew 28.18-20)

By comparing these few extracts from the Scriptures with the teachings of the Reformers, we may easily see that they agree. Both teach that the Bible is the Word of God; that we are chosen, called, put right with God, made holy in Jesus Christ; that the Church is His, and is to be ordered according to His instructions; and that in every aspect of the Christian's life, God is to be glorified, for He alone is the Author and Applier of our salvation.

Read especially the New Testament Letters for yourself, and you will discover that doctrine, "clear, ringing doctrine" (J. C. Ryle) showing us the sheer unmerited grace of God, lies beneath all Christian behaviour and worship.

This is the Gospel of grace that the Reformers discovered in the Bible, and sought to practice in their lives and worship. When God the Holy Spirit applied it to all classes of English society, people saw for the first time that not only were *some* of Rome's *practices* wrong, but also that *most* of her *teaching* was wrong, and that the building erected on it was rotten.

In short, people began to realize that they could not find salvation while they stayed in the Church of Rome, so they must come out of her. When Luther and other continental Reformers showed them *God's* way of salvation, the English Reformers greedily grasped it. The result was national reformation. For this we should always thank God.

# **Chapter Six**

## **The Reformation Under Henry VIII**

### **Introduction**

Once the Holy Spirit of God begins to settle His subjects in the teachings of His Word, He then proceeds to give them experience of its power. The result is changed hearts and reformed lives. When these hearts and lives belong to rulers of Church and State, the effect on others spreads. Whole families, communities and even nations are changed. Not every single person is converted to Christ, but every one is affected.

In this chapter we will study how the Holy Spirit wrought such a change during the reign of Henry VIII.

One historian wrote that the split between the English people and the corrupt Papal Church under Henry VIII “had little or nothing in common with the Reformation.” Rather, “the work done in that reign was simply to demolish the Medieval Church in England. The real Reformation began in the reign of Edward VI, and was carried out into successful issue under Elizabeth.”

This is mainly true. Henry VIII destroyed the pope’s headship over England; he pulled down the rotten church framework that united the Church of England to the Bishop of Rome, but he put nothing lasting in its place. His aim was to be a kingly pope, as powerful and worldly as the one he was replacing. [A swaggering old poem shows this: it begins: “I’m ’enry the eighth I am, I

am; I'm 'enry the eighth I am!"] The Church he tried to form did not last longer than his own lifetime; but his work prepared the way for the later Reformation of the Church in England. All reformation of teaching, worship and morals was as hateful to Henry as to the Bishop of Rome.

### **Early Persecutions**

The early years of Henry's reign (1509-17) were marked by the persecution in London of many true Christians. As believers came to be known by their Roman Catholic neighbours, who then told the authorities about them, their proud enemies taunted them with the question: "Where was your church fifty years ago?" Of course, their Church was the Church of the apostles and first New Testament believers. It flourished long before the deformed Church of Rome existed.

Between 1510 and 1527 the records of the City of London note forty citizens accused of 'heresy.' What were their crimes? Not bowing to a crucifix, criticizing pilgrimages, refusing to pray to dead 'saints', calling the priests' prostitutes their gods, rejecting the authority of the pope, condemning the wealth of the Roman Church, keeping company with those suspected of 'heresy', speaking against carrying the communion wafer around the streets to be adored, reading 'certain heretical English books', and denying that Christ's body and blood were in the communion bread and wine. Do you think they should have been burned to death or put in the Tower of London and left to die for these things? Surely not!

These believers were like the early Christians, who were martyred for the sake of the Lord Jesus. Their sufferings are recorded in heaven. God will avenge them on the Day of Judgment.

Lincolnshire and the Eastern counties were especially noted for condemning believers. Men and women in these districts had begun to profess the Gospel, but it was condemned as “a novelty.” Says John Foxe, they had learned it “partly out of *Wickliff’s Wicket*, partly out of the *Shepherd’s Calendar*.” In these two popular tracts they discovered that the Lord’s Supper was made *in remembrance of Christ*, not as a repeated sacrifice of His body and blood, and that Christ our Saviour sits on the right hand of the Father, and was not hidden in the wafer and wine.

King Henry protected the Bishop of Lincoln when he began to execute “the said heretics, according to the laws of holy church.”

This was the attitude towards Christian believers that Henry found when he ascended the throne, and that he encouraged.

The chief persecutor at this time was **Cardinal Wolsey**. This lowborn lover of pomp and power was Papal Legate (or Ambassador) to Henry’s court in England. Wolsey showed himself to be “the express image of the proud, vainglorious Church of Rome, how far it differs from the true Church of Christ Jesus.” (Foxe) He set up a court of

his own in which he 'proved' wills and heard charges against people. He dressed in velvet and silk. He filled his coffers with all kinds of treasure, and even stored silver and gold in barrels! He sent out (in the king's name but without his knowledge) orders for every man to part with a sixth of his goods. He even set about reforming the king's household!

As a result, "every man complained, but no redress was had." (Foxe) Yet God caused Wolsey's extravagance to stir up widespread discontent among the people, and so prepare the way for reform.

But his worst offence was to persecute God's people. We will mention just one notable case. Seated in his pontifical robes beneath a cloth of gold in St. Paul's cathedral, London, Wolsey caused **Robert Barnes**, the head of the Augustinian priory in Cambridge, to 'bear his faggot' for some points that he called 'heresy' or false teaching. But Barnes' beliefs were not heresy. They were the truths of the Gospel he had found in "the most glorious and heavenly Word of God" (his own words).

But Barnes had also taken a risky poke at the cardinal's love of pomp and ceremony in one of his sermons. This touched the vainglorious cardinal to the quick! So he resolved to humble Barnes without expressly charging him with heresy. But Barnes refused to apologize, and so was forced to make 'public penance' by carrying his faggot [a bundle of sticks used to burn so-called 'heretics'] to St. Paul's. Bishop John Fisher of Rochester

‘absolved’ or pardoned him, and Barnes returned to Cambridge a free but wiser man.

About the same time, Fisher preached a sermon against Martin Luther that was full of the pope’s glory and dignity, so much so that “he forgot to speak of the Gospel which he took in hand to declare.” (Foxe) This was because he had no Gospel to preach.

The second main persecutor was the under-sheriff of London, **Sir Thomas More**. In 1514 the body of Richard Hunne was found hanging in the Lollards’ Tower, the Bishop of London’s prison for ‘heretics.’ More pled that Hunne was both a heretic and a suicide, and so deserved to die. But the evidence pointed to murder.

In 1515 More penned a book entitled *Utopia*. It dreamed of a world of unselfish people who would prove to others the truth of Christianity by their virtue. This was the only reform he wanted to see.

After 1517, More became a king’s councillor and wielded much influence over affairs. He gained even more royal favour by editing Henry’s blast against the Reformer Martin Luther (1521), and by 1525 he was found taking harsh measures against the spread of Reformed teachings in Cambridge.

By 1527 his attitude to Gospel-believing ‘heretics’ became clear to all. He embarked on a bitter and cruel campaign against **Thomas Bilney**, who was later

martyred, and he published a *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* that firmly indicated his final choice: to become a public defender of the Roman faith.

In 1529 More intensified his “bloody crusade” against believers. He wrote scathingly against **William Tyndale**, the Bible translator, and urged more severe measures against all Protestants. The burning of **Bilney**, **Bayfield** and **Tewksbury** drew from him the remark: “there should have been more burned by a great many than have been within this seven year last passed.” Sir Thomas More was the kind of man from whom the friends of Reform could expect no mercy.

Notice how deceitful More was in getting the State rather than the Church to burn believers. He used the legal term ‘relaxed.’ A prisoner was ‘relaxed’ after the Church had found him guilty of heresy. This did not involve a period of relaxation; far from it. It meant that the Church authorities ‘relaxed’ their hold on him by handing him over to the State authorities for execution. More defended this ritual handing over on the pretext that *the Church does not shed blood*. How like the Pharisees after their mock trial of Jesus! They handed Him to Pilate, the Roman Governor for sentencing, and the Roman soldiers nailed him to the cross.

The historian Jasper Ridley summed up More’s part in the English Reformation when he wrote: “No one was more active in persecuting the Protestants who distributed the English Bible than Sir Thomas More . . . a

particularly nasty sadomasochistic pervert. He enjoyed being flogged by his favourite daughter as much as flogging heretics, beggars and lunatics in his garden . . . When he was writing as a propagandist for the Catholic Church, he was a shameless liar. On one occasion he wrote a very favourable review of his own book, pretending that it had been written by a(n) . . . eminent foreign theologian, when in fact he had written it himself.”

### **The King’s Matter**

This brings us to ‘the king’s Matter.’ When Henry became king in 1509, he married his brother’s Spanish widow, Catherine of Aragon. But Catherine failed to produce a male heir to the English throne; so Henry threatened to divorce her. He did not want a ‘succession crisis’ after his death. He had a daughter Mary, who was 9 years old in 1525, but England had not had a female queen before.

Mere politics were not Henry’s deepest fears. He believed that God was angry with him; for in fact he did have a son, Henry, who was born to his mistress Bessie Blount in 1519. The king thought that if he could have a son by her but not by his queen, then God was punishing him. By having this son, Henry had broken God’s law, as spelt out in Exodus 20.14, which forbids all sexual relations outside marriage.

Henry also thought he had sinned by marrying his elder brother’s widow. For the Word of God in Leviticus 18.16

says: “You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother’s wife.” But Henry had married the wife of a brother *who had already died*; yet he did not grasp the significance of this at the time, so he sought a solution that would salve his conscience *and* provide him with a male heir.

Sometime in the 1520s Henry felt convicted by both these texts. Indeed, he came to believe that God was angry with both himself and Catherine. Henry petitioned the pope for a divorce, but in vain. Even the high-ranking churchman Cardinal Wolsey failed to secure his wish.

To complicate matters, those who disagreed with the divorce found a text in Deuteronomy that allowed Henry to marry his dead brother’s widow. (Deuteronomy 25.7) Boaz had done this after Ruth’s husband had died. (Ruth 4.10)

There seemed to be a contradiction somewhere. The Leviticus text forbade him to marry Catherine; the Deuteronomy text encouraged him to marry her. How could the (apparent) contradiction be resolved?

There was a further complication. Henry was ‘flirting’ with Anne Boleyn, though she refused to sleep with him till 1532, when she was sure of becoming queen. As it was, she fell pregnant in December of that year; they married in the following year (without Papal approval) when her daughter, the future Queen Elizabeth, was born. This meant that in the eyes of the Roman Church Henry

was either an adulterer or a bigamist, or both, but no one dared to say so in his presence.

The Sack of Rome in 1527 by mutinous troops of the emperor Charles V seemed to Henry to be another token of God's displeasure with the Church of Rome. Could it be mistaken in claiming to be the only lawful Church of Christ on earth? And did he really need its approval for his divorce?

As he continued to quarrel over the divorce, Henry enlisted the services of **Thomas Cromwell** and **Thomas Cranmer**.

Cromwell could do nothing towards a solution. But Cranmer could. At Cromwell's suggestion, in 1529 he went on a tour of several European universities to consult their Bible scholars about the King's 'Great Matter.' On his return he persuaded Henry that a divorce would be lawful.

What has all this to do with the English Reformation? Well, Thomas Cranmer's promotion made him the principal guide of the English Church through the changes it needed to become a Reformed Church. He was chief adviser on religious affairs to both Henry VIII and Edward VI, and so was able to put into practice some important Biblical reforms. But because Henry was an 'absolute monarch' who always wanted his own way, Cranmer had to move very cautiously. So he waited his

time, and hoped in God that the reforms he had so deeply thought about would one day be put in place.

### **God employs Henry to further Reform**

In the secret purpose of God, the king became entangled in controversies about faith. These helped to further reform in unexpected ways.

As a committed Roman Catholic, Henry was willing to condemn the German Reformer **Martin Luther**, and was actively hostile towards the Bible translator **William Tyndale** when he heard that Tyndale was ‘an early English Lutheran.’

Under God, Henry’s opposition to both Luther and Tyndale helped on the Reformation.

#### **1. Martin Luther**

During the ‘teen’ years of the new century the pope had claimed that by paying a few coins to the Roman Church people could release their dead relatives from the pains of purgatory. This was a man-made fiction anyway, invented to meet the costs of building St. Peter’s, Rome.

Over in Germany, Luther was bold enough to speak up against this evil. It was called an Indulgence, because the pope, its inventor, and Johannes Tetzel, the peddler of this worthless piece of paper, promised to ‘indulge’ or relax the punishment due to offenders for their sins on payment of a sum of money. A popular ‘jingle’ of the day mocked the whole ‘scam’:

‘As soon as the coin in the coffer rings  
The soul from purgatory springs.’

Luther condemned this practice. He said it was “the pious defrauding of the faithful.” When the pope banished him from Church communion for refusing to withdraw his protests, the German Reformer burned the ‘bull’ (or parchment containing his ‘excommunication’) and began to re-organize the Church along more Biblical lines. In this move Luther was supported by the German princes and people around him.

When Henry heard what Luther had done, he wrote a book against him. He then had the book bound most attractively and sent it to the pope. With much pomp and ceremony, seated on his throne, dressed in his best robes and surrounded by priests, the pope received Henry’s messenger. The messenger knelt humbly before him, kissed his toe, then his cheek, and presented him with the book. After both had made a long speech, the ceremony ended.

When he had read the book, the pope gave Henry a new title: *Fidei Defensor*, which means *Defender of the Faith*. He wrote Henry a letter of thanks, calling him “Our most dear son Henry, the illustrious King of England and Defender of the Faith.” This title remains on our coins to this day, but it no longer refers to the Roman Faith.

Henry was as proud of his new title as he was of his learning, especially about religion; so he held a solemn

service in Westminster Abbey, had the pope's letter read to all present, and his new title proclaimed.

All this shows just how much the kings of Europe feared and flattered the pope. Yet God's Word tells us: "The fear of man brings a snare," and "The Lord will cut off all flattering lips." (Proverbs 29.25; Psalm 12.3)

These events, along with Luther's Biblical teachings, soon became known in England, and people wondered if they should leave the communion of Rome and worship God according to His Word and their own conscience, even though they had no official church buildings to worship in.

This movement in the hearts of the people marks the beginning of the spiritual Reformation of the nation, and despite slow progress, under the guidance of God currents were swirling beneath the surface towards massive changes for the better in England.

## **(2) William Tyndale**

Henry's opposition to Tyndale likewise became a tool in God's hand to further reform. On reading Tyndale's *Obedience of a Christian Man* he saw that the Bible itself encouraged him to oversee the life of the Church in England, and that churchmen were not outside the law of the land. (Romans 13.1-7) Now Henry thought he might rid himself of troublesome greedy churchmen, and rule the Church himself! Yet he was slow to take action,

because he had a natural dislike of reform. Changes for the better therefore came very slowly.

But unknown to all but God, a clean break with Rome was about to take place.

Early in 1531 several 'clergymen' were accused of serving the pope before Henry. Henry was clearly determined to intimidate the 'clergy.'

Later the same year the king suddenly accused Cardinal Wolsey of breaking a certain law by being the pope's ambassador. The charge included all the 'clergy' who had accepted him! As a punishment for their crime, Wolsey and the churchmen forfeited all Church property [which according to Scripture should never have been theirs in the first place!]

In the autumn of that year Henry was shown some historical documents that made it lawful for him to become head of the Church in England. If he was head of State *and* Church, he could both disannul his own marriage and regulate the affairs of the Church to his own liking!

Bishop Fisher of Rochester only managed to secure the words "so far as the law of Christ allows" in relation to the king's claim to absolute supremacy. Clearly, Henry's push towards complete control was gaining ground.

By early 1532 he had succeeded in browbeating the churchmen into complete submission. With the approval of the so-called 'Reformation Parliament' Henry severed the national Church from Rome, and began to govern its affairs through a law guaranteeing his royal supremacy.

Then Archbishop Cranmer, speaking in the name of the Church in England and by Act of Parliament, declared the marriage to Catherine of Aragon null and void. To make his defiance of the pope clear to all, Henry married Anne Boleyn.

This rapid succession of moves separated England from the centuries-old empire of the Middle Ages. **It was the most momentous change in modern English history.**

Other significant events followed in quick succession. In the secret purpose of God Sir Thomas More's opposition to Henry brought about his own downfall. By disapproving of Henry's divorce of Catherine of Aragon, refusing to attend the marriage and coronation of Anne Boleyn, and refusing to swear obedience to the Statutes of Succession and Supremacy (which made Henry head of both State *and* Church), More was condemned, imprisoned and beheaded. John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, was also beheaded for refusing to acknowledge Henry as head of the Church.

Then in 1536 Henry ordered the suppression of the monastic orders and the confiscation of Church lands. This proved to be a tremendous blow to the Roman

Church. Within four years it forfeited a third of the property in England to the crown! While the king himself used much of the Church's money to finance his war with France, and the nobles grabbed what land they could for themselves, nevertheless God was undermining the power of Rome in the country, and was paving the way for more constructive reform later.

Comments one historian: "No portion of the clergy were more justly attacked than the monks . . . Their laziness, their wealth, their greed, and their bad living were notorious all over Europe."

The same year (1536) saw the introduction of the *Ten Articles*. These articles of faith asserted the authority of Scripture, of the three ancient creeds (Apostles', Athanasian and Nicene), and the first four ecumenical councils (Nicene, 325 A.D., Constantinople, 384, Ephesus, 434, and Chalcedon, 454). These creeds and councils are Catholic (common to the universal Church) but not Roman Catholic.

But the *Ten Articles* were still Roman Catholic. They were, as one writer says: "Romish, with the pope left out in the cold."

In no way did they remotely approach the Protestant Faith. For they distinctly taught the errors that baptism is necessary to salvation; that penance, or paying for some of our sins, was necessary; that Christ's body and blood were physically present in the wafer and wine; that we

are justified by faith, joined by obedience and love; that images might be used in churches; that the help of the virgin Mary and saints was to be called on in prayer; that the various rituals and 'holy days' of the Medieval Church, with their vestments, crucifixes and 'holy water', were to be kept; that there is a place called purgatory; and that prayers might be offered for the dead.

Henry was now showing all Europe who ruled the Church in England! And that he was still a loyal Roman Catholic!

While these events had been taking place, Catherine of Aragon died, Anne Boleyn was beheaded on a charge of unfaithfulness [note the king's hypocrisy, in view of his repeated unfaithfulness!] and Henry married Jane Seymour.

### **Reaction and Rebellion**

Although these massive changes did not make a Reformation, they nevertheless provoked a Roman Catholic reaction. In 1536 a 'Pilgrimage of Grace' (more accurately, a well organized popular armed revolt against the reforms of the corrupt Church) threatened to stop any further changes.

The rebellion was sparked off by the execution of Sir Thomas More and Bishop John Fisher. The large numbers of the king's subjects who were still devoted to Rome were embittered by their deaths, and in retaliation hoped to overthrow the king altogether. Government

sources reported that the rebellion was co-ordinated with an invasion of England from the Continent by the pope's and emperor's forces. Clearly, neither pope nor emperor could tolerate the idea of Henry making himself the Head of the Catholic or Universal Church in England.

Yet the rebellion failed. The king and Cromwell pretended to agree to the rebels' demands, and invited their leaders to London under the promise of a free pardon and a parliament in the north. Henry taught them a sharp lesson. Without more ado, he destroyed them, then sent in the troops to execute as many rebels as they could capture. This too was the Lord's doing, for all rebellion against lawful authority is sin.

In their efforts to promote further reform, Cromwell and Cranmer drew up *The Bishops' Book*, or *The Institution of a Christian Man*. This contained a much more Protestant form of teaching than the *Ten Articles*.

The next year Cranmer devised another creed called the *Thirteen Articles*. These were based on the Lutheran *Confession of Augsburg*. But the king refused to sanction them.

Furthermore, the king showed his determination to cling to Rome (though not to the pope) by publishing *The King's Book*. This was a Romanist revision of *The Bishops' Book*.

In 1539 Henry showed his resolve to return to the *status quo* he inherited at his coronation by issuing the *Six Articles*. These were intended “for the abolishing of diversity of opinion.” They required all Englishmen, on pain of death, to believe the falsehood that the communion bread and wine became body and blood of Jesus after being consecrated by a priest, to deny that drinking communion wine was necessary for the people (though it was drunk by the priest), to accept the celibacy of the clergy, the binding nature of vows of chastity, and the necessity of the Mass and Auricular Confession.

People called these six articles *The Bloody Statute* and *The Whip with Six Strings*. They began a reign of terror that ended only with the king’s death.

### **The Case of John Lambert**

This period of Henry’s reign witnessed the condemnation of the Protestant **John Lambert**. It proved (if anyone needed proof) that Henry was determined to block further reform, and was anxious to kill off all Protestant teaching in his realm.

The king commanded Cranmer to refute Lambert’s claim that the body of Christ was not present in the wafer and wine on the altar. But Lambert answered so well that the king was deeply moved, Cranmer was entangled and the audience amazed. Nevertheless, the faithful servant of Christ was condemned and burned alive.

John Foxe describes Lambert's martyrdom in the following words:

“As to the terrible manner of burning of this blessed martyr . . . there was yet none so cruelly and piteously handled as he. For after his legs were consumed and burnt up to the stumps, and the wretched tormentors and enemies of God had withdrawn the fire from him, so that but a small fire was left under him, then two that stood on each side of him with their halberds pitched him upon their pikes, as far as the chain would reach. Then he, lifting up such hands as he had, and his fingers' ends flaming with fire, cried to the people in these words: ‘None but Christ! None but Christ!’ and so being set down again from their halberds, fell into the fire, and there ended his life.”

### **Reforms but no Reformation**

The latter years of Henry's reign seemed to bring out the worst in the king's cruel, selfish and domineering nature. Satan seemed to be using him to create havoc in the realm. He ordered the execution of both Romanists and Protestants, albeit for different reasons. Romanists were condemned for treason, Protestants for ‘heresy.’

The power struggle between the Roman faction and those Protestants who wanted further reform continued. Cranmer's placing of the Bible in parish churches and the *Ten Articles* of 1536 had swayed the nation gently in a Lutheran direction. But the publication of the anti-Protestant *Six Articles* of 1539 signalled a strong pro-Roman reaction.

Then, Cromwell aroused Henry's anger by encouraging a scheme of Protestant Union, and by suggesting that he marry Anne of Cleves in order to cement such a union. Like More and Fisher, he too perished on the scaffold!

The fall of Cromwell seemed ominous for Cranmer. Indeed, his enemies tried to topple him, but Henry, who trusted and respected him, protected him. In view of later developments under Cranmer, Henry's protection was a key factor in preparing for later reform. Clearly, the Lord was a 'wall of fire' around Cranmer. No enemy could come near him.

Still, danger lurked on every corner. In 1542 Pope Paul III officially approved the **Inquisition**, extending its reach to every country. This was not a body of men appointed merely to *inquire* about people's faith. They mercilessly imprisoned, tortured and killed those they called 'heretics,' whether they were Protestants, Jews or even Catholics. Cardinal Caraffa (later Pope Paul IV) actually said: "If our own father were a heretic, we would carry the wood to burn him!" Under such a threat no believer was safe.

### **Conclusion**

When he died in 1547, Henry was regarded by all as a cruel tyrant. Yet God had used him to bring in some very important reforms.

1. In the first place, the Bible could now be heard read in many parish churches in England. This was God's

answer to William Tyndale's prayer at the stake: "Lord, open the King of England's eyes."

A print exists showing a man named Porter reading it in the crypt of St. Paul's cathedral around 1540. Among his hearers were both enemies and friends of the Reformation - cruel Bishop Bonner, who is speaking to a monk; Humphrey Monmouth, who greatly helped William Tyndale; Anne Askew, a lady whose faith was firmer than that of many men; Bishop Gardiner, enemy to all reform; Thomas Cromwell, who had done much to promote the public reading of Scripture, and Miles Coverdale, the Bible translator. In the shadow of the pillar are three martyrs, who were burned with Anne Askew in the fires of Smithfield.

This was the doing of the Lord, and it is marvellous in our eyes, especially in view of Henry's hatred of Martin Luther, William Tyndale and the Protestant faith. With the Bible in their hands, people became better taught in the things of God than the priests ever were. Furthermore, the open Bible taught them that all the members of Christ's Congregation are equal in God's eyes. The 'priesthood of all believers' gives every believer the freedom to minister to his fellow believer's needs, instead of leaving him under the power of the priest.

2. Then again, Henry had ordered the monasteries, convents, priories and abbeys, where the monks and nuns lived, to be closed, and had sent their inmates out into the

fields and streets, to earn a proper living and contribute something to the common good. Some of these monasteries had been very rich, laden with jewels, wood carvings and paintings, and possessing much land.

Besides, many monks and nuns had lived scandalous lives. Though they made vows to remain chaste, they were sexually 'free.' When Henry's commissioners searched the tunnels between men's and women's 'religious houses,' they found numerous infant skeletons. All these evils were recorded in black books, a practice that gave rise to the saying: "Better not get into his black books!"

3. Thirdly, in his desire to rid himself of the Papacy Henry was not alone. Other kings in Europe also wanted to be rid of him. Charles VIII (ruled 1483-98) of France, for example, had presented a challenge to Rome as his country grew stronger. By 1516 his successor Francis I was virtually the head of the Church in France. Henry knew of Francis's position, and wished to copy his example. This was a further factor in God's plan to rid England of Papal tyranny, and make His Church in England independent. Do not forget: "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, and He turns it wherever He wills." (Proverbs 21.1)

Before we leave Henry, let us remind ourselves that although he had broken with the pope, he never became a true Christian, nor did he wish the religion of England to change. The king would never have burned Protestants

nor left £600 for Masses to be said for his soul if he had become a true Christian. He remained a Roman Catholic to the end.

### **Key Persons**

**Henry VIII** (1491-1547) King.

**Thomas Wolsey** (1474-1530) Roman Catholic Cardinal.

**Thomas More** (1478-1535) Lord Chancellor of England and persecutor of the true Church of God.

**Thomas Cromwell** (1485-1540) Chief adviser to Henry VIII and the one who steered the king towards involvement in the Reformation.

**Thomas Cranmer** (1489-1556) The first Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury.

### **Key Events**

1509 Henry VIII becomes King of England.

Monks contended with each other.

Persecution of Protestants continues.

1503 Julius II is Pope until 1513.

1511 Earliest martyrs in Henry's reign.

1513 Leo X is chosen Pope.

1515 Thomas Wolsey becomes Lord Chancellor and a Roman Cardinal.

1517 Martin Luther challenges Rome over Indulgences.

- 1519 Martyrs burned to death at Coventry.
- 1520 The Pope excommunicates Luther.
- 1521 Henry supports the Pope against Luther, and is made 'Defender of the (Roman) Faith.'
- 1522 Adrian VI chosen Pope.
- 1523 Clement VII is chosen Pope.
- 1529 Sir Thomas More becomes Lord Chancellor.
- 1529 The 'Reformation Parliament' supports Henry's 'reforms' (1529-36).
- 1531 Fall of Wolsey.
- 1532 The breach with Rome in full swing.
- 1533 Catherine prevented from appealing to Rome against the annulment of her marriage.  
Henry marries Anne Boleyn.
- 1534 Henry severs England from Papal authority, and becomes Head of the Church of England.  
The Act of Succession makes people take an oath agreeing to the annulment of the marriage and to the king's supremacy.  
Sir Thomas More and Bishop Fisher of Rochester refuse to take the oath.  
The Act of Supremacy makes Henry head of the Church in England.  
The Treason Act makes denial of the king's supremacy treason.  
Paul III chosen Pope.
- 1535 Martyrdom of William Tyndale in Vilvorde, the Netherlands (now Belgium).  
Execution of Sir Thomas More and Bishop Fisher for treason.
- 1536 Dissolution of the Monasteries (1536-40) begins.

- Five hundred religious 'houses' closed.  
Execution of Anne Boleyn; Henry marries Jane Seymour.  
The 'Pilgrimage of Grace,' a Popish uprising in the north of England, is suppressed.  
The Ten Articles imposed on the Church.
- 1537 Jane Seymour dies after giving birth to the future Edward VI.
- 1538 The Bible in English placed in parish churches.
- 1540 Henry marries Anne of Cleves, then Catherine Howard.  
Thomas Cromwell is executed on a charge of treason.
- 1542 Catherine Howard is executed.
- 1543 Henry marries Catherine Parr.
- 1545 Pope Paul III opens the Council of Trent.
- 1547 Death of Henry VIII; Edward VI crowned king.

### **Key Terms**

**Evangelical** – This term comes from the Greek 'evangelion' = 'Good News.' It signifies the Gospel that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

**Mass** – Derived from the Latin 'missio' = 'I send,' this term was used by the priest to dismiss the congregation. Gradually it came to refer to the central service in the Roman Church. "Without the Mass . . . the Pope . . . and the clergy of the Western Church would have had no power for the Protestant reformers to challenge, for the Mass was the centrepiece around which all the complex

devotional life of the Church revolved.” (Diarmaid MacCulloch)

**Diocese** – the territorial unit of the Church administered by a bishop. The word was adopted from the territorial divisions of the Roman Empire. In Greek, the term is ‘diokēsis’ = ‘administrative unit.’ There was no such unit in the early Christian Church. Each church or group of churches was ruled by a presbytery of elders. (Acts 20.17,28; Philippians 1.1; 1 Timothy 4.14)

**Celibacy** – the state of remaining unmarried in order to devote oneself to religion. Since the 4<sup>th</sup> century celibacy was imposed on the Roman Church, even though Peter, its supposed pope, was married. (see Mark 1.30; 1 Corinthians 9.5)

**Auricular Confession** – the Roman Catholic practice of confessing one’s sins to a priest. It is called ‘auricular’ because the confession is made through a grilled partition into his ear (from the Latin ‘auris’ = ‘ear’).

## **Chapter Seven**

### **The Reformation Under Edward VI**

#### **Introduction**

Henry VIII had three children: Mary, Elizabeth and Edward. Although he was the youngest of the three, Edward was made king, because he was a boy, and in those days a female heir to the throne was unthinkable.

His mother was Lady Jane Seymour, who was a Protestant, and so was her brother Lord Somerset, who now became Protector. So Edward was brought up in the true faith; and although he had no real power in the land, he wanted the nation to become Protestant.

If his father had broken the power of the pope in England, Edward was to exalt the power of Christ and His Word. Even at the tender age of nine, when he ascended the throne, he showed a love for the truth worthy of a mature Christian man. At his coronation the three swords of state were carried before him. “But where is the fourth sword?” asked the young king. “What sword, your majesty?” asked a councillor. “The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God,” Edward replied. For the first time in the nation’s history, the sword of the Word was acknowledged to be above the swords of state.

Because he so much resembled an Old Testament king in his youth, personal godliness and efforts towards reform, Edward was referred to as ‘the English Josiah.’ (See 2 Kings 21-23; 2 Chronicles 33-35)

### **True Biblical Reforms**

Edward's reign brought together politicians and churchmen in a united attempt to remove all remaining 'rags of popery' and promote further Biblical reform. Edward's uncle, **Edward Seymour**, Duke of Somerset and Lord Protector of the boy king, headed affairs.

The veteran Evangelical **Thomas Cranmer**, with the consent of the young king and his counsellors, was now able to put in place some of his long matured plans for reform.

In the first year of the reign, a royal **Visitation** ordered all remaining images to be destroyed, the old 'heresy' laws were abolished and all chantries (buildings where priests used to sing Masses for the dead) were dissolved.

Next, Cranmer sought to provide the Church with a godly, well-educated ministry, because so few priests ever preached a sermon from the Word of God and so few people heard one. But his plans for a thorough ministerial training never materialized.

Nevertheless, he did oversee the publication of the **Book of Homilies** (or Sermons) published in 1547. These set forth true Gospel teaching, and were to be read to the people wherever a proper ministry was lacking.

Cranmer's next reform was to fix the Church's order of service and worship. From the many Latin manuals of prayer and devotion, he masterminded two successive

versions of the **Book of Common Prayer** in English. Now the Church had one book that contained services for the entire year, as well as the Book of Psalms and Bible readings.

Apart from one or two questionable phrases, the Prayer Book is thoroughly Biblical in doctrine or teaching. Those glorious Gospel truths that had been lost for centuries were now restored to the Church in England. The teaching of the Prayer Book stretches right back to the earliest days of Christianity, and is far older than the corrupt teaching of the Church of Rome.

Cranmer's service for Holy Communion especially reveals his ability as a Christian theologian and prose writer. It contains the true Biblical understanding of both the Lord's Supper and Justification by Faith.

The Collects or Prayers of the Prayer Book too are penned in beautiful English prose and designed to serve every believers' need.

The Prayer Book was immensely important in settling worship in the Church of England. Sadly, it is now replaced in many areas by alternative service books. Yet it remains the official service book of the Church of England.

Besides providing a manual of worship in English, Cranmer also had altars (places of sacrifice) changed to communion tables (from which the Lord's Supper was

administered); images, candles and incense banned; stained glass windows replaced with plain glass, both to let in more light and to signify the light of the Gospel that was now shining into the Church; and church music simplified, so that instead of the confusing word-settings of the Roman Mass sung only by a choir, the people could sing one note to each word as a congregation.

In introducing these reforms, Cranmer proceeded cautiously but firmly. He was anxious to retain what was good from the past, and so his reforms took hold by stages. In the kindness of God, most of them were welcomed by the nation.

Edward's government also **invited some continental Reformers to England** to aid the work of reform here. Those most congenial to their aims were **John à Lasco**, **Peter Martyr Vermigli** and **Martin Bucer**, for they shared Cranmer's new view of the Lord's Supper.

Instead of seeing the body and blood of Christ 'in, with and under' the bread and wine, as Martin Luther taught, Cranmer now believed Christ to be in the hearts of believers when they received communion. This teaching is called 'Receptionism,' because believers *receive* the Saviour into their hearts by faith as they remember His broken body and shed blood. The Supper gives them an extra opportunity to get a firmer grip of Him, and to become more assured that He is theirs and they are His.

Vermigli and Bucer were given leading teaching posts in Oxford and Cambridge. John à Lasco pastored the foreign congregation in London (1550). Thousands of Europeans and Protestant refugees followed them into England, where they proved to be a great asset to the nation, especially as skilful printers, weavers, farmers and merchants.

Edward also appointed **six royal preachers** to tour the country, declaring the true Gospel to all and sundry. Among these was **John Knox**, the Scottish Reformer. Knox had returned with other exiles from Calvin's Geneva. He was a man on fire for God. In Lancashire and Cheshire, the royal preacher was **John Bradford**, a most holy man of God who later suffered martyrdom.

By 1553 Cranmer had fixed the doctrinal basis for a Reformed Church in England in the **Forty-two Articles** (shortened to Thirty-nine Articles in 1571). These Articles anchor the Church in England to the Word of God, and link it to the early Creeds and Reformed churches everywhere. On the one hand they reject popish heresies and errors; on the other the fanatical extremes of 'ultra-spiritual' sects that had swarmed all over Europe in the wake of true reform.

Finally, Cranmer did his utmost to **promote unity with other Reformed leaders** throughout Europe. He longed for greater co-operation between the reformed churches, and for greater effort by their leaders to find a common way forward. To this end he corresponded with many

continental Reformers; but had little success in this area. Yet his far-seeing spirit embraced the whole Church of Christ on earth.

As a result of these changes, England began to emerge as a new potential centre of the Reformation, possibly to succeed Zurich or Geneva.

### **Reformed Preachers in England**

To obtain a glimpse of how reform affected the people of England during Edward's reign, we will recall some of the preachers under whose ministry the Word of God "had free course, and was glorified." (2 Thessalonians 3.1)

**John Knox** was one of several heaven-sent messengers God gave to England at this time. First as pastor of the English congregation in Geneva, then as court preacher to Edward VI, he had an influence on the English Church that few realize. He preached constantly before the king, at Hampton, Windsor and Westminster, and was a favourite of his.

Knox was offered the Bishopric of Rochester, but refused the offer because he believed that all bishops are equal, and that their office is the same as that of presbyter, as the Bible teaches.

Knox's preaching was electric. When he mounted the pulpit, he *explained* the meaning of the Bible text in only

a few minutes; but when he began to *apply* it he grew so animated that he was likely to knock the pulpit to pieces! The Lord blessed this kind of preaching. The result was hundreds of converted men and women, changed for the better by the power and grace of God.

He was also filled with the Spirit of Christ. He prayed publicly for the new popish queen, yet added the request: “Repress Thou the pride of those that would rebel . . . But O Lord let us never revolt or turn back to idolatry again.”

His *Admonition to England*, written soon after ‘Bloody’ Mary’s accession, is one of the most moving calls to the nation it is possible to read. Here is a fragment of it: “O England! Now is God’s wrath kindled against you. Now has He begun to punish . . . He has taken from you the crown of your glory, and has left you without honour . . . For I perceive that the heart, the tongue and the hand of one Englishman is bent against another, and division to be in the whole realm . . . O England, England! Do you not consider that your commonwealth is like a ship sailing on the sea; if your mariners and governors shall consume one another, shall you not suffer shipwreck? . . . O England, England!”

One of the most popular preachers in England during Edward’s reign was **Hugh Latimer**. His lively, practical style was greatly blessed to the scholars and townspeople of Cambridge.

It was a saying of the day:

‘When Stafford read, and Latimer preached,  
Then was Cambridge blessed.’

Let us hear a sample of the kind of preaching God used to stir England to the very depths: “And now I would ask a strange question,” says Latimer. “Who is the most diligent bishop and prelate in all England? I can tell, for I know him who it is. I know him well . . . And will ye know who it is? I will tell you – it is the devil. He is the most diligent preacher of all other; he is never out of his diocese; he is never from his cure; . . . ye shall never find him idle, I warrant you. And his office is to hinder religion, to maintain superstition, to set up idolatry, to teach all kind of popery. Where the devil is resident . . . away with books, and up with candles; away with Bibles, and up with beads; away with the light of the Gospel, and up with the light of candles, yea, at noon-days!”

Another moving preacher was **John Bradford**. He was greatly used by the Lord in his native Lancashire and its adjoining county, Cheshire. He was renowned for ripping open people’s steel-hard consciences, and for bringing them to repent of their sins.

Here is part of the opening of his printed sermon on repentance: “The life we have at this present is the gift of God . . . For the which life we should be thankful, so we may not use it after our own fantasy, but to the end for which it is given . . . that is, to the setting forth of God’s

praise and glory, by repentance, conversion, and obedience to His good will and holy laws.”

Bradford was renowned too for his deep sense of sin and prayerfulness. Here is an extract from one of his printed prayers: “O Almighty God and most merciful Father . . . be gracious and tender towards me; lighten my mind that I may with pleasure look upon good things only: inflame my heart with the love thereof, that I may carefully covet them; and at the last, by Thy gracious conducting, may happily attain them through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

**John Hooper** too was in great demand as a preacher. On his return from Zurich to England in 1548 Hooper preached in London, often twice, and never less than once a day. In his sermons he sharply reprov'd worldly people's sins and the corrupt abuses of the church. The people flocked daily to hear him. Often when he was preaching, the church building would be so full that none could enter further than the doors.

A glimpse into Hooper's life as a bishop shows a marked contrast with that of the popish bishops of his day. Writes Foxe: “he left no pains untaken, nor ways unsought, how to train up the flock of Christ in the true word of salvation . . . No father in his household, no gardener in his garden, no husbandman in his vineyard, was more or better occupied than he in his diocese among his flock, going about his towns and villages, in teaching and preaching to the people there.”

On entering his home, the visitor would have thought he had entered some church. “In every corner,” noted Foxe, “there was some savour of virtue, good example, honest conversation and reading of holy Scriptures.” There was no lewd or riotous behaviour or idleness, no pomp, no lying, no swearing.

In addition, Hooper spent his bishop’s salary on hospitality. “Twice I was at his house in Worcester,” says Foxe, “where in his common hall I saw a table spread with good store of meat, and set full of beggars and poor folk; and I asking the servants what this meant, they told me that every day their lord and master’s custom was to have to dinner a certain number of the poor folk of the city by course, who were served with wholesome meats; and when they were served, after having been examined by him or his deputies in the Lord’s Prayer, the Articles of their faith and Ten Commandments, he himself sat down to dinner, and not before.”

Such was just one scene of many from the rapidly reforming nation under godly King Edward.

### **The End of Reform**

By the Spring of 1553, however, ‘the English Josiah’ was showing symptoms of increasing weakness. He had never been a healthy boy, and the Duke of Northumberland suspected that he would not live long.

The next heir to the throne was Mary, Edward’s older sister. She was the daughter of Catherine of Aragon,

Henry VIII's first wife. Mary was a fanatical Roman Catholic. She hated the Protestant faith as much as Edward loved it.

Edward was saddened to think that when he was dead, Mary would undo all the work of reform that he had encouraged. Northumberland knew this, and so he persuaded Edward to make a will leaving the throne to his cousin, Lady Jane Grey.

Lady Jane was only sixteen, and had a tender heart towards the Lord Jesus Christ. If she would accept the throne, then the ambitious Duke could rule as he liked. He tried to keep his plan secret, for he knew that many people in England wished Mary to be queen. He succeeded so well that even Jane herself did not know his intentions.

In 1553, soon after making his will, Edward died. One of his deathbed prayers was: "O Lord God, defend this realm from Papistry, and maintain Thy true religion."

The martyr John Bradford deeply bewailed the young king's death, saying that the Lord had taken him away because of England's sins, especially the noblemen's greed for land and power, and the people's fondness for the superstitions of popery.

### **Conclusion**

Edward was a good, gentle and God-fearing boy. During his reign many reforms took place, and many fine

schools were founded. Some of them still flourish, and are known as King Edward Schools.

As we try to sum up the progress of the Reformation to date, we may say that while the seed had been sown during Henry's reign, when Cranmer could only think through the reforms he desired without seeing them come to fruition, Edward VI enabled him to do much to place the English Church on a sound Biblical basis.

## **Key Persons**

**Edward VI** (1537-53) King.

**Thomas Cranmer** (1489-1556) Archbishop of Canterbury. Architect of the Anglican Reformation under Edward.

## **Key Events**

- 1547 Death of Henry VIII and accession of Edward VI.  
Edward Seymour becomes Lord Protector, then Duke of Somerset.  
Act for Dissolving the Chantries passed.  
The Book of Homilies published.
- 1548 Orders for images to be removed from churches and superstitious ceremonies disused.
- 1549 Parliament passes Act of Uniformity authorizing the First Prayer Book of Edward VI.  
Act passed permitting priests to marry.  
Two Popish rebellions: Western and Kett's.  
Bonner, bishop of London, deprived of his office for opposing the Prayer Book.
- 1550 Princess Mary refuses to use the new Prayer Book.
- 1551 Bishop Gardiner of Winchester deprived of his office.  
Duke of Somerset tried for treason.  
Duke of Northumberland replaces him as Protector.
- 1552 Execution of Somerset.  
Edward's Second Prayer Book published.
- 1553 The Forty-two Articles of Religion framed.  
Death of Edward VI.

## Key Terms

**Visitation** – The act of Church authorities in going to check up on the various places of worship in their jurisdiction.

**Chantries** – Places where priests sang Mass for dead souls.

**Liturgy** – The form of public worship laid down by a Church.

**Homilies** – Sermons on religious or moral topics.

**Theologian** – A person who studies God.

**Canon Law** – The Law of the Church that provides a rule to live by. From the Greek ‘kanon’ = ‘rule.’ In Scripture, God expects His people to make rules for worship and service only in accordance with His commandments.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Satan Strikes Back**

#### **Introduction**

Martin Luther once said: “Where the Lord God builds a church, Satan builds a chapel.” By this he meant that wherever a work of God takes place, Satan is sure to oppose it.

We have already noticed Satan trying to suppress the Reformation during Henry’s reign. Following the death of Edward VI he fostered even more cruel measures.

#### **Lady Jane Grey**

Immediately, the Duke of Northumberland and some other nobles offered the crown to Lady Jane Grey. They knelt before her, gave her hand the kiss of allegiance and greeted her as their queen.

But Lady Jane was both sad and frightened. Like her late cousin Edward, she loved learning, trusted the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation, and could even speak and write Greek and Latin, and read a little Hebrew. But she insisted that she was not yet ready to be queen. “It is your duty,” said the Duke. “You cannot put away the duty God gives you.” Weeping, Lady Jane fell on her knees and cried: “Then if it must be so, God give me strength to bear this heavy burden. God give me grace to rule for his glory and the good of the people.” Clearly, she would have been a worthy successor to her cousin. But it was not to be. After only eight days, Lady Jane was cruelly

arrested, imprisoned, and a few months later beheaded. In history she is known as ‘the eight day queen.’

Here is part of a prayer by Lady Jane Grey, composed shortly before her execution: “O Lord, Thou God and Father of my life, hear me, a poor and desolate woman . . . and be Thou now unto me a strong tower of defence, I humbly require Thee. Suffer me not to be tempted above my power; but either be Thou a deliverer unto me out of this great misery, or else give me grace patiently to bear Thy heavy hand and sharp correction . . . Let it seem good to Thy Fatherly goodness to deliver me . . . for whom Thy Son Christ shed His precious blood on the cross . . . Hear me, O merciful Father, for His sake, whom Thou wouldst should be a sacrifice for my sins. To whom with Thee, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory. Amen.”

### **Mary’s Rapid Response to Edward’s Reforms**

Satan raised an even greater tumult during the reign of Mary Tudor, the half sister of Edward VI who ascended the English throne in July 1553. The execution of Lady Jane Grey “was a sombre warning of what was in store for others.” (Marcus Loane) As you read the following facts, bear in mind that in the Bible God calls Satan a false accuser and a murderer.

Mary had been brought up from her infancy as a rigid believer in the Romish Church. She was, in fact, extremely bigoted and narrow-minded.

Though she was a fanatical Romanist, Mary at first took the advice of her cousin, the emperor Charles V, to tread cautiously in trying to re-establish the Roman religion.

As a result, some improvements were left untouched. For instance, she did not forbid the reading the English Bible. Only a few monasteries were re-opened, and only a few ruined shrines were rebuilt. Preachers found it difficult to speak about purgatory, now that it had been thoroughly exposed, and the pope was not as honoured as he had been. Neither did she invite the **Jesuits** to come to England.

Nevertheless, Mary believed, 'the old faith' might be restored with proper teaching. So she appointed **Edmund Bonner** as Bishop of London. Bonner produced a Roman catechism and a collection of sermons. Because they were not very controversial, these were widely read.

But after ratifying her mother Catherine of Aragon's marriage to Henry VIII and the execution of the Duke of Northumberland, Mary began to reverse Edward's reforms. The church laws passed during his reign were repealed, and the official worship of the nation took the form it had at the close of Henry's reign.

Reformed ministers were removed from office and imprisoned, or fled to Protestant cities of refuge in Europe, such as Strasbourg, Zurich, Emden or Geneva.

The Roman Mass was restored, the English service was taken away, people were forbidden to read the works of both English and continental Reformers, and foreign Protestants living in England were banished.

By marrying Philip of Spain (soon to become Philip II) Mary brought to the nation a real threat of foreign and popish domination. Many Englishmen trembled. News of the atrocities of the **Spanish Inquisition** had not reached English ears in vain.

The same year Parliament voted in Papal authority. Cardinal **Reginald Pole**, the newly appointed Papal Legate (or ambassador) officially pardoned the nation for its 'heresy.' In a ceremony in Westminster Hall on 30 November 1554 Pole received the 'submission' of Philip and Mary and the realm to the pope. In return he granted 'absolution' for the 'sin' of 21 years of separation from Rome, and proclaimed that the anniversary of the ceremony should be celebrated as a great religious festival for ever!

By January 1555 the lords and members of parliament had restored the Acts for the Burning of Heretics of 1382, 1401 and 1414. Their 'punishment' could now begin.

### **Mary's Reign of Terror**

The next forty-five months, between 4 February 1555 and 10 November 1558, proved to be Mary's reign of terror. England became a police state, and no less than

283 Protestant martyrs – 227 men and 56 women – were burned alive. The queen responsible for their terrible deaths has gone down in history as ‘Bloody Mary.’

But the souls of the martyrs are now before the throne of God, crying: “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood?” because they were “slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held.” (Revelation 6.9-10) They should be remembered today, though public memory of them is rapidly fading.

### **The Procedure of the Persecutors**

The procedure of the persecutors makes chilling reading.

When a person was accused of ‘heresy,’ he or she was arrested and taken to the court of the bishop in whose diocese he lived. Here he was tried by the bishop himself or a judicial officer trained in the canon law of the church. The accused was put under great psychological pressure to ‘recant.’ His inquisitors even promised to spare his life and remit his sins if he recanted!

If he refused to ‘recant’ or repent of his beliefs, the death sentence by burning was passed, and the poor victim was handed over to the sheriff of the county to execute the sentence.

These burnings were carried out in public, usually before crowds of spectators. Many people came to enjoy the spectacle of others burning; they often brought their

families with them, and fathers lifted the smaller children on their shoulders to enable them to see.

Some of the spectators were Protestants, who tried to give moral support to the sufferers. These were allowed to pay the executioner to hang a bag of gunpowder round the victim's neck or at his feet, so that when the flames reached it the explosion would kill him immediately.

If the victim recanted, the sentence was one of lengthy imprisonment, either in a gaol or monastery. The 'penitent' was forced to wear a 'heretic's badge' and to 'carry his faggot' of wood to the place of execution. On arrival he or she threw the faggot onto the fire, so that only the wood, and not the 'heretic,' would be burned!

If the condemned 'penitent' was a minister, he was required to preach a sermon confessing his 'heresy' and begging the Church's forgiveness! If he 'relapsed' only once more he was not spared again, but was sent to the stake without mercy! Does not the Bible warn us: "the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel" (Proverbs 12.10)?

### **A Bouquet of Martyrs**

Lack of space forbids us to re-tell the stories of all who died under 'Bloody Mary.' You may read about them in modern editions of John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*.

Roman sympathisers tell you that Foxe's accounts are 'partisan.' But in 1940 the scholar J. F. Mozley proved

once and for all that, apart from a few minor factual errors (which can easily creep into any narrative) Foxe is wholly reliable.

Among the many heart-breaking accounts of their sufferings, we will re-tell only a few of them.

**(a) Rowland Taylor**

Dr. Rowland Taylor, rector of Hadleigh in Suffolk, was a fine Christian minister. He faithfully studied Holy Scripture, frequently preached to his congregation, fed and clothed the poor, readily forgave his enemies, and willingly suffered for Jesus' sake.

Yet he was thrust into prison and kept there for two years. In January 1555 he was subjected to a lengthy examination of his beliefs. He was declared a 'heretic' for denying that the bread and wine became the body and blood of Christ, and for stating that priests should be free to marry!

Later in the month he was tried again, along with **John Bradford** and **Lawrence Saunders**, and was condemned to death for refusing to submit to the Bishop of Rome. In prison he was 'degraded' of his office of minister.

Early in February he set out on horseback to Hadleigh, to be burned before his parishioners. As he left London, he bade farewell to his wife and two of his children. "Farewell, my dear wife," he said, "be of good comfort, for I am quiet in my conscience. God shall raise up a

father for my children,” adding: “God bless thee. I pray you all stand strong and steadfast to Christ and His Word, and keep you from idolatry.” His brave wife replied: God be with thee, dear Rowland: I will, with God’s grace, meet thee at Hadleigh.”

All the way on his journey to Hadleigh, Dr. Taylor was “joyful and merry, as one who accounted himself going to a most pleasant banquet or bridal.” (Foxe) Coming within two miles of the place, he alighted from his horse, and when asked by the sheriff how he was, replied: “Well, God be praised, good master sheriff, never better; for now I know I am almost at home. I lack not past two stiles to go over, and I am even at my Father’s house.”

On arriving there, he found the streets full of weeping people. He gave away some money, then continued to Aldham Common, where he was to suffer. When the crowds there saw his familiar venerable face and long white beard they burst into tears. Having prepared himself for burning, he went to the stake, kissed it, and stood in the pitch-barrel. After some delay and a few insults from ‘Popish helpers,’ he called on God: “Merciful Father, for Jesus Christ’s sake, receive my soul into Thy hands.” There he stood without moving, until some-one struck him on the head with a halberd (a combination of spear and battle-axe), and his body fell down into the fire. “Thus,” concludes J. C. Ryle, “died one of the best and bravest of the English martyrs.”

**(b) Joan Waste**

In August 1556 a young woman was burnt to death in Derby: her judicial murder aroused great sympathy and anger among the people of England. Joan Waste was born blind. After the death of her parents, her younger brother Roger looked after her. During Edward's reign they both attended Protestant services, and she longed to learn the Bible. But being blind, she could not read, and so she saved up money from rope-making, bought a copy of Tyndale's *New Testament*, and paid an old man who was in Derby gaol for debt to read it to her.

When Mary became queen, Joan was denounced to the Bishop of Coventry and Litchfield, and was examined by him and other officials. She told them that the bread in the Lord's Supper was not the body of Christ. They replied that because Jesus could change water into wine, He could also change the bread and wine into His body and blood. She answered: "I am a poor, uneducated blind woman, and cannot argue with you; but as Dr. Rowland Taylor was prepared to die for his beliefs, I am ready to do the same."

After being scorned as an obstinate heretic, Joan was condemned to be burnt. In the execution sermon, the Chancellor said that she was not only blind in her body but also in her soul, and would burn not only at the stake but also eternally in hell! With her brother holding her hand, she was led to the stake at Windmill Pit outside the town, and there, her lips being seen to repeatedly utter the name 'Jesus,' her spirit went to glory.

While she was being burnt, the Chancellor went to a local inn, got drunk, and slept soundly on the lawn in front of the inn for some time!

**(c) Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley**

With the coming of summer 1555 the number of persecutions increased, and some very prominent members of the nation were condemned. Among these were **Hugh Latimer** and **Nicholas Ridley**.

These two bishops were captured and imprisoned in the Tower of London, where they were questioned, threatened, tormented and mocked. When every effort to get them to recant failed, they were moved to Oxford, along with **Thomas Cranmer**, to be tried and sentenced. Their death was a foregone conclusion.

**Ridley** was questioned first. He was reproved because he did not remove his hat when the pope was mentioned! He admitted that he had helped Lady Jane Grey become queen rather than Mary.

**Latimer** was next questioned. His response to his inquisitors was a noble one: "I thank God most heartily that He has prolonged my life to this end, that I may in this case glorify God with this kind of death." He was not in the least afraid to condemn the errors of Rome, nor to state his faith in the Lord Jesus.

On 16 October 1555 Ridley and Latimer were both led to a site just opposite Balliol College, Oxford (where the

pre-Reformation Reformer John Wycliffe had been Master). There they were burned to death, standing back to back at the stake. When a lighted torch was laid to the wood, the aged Latimer first prayed: "Heavenly Father, I give Thee most hearty thanks that Thou hast called me to a profession of Thee even unto death. I beseech Thee, Lord God, have mercy on this realm of England, and deliver the same from all her enemies. Into Thine hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit; Lord, receive my spirit." Then he called to his Christian "brother and companion in tribulation in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 1.9): "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out."

At the time of their martyrdoms, Latimer was about 70 years old and Ridley was 55. Their lives and deaths were heroic. Latimer's words of encouragement to Ridley have proved to be true. The candle of the Gospel has not yet been put out. By God's grace and power, it never shall. "Instead of crushing out God's light and truth, Mary was making it shine as a light which everyone might see." (H. E. Marshall) When will God's enemies see that despite all Mary's persecutions, God's elect shall still be converted, and no tool of Satan can stop Him working?

**(d) Thomas Cranmer**

On their way to the stake, Ridley and Latimer passed the prison where the timid **Thomas Cranmer** was kept, but

they never saw him. He was still alive, but was broken by ill health and the fear of death.

Because he had sworn allegiance to both Henry VIII and Edward VI as heads of the English Church, Cranmer had been forced to face a terrible dilemma. Now that Mary was sovereign, he must declare himself a Romanist or a Protestant. At first, he compromised by avowing Mary as the lawful sovereign and head of the church in England, yet kept his personal beliefs to himself. But under pressure from Mary, who sought both his recantation and his death, he renounced his former beliefs and promised submission to Rome.

But there were two further factors in his case.

(i) First, Mary hated Cranmer because he had helped Henry VIII divorce her mother, Catherine of Aragon.

(ii) Then again, he had played a leading role in helping Mary's rival, Lady Jane Grey, to the throne.

Mary therefore condemned Cranmer for treason.

As one of the nation's spiritual leaders, Cranmer was bound to suffer like his fellow Reformers. Traitor's Gate, leading to the Tower of London, was opened to receive him. In prison he shared a cell with Latimer, Ridley and Bradford. They studied the New Testament together, and grew more convinced than ever that the Mass was a 'blasphemous fable and dangerous deceit' (as the later *Prayer Book* describes it). Latimer himself testified: "We were imprisoned in the Tower of London for Christ's

Gospel preaching, and because we would not go a-massing.”

When the day of his execution (21 March 1556) arrived, Cranmer was brought before a great court of accusers and a large congregation in the cathedral church of St. Mary, Oxford. When everyone expected to hear his recantation, he shocked them all by renouncing it, professing his Protestant faith, and denouncing the pope as antichrist! This confession enraged his enemies, and he was instantly ushered to the stake. But rather than waver again, he thrust the offending hand that had signed his recantation into the fire, crying out: “This unworthy right hand! This unworthy right hand!”

At Cranmer’s death God triumphed over both His enemies and His servant’s fear. This reminds us of a resolution and a confession that King David made: “What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee.” “In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.” (Psalm 56.3,11) Some have said that the day of Cranmer’s death was the best day in his life.

Perhaps the saying of John Philpot, another martyr, shows us the spirit in which these disciples of Christ gave their lives for Him: “Shall I disdain to suffer at this stake, seeing my Redeemer did not refuse to suffer a most vile death on the cross for me?”

## **Mary's Last Days**

Despite all these burnings, Mary remained unsatisfied. The closing years of her reign (1556-58) were marked by a personal desolation that few pitied.

Her husband Philip had grown tired of England, where he was not allowed to rule, and returned to Spain, never to see these shores again.

She had lost Calais, in France, which had been part of English territory for 200 years. She is known to have said: "When I am dead, you will find 'Calais' graven on my heart." What a tragic state of mind to approach death in: longing for a piece of earth on the far side of the English Channel!

Her fantasy pregnancy, by which she had hoped to produce a Roman Catholic successor to the throne, had deceived her.

Yet she felt that the only way to satisfy God's justice for her sins was to burn more Protestants!

In the autumn and winter of 1557 the authorities, under the direction of **Bishop Bonner** of London, were searching for Protestants and burning them all over southeast England and the Midlands. Surely she must have known, unless her conscience was "seared as with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4.2), that her cruelty did more harm than good to her own religion. Yet she carried on killing as fiercely as ever.

But after fretting away her life, in November 1558 Mary died on the same day as Cardinal Pole, wretched and unloved, unwanted by both husband and nation. They have both now given in their account to the Judge of all the earth.

With the accession of Elizabeth I, the Satanic persecutions of 'Bloody Mary' ended.

### **The Martyrs' Bravery**

It is difficult for us to grasp how brave, by the grace of God, these early Reformers and Protestants were. Today we are more or less free to believe what we like, but then those who disagreed with the pope were cruelly put to death. Burning at the stake is one of the most Satanic forms of cruelty.

So, we have two vital questions to ask:

1. Why did the pope not order Mary to stop the burnings? Surely it is because, as a servant of Satan, he approved of them.

2. What kind of 'Church' is it that brands people who disagree with it 'heretics' and orders them to be burned to death for so doing? It is certainly not the Church of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

During Mary's reign England's finest men and women were condemned as 'heretics' by heathens posing as Christians; the religion of the Bible was overturned in favour of idolatry; and anyone who resisted was

mercilessly slaughtered. Nevertheless, as Jonathan Edwards said: “The martyrs would not undergo cruel sufferings from their persecutors . . . did they not expect to be with Christ, and to enjoy God there.”

### **Four Important Points**

As we leave this sad account, let us remember four important points:

1. These Protestant Reformers were burnt for their faith, whereas Roman Catholic traitors during Elizabeth I’s reign were hanged, drawn and quartered for treason.

The Reformers were tried in church courts, whereas the Romanists were tried in civil courts.

The Reformers died, not for committing any crime, but for believing the Gospel; the Romanists (and most of them were treacherous, abominable priests) died for plotting against the monarch or the realm.

Some historians have placed the Reformers and the Romanists on the same level, yet they were not so. The one died for the Lord Jesus Christ, the other for their ‘lord god the pope’ (a term used by cardinals and bishops at the pope’s ‘coronation’).

2. The burning of the English martyrs brought to a close centuries of persecution in this country by the unreformed Church of Rome. They take their honoured place near the end of a long line of Hussites, Lollards and Waldensians who were slaughtered in such large numbers that their groups were almost exterminated. The Church that had dominated Europe for almost a

millennium was an intolerant and persecuting church. The extermination of the Biblical faith and of true believers was unquestionably Mary's aim.

3. It is strange that a church that had 'absolved' the whole nation of its 'heresy' should now burn the nation's most faithful and loyal subjects to death! When God absolves from sin, He does not punish the culprits, because His own dear Son has died for them. He embraces and receives them into fellowship. When Rome absolved, she burned the absolved! Yet all the time she used the language of piety, such as 'Holy Mother Church' and 'The Spouse of Jesus Christ.' Has she not been rightly called 'Satan's Masterpiece'?

4. To both Protestant and Romanist, these terrible events took place according to the will of God. Romanists believed that if the victim took a long time to die, this was because God wished to increase his torments because his sins were greater than those of others. On the other hand, Protestants were sure that if God prolonged their sufferings, it was to show everyone His power in keeping His people faithful to the end, and to expose the cruelty of the persecutors.

#### **First Afternote**

Those Reformers who had fled persecution to Geneva served the cause of reform in a different way. Aided by **John Calvin** and **Theodore Beza**, some of them, including **John Knox**, **William Whittingham** and **Miles**

**Coverdale**, produced the **Geneva Bible**. This became the standard version of the Puritans for several generations. It was being used long after the Authorized Version of 1611 had been produced.

### **Second Afternote**

Between 1647 and 1663 the Church of Rome seemed to want to reform itself through the ‘canons and decrees’ of the **Council of Trent**, a town in Süd Tyrol, N. Italy.

Now, Roman Catholics believed that the Spirit of Truth spoke through their council, and so they expected the Council of Trent to settle the Reformation controversy for good.

[Protestants did not accept the Council as lawful, because the early Church councils represented the *whole* Church, whereas Trent represented only Rome.]

There were many able men at Trent. They might have been expected to push through some valuable reforms. But instead the majority dug in their heels and merely re-asserted Rome’s unreformed claims. In fact, Roman teaching was merely petrified (i.e. converted into stone).

Here is a sample of **Trent’s teaching**:

“If any one says that the sinner is *justified by faith alone* (the central Protestant doctrine) . . . let him be anathema (i.e. an object of loathing, or cursed, or devoted to evil).”

“If any one says that the grace of *justification* is shared only by those who are *predestined* to life . . . let him be anathema.”

“If any one says that the *good works* of the one justified . . . are not also the *good merits* of him justified . . . let him be anathema.”

**The Scriptures** clearly condemn this teaching:

“One is justified by faith apart from works of the law.”  
(Romans 3.28)

“If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” (Romans 4.2)

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2.8-9)

From these verses (and there are many more like them) it is plain that Paul teaches that justification is by ‘faith alone.’ The moment the penitent sinner casts himself on God’s mercies in Christ, God *pardons* him of all his sins (Acts 10.43; Romans 4.6-7) and *declares* him righteous by reckoning the righteousness of Christ to him (Romans 5.1,19; 2 Corinthians 5.21).

In sum, Trent produced no real reforms but plenty of anathemas! Was it the Holy Spirit who presided over this Council, or some other spirit?

Robert L. Reymond concludes: “Rome continues to this day to urge upon the world the teachings of Trent, thus evidencing its own apostate condition.”

### **Key Persons**

**Mary** (1516-58) Queen.

**Reginald Pole** (1500-58) Roman Cardinal and Legate to England.

**Edmund Bonner** (1500-69) Roman Catholic Bishop of London.

**Thomas Cranmer** (1489-1556) Archbishop of Canterbury and Protestant martyr.

**Hugh Latimer** (1485-1555) Bishop of Worcester. Martyr.

**Nicholas Ridley** (1500-1555) Bishop of London. Martyr.

**John Hooper** (1495-1555) Bishop of Gloucester. Martyr.

**John Bradford** (1510-1555) Royal Chaplain under Edward VI. Martyr.

## Key Events

- 1553 Eight-day 'reign' of Lady Jane Seymour (6-19 July)
  - Accession of Mary
  - Execution of the Duke of Northumberland
  - Edward's religious laws repealed
- 1554 Execution of Lady Jane Grey
  - Mary marries Philip, heir to the Spanish throne
  - Cardinal Pole arrives as Papal Legate
- 1555 Parliament restores Papal Supremacy
  - 'Heresy' laws revived
  - Burning of first Protestant martyrs
  - Bishop Hooper burned at Gloucester (February)
  - Philip leaves England
  - Latimer and Ridley burned at Oxford (October)
  - Cranmer deprived of his office of Archbishop of Canterbury, and replaced by Pole
  - Pole holds Legatine Synod in London
- 1556 Philip becomes King of Spain
  - Cranmer burned to death (March)
- 1557 Philip returns to England
  - War with France
  - Pole deprived of his legatine powers by Pope Paul IV and investigated for 'heresy' in Rome
- 1558 The English lose Calais
  - Deaths of Mary and Pole on the same day (November)

## Key Terms

**Exterminate** – To utterly destroy.

**Regime** – A prevailing system of government.

**Purgatory** – A place and state of spiritual and moral purging, invented by the Church of Rome, where souls are purified from pardonable sins by suffering. Cardinal Newman, in his *Dream of Gerontius*, grotesquely pictures the holy angels letting a soul gently down into its flames!

**Shrines** – Places of worship erected both in buildings and in fields and forests. They usually contained (and still do in such Roman Catholic countries as Italy and Austria) figures of ‘Mary’ or ‘Jesus on the cross.’

**Jesuits** – A Roman Catholic order of priests founded in 1534 by Ignatius Loyola. Its members swore absolute obedience to the pope, and agreed to tell any number of lies, provided they would serve ‘Holy Mother Church.’

**Inquisition** – The body of Roman cardinals and lawyers appointed to investigate or search thoroughly into people’s religious beliefs. It was strongest in Spain and Italy, and was notorious for its cruel methods of torturing suspects to make them confess their ‘heresy’ or betray friends.

## **Chapter Nine**

### **Why Were the Reformers Burned?**

#### **Introduction**

Before looking at the closing years of the Reformation, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, let us briefly consider why the Reformers were burned to death. This is important, for various reasons.

1. In the first place, there are certain facts in history which some people try hard to forget. These facts get in the way of their favourite theories. So they shut their eyes against them. One of these facts is the burning to death of the English Protestant martyrs.
2. Then again, many people today are so cynical that they are not ashamed to say that there are no religious opinions worth dying for. Those who die for what they term 'truth' are seen as nothing but fools.
3. Others find it convenient to leave out the unpleasant things of history, and to paint everything in bright colours, as if mankind was making steady progress towards perfection according to Darwin's theory of evolution.
4. Still others regard it as very bad taste to say anything against popery and the unreformed Church of Rome. They coolly set aside Rome's history of bloodthirsty tortures and massacres, seeing in her only the glory of her 'spiritual' figurehead, pomp and power, sensual

worship, appeal of numbers and survival through the centuries.

So it is with respect to the cruel reign of 'Bloody' Mary. Some popular histories of the kings and queens of England barely mention her cruelties. Yet she was not called 'Bloody Mary' for nothing. And her programme of burnings sprang wholly from her fanatical devotion to the bloodthirsty Church of Rome.

### **Why They Were Burned**

*Why* then were the Reformers burned to death?

It was not for refusing to obey the pope, or for wanting to make the Church in England independent, or for claiming that priests should be allowed to marry, or for demanding reforms within the Church.

The principal reason for their burning was because they refused to believe ONE of Rome's favourite false teachings! On that teaching hung their earthly life or death. If they accepted it, they might possibly live; if they denied it, they must die.

#### **(a) The Real Presence**

The teaching in question was the *Real Presence* of the body and blood of Christ in the consecrated elements of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. Did they, or did they not believe that the real body of the Lord Jesus, that had been born of the virgin Mary, was present on the

altar as soon as the words *Hoc est corpus meum = This is my body* had been spoken by the priest?

[Incidentally, the magic term ‘hocus pocus’ is derived from the Latin ‘hoc est corpus meum!’]

Did they believe that, when blessed by the priest, the communion bread and wine actually turned into the body and blood of Christ?

This false teaching had not been introduced into the Church until 1215! Yet everyone in Europe was expected to believe it!

The question is: **What does the Word of God say on the matter?**

Let Jesus Himself answer. **After** blessing the bread and giving thanks for the wine, He said: “I will not drink henceforth of this **fruit of the vine**” (Matthew 26:19). His faithful apostle Paul says the same thing (1 Corinthians 10:17): “we are all partakers of that **one bread,**” and (1 Corinthians 11:26): “as often as ye eat **this bread.**”

That is, the bread and wine remain bread and wine *after* being set apart for a special use, and do not change their substance at the priest’s magic formula.

There was also another closely linked matter for which the Reformers were condemned. The Church of Rome

believed (and still believes) that in the Mass (their name for the Lord's Supper) Christ is *re-offered as a sacrifice for sins*.

But the writer to the Hebrews says that the Lord Jesus Christ "offered **one** sacrifice for sins **for ever**" (Hebrews 10.12); that He "**once** . . . appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Hebrews 9.26); that He "was **once** offered to bear the sins of many" (Hebrews 9.28); and that "by His own blood He entered in **once** into the holy place (i.e. heaven) having obtained eternal redemption for us." (Hebrews 9.12) There is no need to repeat His sacrifice. His death was enough to pay the price of our sins and so to satisfy God.

Besides, it is the plain teaching of Scripture that the human body of the Lord Jesus Christ is now in heaven. Luke 24.51 and Acts 1.9-11 expressly say this. Neither will He be seen on earth again until He comes a second time to judge the world and receive His people to Himself. (1 Thessalonians 4.16-17; Hebrews 9.28) Indeed, He expressly instituted the Lord's Supper for His people to remember His death *till He comes again!* (Matthew 26.29; 1 Corinthians 11.26)

One more point needs to be mentioned.  
In relation to the Mass the Church of Rome calls on her priests to: "Bring, offer."  
But at the Lord's Supper our Lord said: "**Take, eat.**"

This settles the matter. The Word of God is final.

### **Testimonies of Three Reformers**

But let us hear the testimony of three of our Reformers as to why they suffered death by burning.

**John Rogers** says: “I was asked whether I believed in the sacrament to be the very body and blood of our Saviour Christ . . . really and substantially. I answered: ‘I think it to be false . . . Corporally Christ is only in heaven, and so Christ cannot be corporally in your sacrament.’”

**John Bradford** says: “The chief thing which I am condemned for as a heretic is because I deny in the sacrament of the altar (which is not Christ’s Supper, but a plain perversion as the Papists now use it) to be a real, natural and corporal presence of Christ’s body and blood under the forms and accidents of bread and wine: that is, because I deny transubstantiation, which is the darling of the devil, and daughter and heir to antichrist’s religion.”

**Thomas Cranmer** says: “They (the Papists) say that Christ is corporally under or in the form of bread and wine. We say that Christ is not there, *neither corporally nor spiritually*, but in them that worthily eat and drink the bread and wine He is spiritually, and corporally in heaven.”

Now, were our English Reformers right or wrong? Did they, or does Rome, believe what the Scriptures teach?

Let us be sure about this: it is no mere strife about words. “The Romish doctrine of the *Real Presence* strikes at the very root of the Gospel, and is the very citadel and keep of Popery.” (J. C. Ryle)

Is it not clear that those who believe the *Real Presence* abolish the truth of *the perfection of Christ’s finished work* when He died on the cross? Either Jesus paid the penalty for our sins, or He did not. The Bible teaches that He did. And so the Reformers were right.

Do not those who believe in the *Real Presence* also undercut *the High Priestly work of Christ*? If there are priests who can offer acceptable sacrifices to God besides Him, then Jesus our Great High Priest is robbed of His office and glory.

Further, do they not also pervert *the Christian ministry*? If sinful men can be exalted to the position of mediators between God and people, then teaching and preaching are rendered unnecessary.

Not only so, do they not *make idols of the bread and wine*, which they carry about in the streets and expect people to bow down and worship them?

Moreover, do they not *distort our Lord’s human nature*, making it capable of being in ten thousand places at once, when it is located in the presence of God in heaven? To put it crudely, is this not *cannibalism*?

“Rather than admit the doctrine of the *Real Presence* of Christ’s natural body and blood under the forms of bread and wine, the Reformers of the Church of England were content to be burned.” (J. C. Ryle) Well may they be described as “the noble army of martyrs.” Soldiers who die in battle are honoured as giving their lives for others. Our Protestant Reformers should be honoured for giving their lives for truth.

**(b) Justification by Faith Alone**

There was, however, a very practical doctrine underlying the Reformers’ rejection of the *Real Presence of Christ* that is essential to our salvation. That doctrine is known as *Justification by Faith Alone*.

Although Rome confessed (and still confesses) Jesus of Nazareth to be the Son of God, in whose name is salvation, it added (and still adds) that a living faith alone in the perfect obedience and finished work of Jesus Christ . . . is not sufficient for our right standing before God. In addition to trusting in Christ’s saving work we must perform good works that are *meritorious* in order to be justified.

Now the Reformers, along with Martin Luther and Scripture, believed that this doctrine of *Justification by Faith Alone* is ‘the article of a standing or falling church.’ That is, if a church believes it, that church stands; if it rejects it, it falls. Furthermore, if a sinner really believes that Christ paid for his salvation, and on the basis of that belief receives salvation from Him as a

free gift, he is saved. If he does not, then he is lost. (John 3.14-16 and 18.) Acts 10.43, Romans 4.6-7, 5.1, and 5.19, to name no other Bible texts, all teach this.

This was the underlying reason why our Reformers were burned to death. They rejected Rome's merit mongering, lock, stock and barrel, and embraced a free salvation bought with the precious blood of Christ.

J. Packer and O. R. Johnston state this well when they write: "To the Reformers the crucial question was not simply whether God justifies believers without works of law. It was the broader question whether sinners are wholly helpless in their sin, and whether God is to be thought of as saving them by free, unconditional, invincible grace."

The unreformed Church of Rome rejected (and still rejects) this doctrine of *Grace Alone through Faith Alone*. It taught (and still teaches) the error that faith must be completed by love, and that man is free to cooperate with God in his salvation before he can be justified. It thus denies a basic Bible Truth.

That truth was the one God blessed to bring reformation to England. It was the true battleground of the Reformation.

## **Conclusion**

In trying to sum up this whole period, we may say that: **Henry VIII** sought to impose on the Church a kind of reform without changing the Roman Church's teaching and worship.

**Edward VI** sought to achieve a more Biblical reform.

**Mary** did her utmost to exterminate this Biblical reform.

In Biblical terms, we might say that **Henry** reigned over England for thirty-eight years, and did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. Yet he put away certain abominations and gave his subjects the Word of God in their own language.

**Edward** reigned for only six years, and did what was right in the sight of the Lord. He put away the idols, restored a more Biblical worship and gave his subjects freedom to go to God at His throne of grace directly.

**Mary** reigned for five years, and did what was only evil in the sight of the Lord. She restored the 'Christianized paganism' of Rome in all its outward pomp and merciless cruelty.

## **Key Terms**

**Consecrated** – Something or someone that is made sacred, or set apart for God. The Christian poetess

Frances Ridley Havergal showed its true meaning when she wrote:

‘Take my life, and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.’

At the Lord’s Supper, the bread and wine are set apart from a common to a sacred use. In Roman Catholic worship, the wafer and wine are said to be consecrated when the priest utters the words *Hoc est corpus meum* = *This is my body*.

**Testimonies** – These are statements made in a court of law under oath, designed to elicit the truth from witnesses. The Reformers’ testimonies were statements of their faith.

**Justification** – The sentence of God, acting as Judge, in which He declares someone to be righteous in the court of heaven. It is the opposite of being condemned. (Romans 5.1 with 8.1; Deuteronomy 25.1)

### **A Special Note on John Foxe (1517-87)**

Born at Boston in Lincolnshire, John Foxe was at first deeply attached to popish superstitions. But at Oxford University he saw that the doctrines of the Church of Rome contradicted each other. This discovery “shook his blind obedience to the Church of Rome.” (David C. Relf)

Ordained into the priesthood in 1550, he taught in the Duke of Norfolk’s manor in Reigate, Surrey. Here he began to proclaim the true Gospel. On Mary’s accession, he fled to Basle in Switzerland, where he compiled his

great work known as the *Acts and Monuments* or *Book of Martyrs* (begun in 1552).

In 1563 the work was published. Such was the welcome it received that the Convocation of the Church of England ordered a copy to be placed in each cathedral and other public places, so that anyone could come and read it, or hear it read. Other editions followed later. For many years, Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* was the only book to be seen in English homes apart from the Bible. It is a book everyone should read.

In his *Preface* to the *Acts and Monuments* Foxe thanks the Lord Jesus for what he had been enabled to do: "I have finished my work done for Thee and by Thy grace. I thank Thee that Thou hast thus prospered me . . . The writing of this book has brought great cares, watchings and troubles; and through all Thou hast helped me. The martyrs' names are in Thy Book of Life; nevertheless Thou didst wish thus to make them known to the world. The adversaries never expected their cruelties to come to light . . . above all we thank Thee for bringing to light the innocency of the martyrs. They should be an example to us; but alas, we their sons are unworthy of them . . . Help us to imitate them and to hold fast what they have won. Protest this book and make it fruitful. I dedicate it and myself to Thee."

# Chapter Ten

## The Reformation Under Elizabeth I

### Introduction

Mary was succeeded on the English throne by her sister, the Princess Elizabeth, who was the daughter of Anne Boleyn, the second wife of Henry VIII. On her accession, a new age dawned on England, an age celebrated in such works as 'Gloriana' and such songs as 'In Good Queen Bess's Golden Days.'

Elizabeth was sitting under an oak tree in the grounds of Hatfield House, where Mary had kept her prisoner, when messengers came to tell her of the evil queen's death. She listened, looked up through the branches to the bleak November sky, then fell on her knees and exclaimed in Latin: "It is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes." (Psalm 118.23)

As soon as Elizabeth knew that she was to be queen, she hurried to London. She entered the Tower (used as a palace as well as a prison) not as a prisoner through Traitor's Gate, as she had done under Mary, but as a queen, guarded indeed, but guarded with love and honour.

As she passed through the Tower gates, the new queen paused. "Some," she said, "have fallen from being princes in this land to be prisoners in this place. I am raised from being prisoner in this place to be prince in this land. *That* was the work of God's justice. *This* is a

work of His mercy. So must I be to God thankful, and to man merciful.”

There was great rejoicing at Elizabeth’s coronation. Bonfires blazed and church bells rang. A great pageant in the streets of London hailed her coronation. Among the characters was a man dressed as Old Father Time. He presented his daughter, dressed as Truth, to the new queen, who received from her a copy of the Bible. In front of the huge crowd, Elizabeth kissed the gift and clasped it close to her heart. Throughout her long and prosperous reign, the Word of God gradually took possession of the heart of the nation. Indeed, England became known as ‘the land of the Bible.’

Yet Elizabeth needed all the wisdom God could give her to restore peace and happiness to the mournful land. She began her reign at a most difficult time. The nation was still divided between Romanists and Protestants. Each party hoped that the new queen would favour them.

But they need not have been afraid. From the start Elizabeth resolved not to put any of her subjects to death for what they believed. She kept to her resolve. Throughout her long reign, no one was tortured or killed for their faith.

### **Elizabeth and the Reformation**

Of all Henry VIII’s children, Elizabeth was the only one who resembled him in ability and popularity. With the face of a woman but ‘the stomach of a man,’ and helped

by one of the most far-sighted statesmen England has ever seen (**William Cecil, Lord Burghley**) she proceeded to build on the gains of Edward's reign that Mary had tried to destroy.

In 1559 Parliament passed the new **Act of Supremacy**. By it the authority of the pope and all payments and appeals to him were rejected. But a significant change was made to her official religious title. Instead of claiming to be 'Supreme Head' of the Church in England, she took the title 'Supreme Governor.' The tests of heresy were now to be the Scriptures, the first four general councils, and parliament.

Meanwhile **Edward's Second Prayer Book** was **revised**. But the question of Christ's bodily presence was left undetermined. This fact was clearly intended to calm the fears of Roman Catholics.

Then came the **Act of Uniformity** (also 1559). This ordered all worship to be conducted according to the revised Prayer Book, and left the use of church ornaments and ministerial vestments as they had been in the second year of Edward VI.

To oversee these changes, Elizabeth 'ordered the election' (what a contradiction in terms!) of **Matthew Parker** as Archbishop of Canterbury. Soon a new Anglican 'episcopate' or order of bishops was in position.

In 1563 the *Forty-two Articles* were revised, and became the famous *Thirty-nine Articles* that has professed the official faith of the Church of England ever since.

Thus by 1563 the ‘Elizabethan Settlement’ was accomplished.

### **Two Opposing Threats**

But it was threatened from two sides: on the one side by Papists, on the other by Puritans.

#### **1. Popish Threats**

At the beginning of her reign, Philip II of Spain (‘Bloody’ Mary’s widowed husband) had aided Elizabeth for political reasons. But he soon became her enemy when he saw her as head of a new Protestant nation that he longed to conquer for the pope.

Besides, Mary ‘Queen of Scots,’ a devoted Romanist, was heir to the throne, and became a constant focus of conspiracy to make her Queen of England. In 1569 a Popish rebellion broke out in the north of England. This was encouraged by Spain. It was soon put down.

#### **A. Elizabeth’s Excommunication**

The following year the pope declared Elizabeth excommunicated from the Church and deposed from her throne. It relieved her subjects of all obedience to her government, and gave them leave to murder her. This arrogant papal decree gave rise to numerous popish plots.

One of the earliest of these was the Ridolfi Plot, which aimed to assassinate the queen; but in the kindness of the Lord it was uncovered.

One of the latest took place in 1586, when a new scheme was hatched against Elizabeth's life. This was the Babington Plot. Mary 'Queen of Scots' was held captive in Wingfield Manor, Derbyshire. But English spies discovered messages between her and her accomplices hidden in wine barrels carried in and out of the manor. These messages contained plans for a Spanish invasion of England. Mary was imprisoned. After a good deal of wavering on Elizabeth's part, she was beheaded in Fotheringay Castle. As she walked to the scaffold, she held in her hands a Bible and a crucifix. At her death the Dean of Peterborough said: "So perish all Elizabeth's enemies."

### **B. The Bartholomew Massacre**

The turn of affairs in France soon brought new fears.

In 1572 news reached English shores of a huge massacre of Protestant Christians (called Huguenots) in Paris, the capital city of France. Because it began on a popish 'holy day,' St. Bartholomew's Day, it is known to history as the Bartholomew Massacre.

In the early hours of the Lord's Day, 24 August, the bell of one of the Paris churches tolled. This was the pre-arranged signal to summon the city's Romish population

to take up their weapons and set upon any Protestants they could find.

Killings began as a troop of soldiers, led by the Duke of Anjou, made for the house of the Huguenot leader, Gaspard de Coligny. The soldiers quickly overcame the house guards, then seized Coligny. He begged for mercy, but a soldier ran him through with a pike. The Admiral was then thrown half-dead out of the window down to the street below. Here another prominent Romanist, the Duke of Guise, finished him off by spearing him in the mouth! The next day, Coligny's headless corpse was dragged by little children through the gutters of Paris and then hung from a gibbet!

This evil event sparked off an all-out massacre of Huguenots. Roadblocks were set up, and travellers who were not wearing a popish badge (such as a white cross on their caps) were killed on the spot. Over the next few days up to ten thousand Protestants were murdered throughout France. This was Rome's brutal 'solution' to 'the Protestant Problem' in France.

In England news of the bloodbath was received with horror. While a popish historian hailed its chief perpetrators, Catherine de Medici and Charles IX, as "chosen by our Lord the Redeemer as the instruments of His will," and the massacre itself as "this splendid deed," and while the pope was celebrating Mass in Rome and ordering a medal to be cast for the occasion, English Christians trembled. For although the massacre occurred

across the English Channel, it offered enough of a threat to make England very wary.

### **C. The Revolt of the Netherlands**

The Revolt of the Netherlands against Spanish oppression also brought a fresh popish threat to England.

In the same year as the St. Bartholomew Massacre, several Dutch leaders gathered in Dordrecht to resist an imminent Spanish invasion. These Dutch leaders were decided Protestants. They had already subscribed to the *Belgic Confession* of Faith and taught their families from the *Heidelberg Catechism*. Both these documents were thoroughly Reformed in character. In the war that followed, the brutalities of the Spanish army sickened and horrified Protestants both in the Netherlands and in England. Clearly Satan was striking back with a vengeance!

Again, in the loving-kindness of the Lord, this threat was averted. A compromise treaty was drawn up between the Spanish and the Dutch. The Netherlands, backed by England, eventually asserted their independence and became a strong Protestant nation under the House of Orange.

As a result of these three events – the pope’s authorizing of Elizabeth’s assassination, the horrors of St. Bartholomew and the miseries inflicted on the Netherlands – the next few years of Elizabeth’s reign were fraught with danger. “It would be easy as a

Protestant in the 1570s,” writes Diarmaid MacCulloch, “to ignore the achievements and successes of the Reformation, and feel that God in His unfathomable wisdom was allowing the enemies of truth to overwhelm His little flock.”

Yet God’s people could never believe that He would abandon them altogether. For He had promised them: “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So there was a struggle in their hearts between fear of the enemy and hope in His protection.

Still, John Foxe, compiler of the famous *Book of Martyrs*, had expressed this mood of fear to the crowd at the open-air pulpit outside St. Paul’s cathedral in London on Good Friday 1570. The remembrance of Christ’s death on the cross gave Foxe a good opportunity to remind his audience of the sufferings of His Church. He even branded the “Bishop of Rome” as “more fierce and bitter against us” than “the Turk” or Muslim. For he was busy “stirring up his bishops to burn us, his confederates to conspire our destruction, setting kings against their subjects, and subjects disloyally to rebel against their princes, and all” (he tells God) “for thy name. Such dissensions and hostility Satan hath sent among us, that Turks be not more enemies to Christians than Christians to Christians, Papists to Protestants; yea, Protestants with Protestants do not agree, but fall out for trifles.”

Foxe knew what he was saying. He had lived to witness the whole sweep of the Reformation: England’s break

with Rome under Henry, the reforms of Edward's reign, the frustration of being a refugee in mainland Europe while 'Bloody Mary' was burning her subjects to death, and the promising beginnings of Elizabeth's reign.

Now he felt only uncertainty. And so, in the turmoil of the day he did what all in similar circumstances must do, he prayed: "Forasmuch as Thy poor little flock can scarce have any place or rest in the world, come, Lord, we beseech Thee . . . and make an end, that this world may have no more time nor place here, and that Thy Church may have rest for ever." But that was the ultimate prospect for Christians. Meanwhile, the war against evil continued.

### **Deliverance from the Spanish Armada**

The defeat of the Spanish Armada, or naval fleet, in 1588 is traditionally hailed as a great triumph for British naval skill and power. It was, of course, much more than that. The 120 huge, well-armed and formidable Spanish galleons that anchored off Calais were defeated by a much smaller but far more manoeverable English fleet and a few old 'fireboats.' Six hundred Spaniards were killed, and eight hundred more were disabled, while not an English ship was put out of action and only a hundred men were lost.

Before the Armada had set sail, King Philip II of Spain (the same person who had been Mary's husband) had told his admiral, Medina Sidonia: "If you fail, you fail; but the cause being the cause of God, you will not fail."

Also, many sailors and soldiers on board boasted of what they would do to English women, and how luxuriously they would live on the loot of the conquered country. The Spanish invaders really believed that they were invincible.

The reasons for the invasion were clear. First, Philip hated the English people and the Protestant Faith. Then he had asked Elizabeth to marry him, but she had refused. This made him very angry and determined to punish Elizabeth and conquer England for the pope.

But He who stilled the wind and waves on the Sea of Galilee now stirred up the wind to blow the Spanish fleet off Gravelines near the French coast straight into the old English fireboats. In the collision they were charred and burned to ashes. Then the wind suddenly changed to force the rest of the Armada into the North Sea!

A touching episode occurred when the crippled Spanish fleet entered Scottish waters. On reaching the Fifeshire coast, Admiral Medina Sidonia came ashore at Anstruther begging for mercy for his cold and hungry sailors. The minister, James Melville, and the town councillors agreed to give them hospitality, and the local gentry put them up in their own homes.

Compare this kind treatment by Scottish Reformed Christians to the cruelties of the slaves of Popery! This came from their obedience to Christ's command: "If your enemy hungers, feed him."

Many of those on board who managed to round the north coast of Scotland were slaughtered by their own religionists on the Sligo coast of Ireland, or hanged by English officers of the crown. Only a few shattered ships limped back to Spain. It was a remarkable deliverance for England and the Protestant Faith.

The 'heroes' of this astonishing victory were Admiral Hawkins, Sir Frances Drake (who had read Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* on his trip round the world) and the old Devonshire captain, John Young, who had been in charge of the fireboats. But the real Author of the deliverance was God.

Both queen and country acknowledged His hand in it. Bells rang, bonfires blazed, and Elizabeth ordered a medal to be struck in commemoration of the deliverance. On it was the motto: "God blew with His breath, and they were scattered."

The defeat of the Spanish Armada swung the balance of power in Europe from the Roman Catholic south to the Protestant north. Roman Catholic Spain's days of domination in Europe were nearing their end.

In England, the deliverance secured long-lasting safety and stability under the unflinching queen. God had delivered the nation from fear of the enemy.

#### **D. The Jesuits**

Meanwhile, Rome was preparing a 'comeback' under the Jesuits. This order of monks re-kindled Roman zeal in its efforts to regain England for its master, the pope. Drilled by a 'spiritual' manual written by their founder, Ignatius Loyola, these men set about their work with intense earnestness.

They all swore absolute obedience to the pope, yet they were not bound to tell the truth or keep an oath if their deception and perjury would serve him. By educating the sons of kings, nobles and the wealthy, they wormed their way into the 'higher' ranks of society, and through the confessional they came to know many political and domestic secrets.

The Jesuits were greatly helped by **William Allen**, an English Roman Catholic exile on the continent who established a seminary in Douai, now in Belgium, for the training of 'missionary' priests for England.

In 1580 they began their mission, led by **Robert Parsons** and **Edmund Campion**. Campion was soon seized and executed, but Parsons escaped to the continent. There he intrigued for a Spanish invasion of England (eventually by the Armada), the death or dethronement of Elizabeth, and a Roman Catholic uprising here.

The English authorities, under the watchful eye of **Sir Francis Walsingham**, uncovered their plans, arrested as many priests as they could find, and executed them as

traitors. (Today, Walsingham would be regarded as the head of MI5.) The failure of these Satanic schemes saved England from another reign of terror.

The work of the Jesuits has been referred to as the strike force of the ‘Catholic Counter Reformation.’ Though now generally accepted, the term is inaccurate. What Christians call the *Reformation* was that movement that sought to re-form a Church that was de-formed. “The movement called the *Counter Reformation* did not arise to counter this reformation, but . . . to recover the (Roman) Catholic Church from the hammer-blows of Protestant criticism,” directed specially at her false teaching and corruption. (James Atkinson) The Roman Catholic Church remains unreformed to this day.

## **2. Puritan Threats**

The new freedom to discuss Reformation ideas and practices that English people had from the opening of Elizabeth’s reign gave rise to a new threat to her settlement of religion. This threat came from the people called Puritans.

Let us be clear, however, that the Puritan threat was *not* a threat to the Reformation, *nor* a threat to Elizabeth’s life or parliament, *nor* to the lives of the queen’s Roman Catholic subjects. It was only a threat to the established state of religion. For with the Bible in their hands, **the Puritans thought that Elizabeth’s reforms had not gone far enough!**

When they made their demands for further reform known in public, their enemies branded them ‘with the odious name of Puritans’ (Brook). This was because they wished to serve and worship God with greater *purity* than was now established.

Some even feared them as revolutionaries, threats to both church and state, turbulent spirits who ‘would exclude order, that’ their ‘brain might rule’. This charge was grossly unfair.

More friendly (and accurate) contemporaries described them as ‘those who square their life by the rule of the Word’.

Despite the difficulty in defining them, there is such a thing as a recognizably Puritan spirit. Lord Macaulay noted their total devotion to God: “To know Him, to serve Him, to enjoy Him, was with them the great end of existence.” Another historian, John Richard Green, wrote: “The temper of the Puritan was eminently a temper of law. The diligence with which he searched the Scriptures sprang from his earnestness to discover the divine will, which in all things, great or small, he might implicitly obey.”

During the whole of Elizabeth’s reign the Puritans made their demands known. How they saw the situation we shall now try to explain.

During Mary's persecutions English exiles in Frankfurt and Geneva came to see that the continental Reformation, especially in Germany, Holland and Switzerland, was more Biblical than the English one under Edward VI. On their return to England at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, they saw that her reforms did not match the European models, so they sought greater agreement with the Reformed churches abroad.

For example, in the continental Reformed churches, there were no images or saints' names and days; but in England images and saints' names and days were retained, though they were not worshipped.

In the continental Reformed churches, all the ministers were equal; but in England a clerical hierarchy (archbishop, bishops, priests and deacons) was retained, but only for convenience and not because it was Biblical.

In the continental Reformed churches, the only ministerial dress was a Genevan gown; but in England full clerical dress for both bishops and ministers, and many ceremonies were retained, even when not too much significance was attached to them.

### **The Vestarian Controversy**

The first stage of Elizabeth's controversy with the Puritans was about vestments. Through the influence of the continental Reformers **Peter Martyr** and **Martin Bucer** (who worked in England) and **John Calvin** and **Henry Bullinger** (who corresponded with the English

Reformers), and through the filling of vacant bishoprics with such Reformed men as **Matthew Parker**, **John Jewel** and **Edmund Grindal**, the Puritans demanded that caps and surplices be discarded as popish.

Among their other complaints were that the Apocrypha (an uninspired collection of books) was retained; the Prayer Book contained some 'popish relics'; cathedral services were too pompous; church festivals or 'holy days' were being preferred to the Lord's Day; and that such ceremonies as crossing in baptism, confirming children, kneeling at the communion rail, bowing at the name of Jesus, using a ring in marriage and other 'rags of popery' (as they called these things) should not be seen in a Reformed Church.

As long as these ceremonies were retained, the Puritans urged, popery had a toehold from which it could push its way back into the Church. [As the events of the Stuart kings (James I, Charles I, Charles II, James II) later showed, they were right.] From the outset, therefore, the Puritans regarded the Church of England as only half reformed.

But Elizabeth refused all their petitions, and compelled every Church minister to wear vestments.

### **Prelacy and Erastianism**

The second stage of Elizabeth's controversy with the Puritans was over Prelacy and Erastianism. Prelacy is the system of operating the Church through archbishops and

bishops. Erastianism (after Thomas Erastus) is the belief that the State has supreme rule over the Church.

**Thomas Cartwright**, Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, aided by **Walter Travers** and **William Ames**, claimed that the Bible was the only rule, not only of faith, but also of church government and discipline. He saw that in the New Testament Church officers (such as elders and deacons) are distinct from State officers. In addition, he saw that these officers were presbyters, not prelates.

Besides, Cartwright added, the things required by Elizabeth and her bishops had no warrant in Scripture, were not received by the continental churches, and smelled of Popery.

Elizabeth saw these claims as a challenge to her own authority over both Church and State. Her aim was an all-inclusive national church that allowed no non-conformity, and she refused to budge. She realized that England was already Lutheran and Calvinistic in doctrine. She knew too that her subjects hated Popery. These two forces would prove a safeguard to the realm. To her mind, therefore, further reform was unnecessary.

On her behalf **John Whitgift**, the archbishop, defended prelacy as 'ancient and expedient.' **Richard Bancroft**, Whitgift's chaplain, and a 'good hater of Puritans,' defended it as 'by divine authority.'

Although, therefore, the Puritans hoped to influence Elizabeth in the direction of further reform, they were disappointed of their hopes: Elizabeth insisted on uniformity and total compliance with the law.

A reaction to their demands was bound to follow. In the 1570's persecution, first under **Archbishop Parker**, then under his successor **Edmund Grindal**, was severe. Cambridge University, 'the very nursery of Puritanism', and the London, Norfolk and Suffolk Puritans, were alienated from the Established Church, despite the godliness and learning of their leaders.

When **Archbishop Parker** was forced to impose the queen's wishes, the Puritans were driven to worship in 'conventicles' or secret meetings.

By 1583 **Archbishop Whitgift** had suppressed 'all reading, preaching, catechizing and praying in any private family'. No man was to preach unless he accepted the whole Prayer Book; all preachers were to wear the prescribed 'habits'; no-one could preach unless ordained by an Anglican bishop; no-one could be ordained until he had subscribed to the supreme authority of the sovereign in church and state, to the Prayer Book as containing nothing contrary to Scripture and to the *Thirty-Nine Articles*.

These conditions were strictly imposed, leading to the suspension of many ministers and university fellows.

Rigid uniformity was maintained and persecution continued.

In 1592, a Puritan named Morrice boldly asked parliament to investigate the bishops' proceedings. Elizabeth's response was to forbid parliament to discuss the matter and to have Morrice imprisoned.

The same year an Act against non-church-goers gave them three months to conform or be deported from the country. Under this legislation the Brownists, or first Separatists, suffered most. **John Penry** was even executed for his non-conformity.

### **The Elizabethan Settlement Confirmed**

Towards the close of Elizabeth's reign, a defender of her religious settlement appeared on the scene who was to have lasting influence on the Church in England. His name was **Richard Hooker**.

At first Hooker was preoccupied with defending the Elizabethan Church of England against the claims of Roman Catholics. His later years were devoted to writing his masterpiece *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. Hooker's aim in the book was to defend the Church against Puritan criticism.

Hooker claimed that prelacy was apostolic, and that bishops were a distinct order above presbyters. Moreover, he believed that authority resides in each

independent national church, and that the reigning monarch is governor of the Church.

His own firm attachment to the Church of England as it was then settled made him just the right man to codify the queen's 'middle way' and guarantee stability. On the one hand he viewed Roman devotion to the Papacy and false views of justification as most serious errors. On the other hand he saw Puritan reliance on Scripture alone and austerity in worship as unbalanced.

In the structure of the Church of England, Hooker's ideas retained the Roman hierarchy or pyramid of archbishops, bishops, 'priests' or ministers, deacons and people, excluding the pope and his cardinals.

In its worship and ceremonies, Hooker's arguments against the Puritans extol the value of beauty and order, play down the role of preaching, and give a central role to Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

In sum, Hooker upheld the ideal of moderation, harmonizing Scripture and tradition, faith and reason, grace and nature, church and state. That is, he recommended a Christian Republic. "In such a state, the head of the State is head of the Church. That is because there is one cultural life, one common good and one governmental mode of expressing that common way of life." (John S. Marshall) It is for the common good of the nation to adopt the Christian way of life. There are not to be two societies – Church and State, one Christian and

the other secular – but one society, ruled and guided by Christian principles. Ministers of the Crown and ministers of the Church have different functions; but both are ministers of the same Christian society. Citizens of the State are likewise to be members of the Church, fulfilling their respective duties in each sphere.

This is the Church of England (now greatly diluted) that our generation has inherited.

### **Conclusion**

Elizabeth's 'middle way' between Popery and Puritanism, prevented the flowering of a fully Biblical Reformation. Yet it gave England great stability.

Had the queen agreed to the Puritans' demands, she may well have seen the nation at large converted to a more robust Reformed faith. But in the providence of God it was not to be. Evidently He thought it the best form of government for the English people.

When James I inherited the English throne in 1603, he found a Church and Nation remarkably secure. Elizabeth's bishops had frustrated every attempt to reform the country further. When Puritan spokesmen pestered the new king for further reform, they realized that the bishops were part of the remaining problem, and not a solution, as Elizabeth had hoped. Their long-desired Reformation never came.

## Key Persons

**Elizabeth I** (1533-1603) Queen.

**William Cecil, Lord Burleigh** (1520-98) Chief adviser to Elizabeth. Secretary of State, then Lord High Treasurer.

**John Jewel** (1522-71) Protestant Bishop of Salisbury. Exile under Mary. Personal friend of the Zurich Reformer Henry Bullinger. Author of the official defence (called an *Apology*) of the Elizabethan Settlement.

**Matthew Parker** (1504-75) Archbishop of Canterbury. He conformed to Mary's Romanism, and would have been amongst John Calvin's 'Nicodemites,' or disciples afraid to profess their faith openly, like Nicodemus in John 3 of the New Testament.

**Edmund Grindal** (1519-83) Archbishop after Parker. He has been described as a 'Puritan archbishop.' He silenced many of his Calvinistic brethren at Elizabeth's command.

**John Whitgift** (1532-1604) Archbishop of Canterbury after Grindal. A firm upholder of the Elizabethan Settlement.

**Richard Bancroft** (1544-1610) Whitgift's Chaplain. A hater of all Puritans. He believed in the 'divine right' of bishops to rule in the Church.

**Thomas Cartwright** (1535-1603) The veteran defender of Puritan Presbyterianism.

**Richard Hooker** (1554-1600) Author of the 'blueprint' for the Church of England that has survived the centuries.

### **Key Events**

- 1558 Elizabeth becomes queen.
- 1560 The first Puritans preach the need to purge the Church of England of all remaining 'rags of Popery.'
  - Many refugees return from the continent who had fled to avoid Mary's persecution.
  - Treaty of Berwick between Elizabeth and the Scottish Parliament.
  - The Scottish Reformation officially acknowledged.
- 1562 The Romish Earl of Tyrone in Ireland leads two unsuccessful rebellions against Elizabeth.
- 1563 The Thirty-nine Articles adopted as the doctrinal standard of the Church of England.
- 1566 Mary Queen of Scots gives birth to the future James VI of Scotland and I of England.
- 1568 Mary Queen of Scots is held captive by Elizabeth because of her threat to the English throne.
- 1570 The Pope excommunicates Elizabeth I and licences anyone in England to kill her and members of her government.
- 1572 The Bartholomew Massacre of 8000 Protestants by Papists in Paris and then throughout other districts

of France.

Each English parish is allowed to levy a tax for the poor.

1576 Protestantism is forbidden in France.

1577 England and the Netherlands form an alliance against Spain.

1586 Mary Queen of Scots is involved in a plot to overthrow Elizabeth.

1587 Mary Queen of Scots is executed for treason. England is at war with Spain.

Sir Francis Drake destroys the Spanish fleet at Cadiz.

1588 The Defeat of the Spanish Armada.

1603 Death of Elizabeth I.

James I becomes king.

### **After Elizabeth's Death**

1604 James bans the Jesuits from England.

England and Spain make peace.

1605 The Gunpowder Plot.

1606 New laws are passed against Roman Catholics.

1611 The Authorized Version of the Bible is published. This may be regarded as the summit achievement of the English Reformation. Despite many new versions, it is still the most accurate translation of the original Hebrew and Greek.

### **Key Terms**

**Episcopate** – The recognized government of the Greek, Roman and Anglican Churches by prelates or bishops. A

bishop presides over a diocese. He ranks beneath an archbishop but above ‘priests’ and deacons. A bishopric is his tenure of office.

**Holy Day** – A day set apart for God. Originally, the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Lord’s Day. But since the Roman Church took over power in western Europe, it refers to days set apart for the remembrance of Saints. Today, both the Lord’s Day and ‘saints’ days’ are thoroughly secularised or worldly.

**Belgic Confession** – A Reformed Confession of Faith originating in the Southern Netherlands, now called Belgium. It was compiled by Guido de Brès, a Reformed minister who was martyred for the faith in 1567.

**Heidelberg Catechism** – A Reformed Catechism written in Heidelberg by Zacharius Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus. It was commissioned by the Elector of Palatine, Frederick III, and was widely used in Germany and Holland. Divided into 52 sections, it has formed the basis of weekly sermons throughout the year in many Reformed churches.

**Vestments** – Ritual garments worn by ‘clergy.’

**Surplices** – loose flowing vestments of white linen with full sleeves, and worn by the ‘clergy’ at services of worship.

**Ceremonies** – Prescribed rituals performed in the name of religion. There are no religious ceremonies laid down in the New Testament.

**Clerical** – Pertaining to ‘clerics’ or the ‘clergy.’ Anticlerical means ‘against the clergy.’

**Presbyterian** – Government of the Church by presbyters or elders. The Early Church continued the form of

Church government adopted by the Jews under Moses on God's authority.

**Independent** – The idea that each Christian church is independent of all others, and can govern itself without external influence. In theory Independents ignore other local churches and the Universal Body of Christ, but in practice they enjoy fellowship with both.

**Apocrypha** – Writings that were never recognized as part of the Jewish canon of Scripture, and are not recognised by Reformed Protestants, but form part of the Roman Catholic canon, or rule of faith and life.

**Zealot** – Some one who is extremely fervent for certain religious or political ideas.

**Genevan Gown** – A black gown worn by the Reformed ministers of Geneva, in Switzerland, to distinguish themselves from Roman priests. It is more or less the same as a university undergraduate's gown.

**Brownists** – Disciples of Robert Brown, an English Independent and Separatist.

**Separatists** – Professing Christians who keep themselves apart from others.

**Ecclesiastical** – Pertaining to the Church.

**Polity** – A particular form or system of government, in Church or State.

## **Chapter Eleven**

### **Reformation Blessings**

The Protestant Reformation in 16<sup>th</sup> century England was the greatest watershed in the life of the nation. We have already seen how it delivered England from appalling ignorance, superstition, tyranny, fear, fraud, love of money, priest-craft and immorality. Let us now list some of the positive blessings God sent with it.

1. First, it gave us **the open Bible in our mother tongue**, with **freedom to read, believe and obey it** for ourselves.

Of all the means God used to overthrow the Church of Rome and its corruptions, the translation of the Word of God was the most powerful. It laid the axe to the very root of the Roman system of religion and morals. Before the open Bible, the vast fabric of Popery crumbled.

Before the open Bible, too, every person in England was free to exercise his own private judgment. When people read it, they soon saw that the religion of priests, bishops, cardinals and popes has no warrant in Holy Scripture. One Roman cardinal proved this: one day he came across a Bible, not knowing what it was. "I do not know what this book is," he said, "but I perceive it is all against us." What a blessing, then, is an open Bible.

2. Second, the Reformation gave us **access to God through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

This glorious privilege had been blocked off for centuries by the rubbish of men's religious inventions. Had we felt the need of pardon and acceptance with God before the Reformation, we would have been directed to seek it through piles of priests, monks, saints, penances, masses and confessions, as if there were no such thing as a Mediator and a throne of grace.

But when this huge pile of spiritual debris was shovelled away by the truth, people found peace with God, and access into His holy presence. Every guilty sinner could now see that he has the God-given right to go straight to the Lord Jesus Christ for the pardon of his sins, without waiting on pope or priest. Consequently, people began to pray at home, in the fields, on their way to work, even at leisure. To have the great distance between God and us removed by our Lord Jesus Christ is an untold blessing.

3. Thirdly, the Reformation gave us **worship that was pure and simple.**

When people discovered from His Word that God is a spirit, and that those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4.24), they cleansed their houses and churches of idolatrous monuments, images, crucifixes, candles, incense, and what not, and began to worship God without them.

4. A fourth major blessing God restored to His Church through the Reformation is **the true Christian minister**.

Before God opened people's eyes, they believed that every church minister was a sacrificing priest. The little preaching they did hear was that of travelling monks, who went around telling bawdy stories and fantastic legends and about fake miracles, along with the 'virtues' of the pope, the hermits or 'desert fathers,' the Virgin Mary and the saints, but nothing of the true Gospel.

But when they learned that we have a Great High Priest in heaven representing them before God, people came to appreciate the gift of the true Christian minister, whose office is not to offer sacrifices on an altar, but to preach Christ crucified.

What a joyful sight it was to see crowds gathered at Paul's Cross in the city of London, where such mighty and moving preachers as Hugh Latimer, John Bradford, John Jewel and others held forth the Word of eternal life to poor, lost souls.

How thankful too were country people when Edward VI's chaplains visited their towns and villages, standing at their market crosses to open to them the 'Gospel market,' where salvation could be had "without money and without price."

5. A fifth major blessing brought us by the Reformation was **the sanctity of marriage and the family**.

Before the Reformation, almost everyone believed that life in a monastery or convent was the only way to overcome sin and become holy. Thousands of young men and women thought they could be more religious by becoming monks or nuns.

The Reformation cut up this terrible delusion by the roots. It did so by dissolving the religious houses where they lived. But it also brought to light God's emphasis on the family. It set up in English hearts the great Biblical truth that true Christianity is not to be sought behind convent walls or in monastic cells, but in our families and daily callings or employment.

When young people read in the Bible that none of the early Christians left their families to live in a monastery or convent or abbey or priory, but that whole families lived and worshipped and worked together, they stayed at home, and served there, helping mother do household chores or father dig the garden and do repairs, and learning to look after the sick or ailing grandparents.

Not only that: families began to pray together and read the Bible together. At the fireside father commended his wife and children to God and taught them His ways. He felt himself to be a 'son of Abraham,' of whom God said: "I know him, that he will command his children and his

household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord.” (Genesis 18.19)

The Reformers ordered the Ten Commandments to be taught to every child, and our duty to God and others to be learned from the catechism. Those who could afford it employed Reformed ministers as family chaplains, to teach their sons the Reformed Faith and expound the Scriptures to the whole family (including the servants) in their private chapels.

This ‘new’ practice in time had a most uplifting effect on English morals. If England had higher moral standards than Popish countries, she owed it under God to the Reformation.

6. A sixth major blessing brought to us by the Reformation was **the Protestant work ethic**.

This was the rediscovery of God’s original ‘creation mandate’ to “replenish the earth and subdue it” for His glory and our good. It gave people a new sense of the dignity of work and the value of the meanest labour.

The Church of Rome had divided people into two classes: ‘clergy’ and ‘laity.’ It taught that only the clergy were important.

By contrast, the Reformation taught people that God places great value on individual people and their lawful callings. Martin Luther, a former monk, taught England

this truth. “The Bible abounds with examples of hard work,” he said. “Christ was a carpenter. Mary kept a clean house. Even the shepherds returned to their flocks after seeing the babe in the manger.” “Surely,” he quipped, “that must be wrong. We should correct the passage to read: ‘They went and shaved their heads, fasted, told their rosaries, and put on cowls.’ Instead we read: ‘The shepherds returned.’ Where to? To their sheep. The sheep would have been in a sorry way if they had not!”

Abraham Kuyper pointed out that when Dutch peasants in the tulip and potato fields began to realize that God had chosen them to salvation, they saw their lives as important, and their toil in the fields as valued both by God and the community.

The American people, heirs of the Puritans, are noted for their diligent attitude to their daily jobs. This is the fruit of the Protestant work ethic.

What an incalculable blessing, then, is lawful, useful work!

7. A seventh blessing brought to us by the Reformation is **the true way to keep the Lord’s Day.**

This day, called the Sabbath by Jews and Sunday by heathens, is the day God has appointed to remind us of three things: Himself resting after His work of creation, the Lord Jesus resting after finishing the work of

redemption His Father gave Him to do, and the eternal rest that remains for the people of God after their work in this present life. It is a creation ordinance. But it is also a Christian holy day. Like the ordinances of marriage and work, it comes directly from God, and is meant to benefit everyone.

The Medieval Church of Rome invented so many saints' and feast days that the Lord's Day had become quite neglected, except by the faithful who regularly attended church.

But the Reformers rediscovered it, and viewing it in the light of Christ's resurrection, spent it as a day of joy and gladness, of rest and praise, in anticipation of their eternal rest with God in heaven.

8. An eighth blessing we have received through the Reformation is a **true appreciation of God's handiwork in nature.**

Again, God used Martin Luther to open our eyes to the wonders of creation. "We now look deeper into creation than we did under the Papacy," he said. "They used to pass it by, looking at nature with the interest of a cow."

For example, under Rome's rule, Medieval artists were patronised almost exclusively by the Church. It commissioned them to paint religious scenes and religious people. The churches of Italy are full of such paintings. *Madonna of the Meadow* (meaning 'My Lady

of the Meadow’) is a typical example of how landscapes were used merely as a backcloth to a religious figure, such as Mary, the mother of Jesus.

The Reformation completely changed this approach. People began to delight in God’s creation as a glorious expression of His wisdom, power, goodness and beauty. The paintings of Gainsborough and Constable are only two examples of the many fine English landscapes springing from Reformation principles.

It was the unlocking of the secrets of nature that has led to countless other blessings, in the sciences of medicine, astronomy, and other disciplines.

Under popery, the astronomer Galileo was persecuted by the Church for challenging its unscientific dogmas. They stopped him inquiring into the physical heavens. Indeed, it was not until 1926 that the Church of Rome admitted that the earth revolves round the sun! Did they never read: “He hangeth the earth upon nothing” (Job 26.7) and “He sitteth upon the circle of the earth” (Isaiah 40.22)?

With the coming of the Reformation, a spirit of reverent inquiry led men of science into realms where the worship of the Creator is the only proper response. “In truly religious awe,” said Dr. John Gresham Machen, “the man of science stands at length before a curtain that is never lifted, a mystery that rebukes all pride.”

## **Conclusion**

Such are some of the blessings that God has given us through the Reformation. He gave us an open Bible, free access to Himself, pure and simple forms of worship, a true Christian ministry, the sanctity of marriage and the family, the Protestant work ethic, the special sanctity of the Lord's Day, a finer appreciation of His handiwork in nature, scientific endeavour unhampered by a mole-blind church, and Christian principles to live by.

Though we are familiar with these blessings every day, we must never forget that they were not won without much prayer, effort, suffering and even bloodshed.

May God give us grace to realize afresh our immense debt to Him for visiting England with the Protestant Reformation. It is our true and precious heritage.

## **Chapter Twelve**

### **Why England Needs Another Reformation**

As we look away from the sixteenth century and turn the searchlight on today, we discover a crying need for another Reformation. How is that?

1. In the first place, there are people in the Church of England who are traitors to the Reforming ‘fathers’ of their Church. They are called **High Church Ritualists**. They are actually doing the work of Roman Catholics for them, by **changing the Church of England back into Romanism**. Even many **Evangelicals** and **Nonconformists** are beguiled by Rome’s charms, and regard loyal Romanists as true Christians, in spite of their ignorance of God’s way of salvation.

Visit a **parish church** anywhere in the land, and with few exceptions you will find an altar, a lady chapel, priestly vestments, candles and flowers, bowings and crossings, stained glass windows of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, crucifixes and statues of Mary.

One parish church in Hereford I visited expressly denied being a Protestant church. It contained a huge statue of Mary with candles to be lit as people prayed to her.

Another parish church I know that was once evangelical now celebrates Mass, for both the living and the dead.

Yet another parish church contains a notice by its chancel rails, warning people not to tread inside the rails because beyond them is holy ground!

When I visited the **cathedral** in Ripon, it had a 'confessional,' where troubled consciences could apply for counsel and pardon.

In the cathedral bookshops in Norwich and Truro I looked in vain for a Biblical treatment of the Gospel. Yet there were plenty of books on the Medieval Mystics!

In York Minster a book was sold that denies the very deity and miracles of Christ.

In Derby cathedral leaflets were available recommending the priesthood and the value of 'retreats.'

The **priory** in Christchurch, Dorset, boasted an 'angelic beam.' Apparently the original workmen cut the beam too short. When they returned to the site the next morning, the beam was in place. In fact, it is about a metre too long! Is this angels' work, or a pious fraud?

The superstitious veneration of '**holy places**,' of **Mary** and the '**saints**' is going on apace. Niches in church walls that were once empty are now being filled with crude figures purporting to be parish patron saints. Prayers to St. Jude are posted daily to the *Times* and *Telegraph* newspapers. Do the senders not know that he is the patron saint of lost causes? Such meaningless

names as St. Cross and St. Saviour's are also given to certain churches or colleges.

When some Protestant Christians wrote to the professing Evangelical Bishop of Norwich, Maurice Wood, asking him to close down the **shrine** at Walsingham, he merely replied that it was just another place of worship in his diocese, and could do nothing about it!

Professing ministers of Christ still call themselves **bishops and priests**.

Some of them are even behaving like their Medieval ancestors.

When I lived in rural Lincolnshire the '**vicar**' of Wrawby was often seen sitting at his church gate with a begging bowl, just like a Medieval monk.

The **Bishop** of Lincoln, in full regalia and accompanied by his acolytes, one bearing a silver cross, visited the village of Barnetby-le-Wold in order to bless the fields and the villagers' gates! But he never preached the Gospel there!

All this (and much more) points to a dark, Satanic effort to unreform, unprotestantize the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ in England.

In his day, Bishop Ryle witnessed a "sapping and mining process" going on under churchmen's feet. He added that

he expected to see more before too long. Well, the High Church movement is still at it!

Even the Queen is dissatisfied with the Church of England, and has welcomed the Pope to her home. The Archbishop of Canterbury has publicly admitted that he is perplexed about the future of the Anglican Communion.

These are only a tiny sample of the symptoms of a return to Romanism. They signify a deep dissatisfaction with our Reformation heritage and a feverish yearning for a return to the benighted religion of the Middle Ages.

It is time we protested against these things. As Bishop Ryle says: "Let us not talk only, but act. Let us not act only, but pray . . . There is a voice in the blood of the martyrs. What does that voice say? It cries from Oxford, Smithfield and Gloucester: 'Resist to the death the Popish doctrine of the Real Presence, under the forms of the consecrated bread and wine in the Lord's Supper!'"

2. In the second place, we are under very serious threats from **sheer worldliness**.

One area where man's religious instincts cannot help poking through is that of **sport**. In football alone, the grounds of various teams are referred to as 'The Church.' Their players are hailed as gods. One was spoken of as God Himself, "because he can do anything." Three others playing in the same team as each other were

described as 'The Holy Trinity.' When players shoot for goal instead of passing the ball to other players, the commentators shout: "He's going for glory." When a player scores after fouling an opponent, the commentators say: "He's now atoned for his sin." When the whole team sweeps into attacking action, the terraces flow with a wave of worship. And so on. These are all religious terms. They prove without question that if we do not have the pure religion of genuine, Reformed Christianity, we shall cultivate a false one, making creatures our gods. (Romans 1)

On church notice boards all kinds of **worldly activity** are advertised: raffles, dances, Victorian markets, Lenten lunches, concerts, organ recitals, playgroups, meditation sessions, strawberry fairs, bridge days (for playing cards), scrabble sessions, tramps' suppers, Christmas parties, craft displays, sleepovers and coffee mornings. The list could be extended for pages.

In Truro Cathedral the antique **auction** show 'Flog It' took place.

In Coventry Cathedral silly 'clergymen' **danced** down the aisle.

In Lincoln Cathedral Italian **opera** was performed. When I asked a man at the cathedral door what Italian opera was doing in a house supposedly set apart for worship, he replied: "What's wrong with Italian opera? It's no worse

than German or French or English opera!” How ignorant can church people be?

Are churches and cathedrals places for prayer, or museums, theatres and secular community halls?

There seems to be no end to the giddy craving for worldly entertainment. And the world looks on and is disgusted. Meanwhile the people of God are grieved.

In addition to these abominations, marriages and families are breaking down; community strife and violence, armed robberies and lust-inflamed murders are all on the increase. Much of this is related to alcohol, drug abuse and gambling, all three the fruit of unrestrained human wickedness.

3. In the third place, the spectre of **Islam** hangs threateningly over our land, with its aggressive demands for Islamic law and its teaching of Jihad, or ‘Holy War.’ [Christians prefer John Bunyan’s title of the same name! It describes the *spiritual war* between Diabolus and Prince Immanuel over man’s soul!] What may we expect from this quarter if the Lord does not intervene?

### **Conclusion**

Yet we should be thankful that a revival of interest in the Reformation is on the increase among Christians. Some Christian leaders are not ashamed to speak of it as a mighty work of God. They agree with J. C. Ryle, who

said: “The Reformation was the greatest blessing God ever gave to this land.”

Let us never forget that the Reformation brought light out of darkness. That light must shine again to dispel the darkness of our day.

Let us never forget, too, that the Reformation restored true religion to our land. It broke away from a Church that was mired in corruption.

For these blessings we should be deeply thankful.

And although the Church of Rome has made some changes for the better, it has not changed its belief and teaching on the sacrificial nature of the Mass, Justification by Faith *and* Works, the Priestly nature of the minister’s office, and the Teaching Function of the Church as the final source of authority for both faith and life. It still stands by the decrees of the Council of Trent.

For this reason, there can be no compromise with Rome. “The need for continued reformation springs from loyalty to the Gospel that is the power of God unto salvation.” (Gordon Murray)

### **Key Terms**

**High Church** – That aspect of the Church of England that emphasizes ritual and ceremony. Its other parties are

Broad Church, which is easy-going, and Low Church, which is evangelical.

**Ritualists** – Those who love humanly prescribed ways of performing ‘divine service.’

**Evangelicals** – Those who believe the original Gospel or Evangel.

**Nonconformists** – Those Protestants who do not conform to the Church of England.

**Chancel** – The eastern part of a church building. It is separated from the nave or main part by a screen or steps.

**Confessional** – A box in which priests hear confessions and grant pardons.

**Mystics** – People who claim to be specially initiated into spiritual mysteries. They base their claims on visions and ecstasies.

**Retreats** – Places where people can take a break from their busy lifestyles, especially to meditate, either alone or with others.

**Priory** – A monastic house.

**Shrine** – Originally, a chest or casket in which religious relics were deposited. Later, any place of worship set up in a building or in the countryside.

**Diocese** – The district supervised by a bishop, whether Greek, Roman or Anglican.

**Vicar** – The priest or minister in charge of a parish. From the Latin ‘vicarius’ = ‘substitute.’ He is not in fact Christ’s substitute. The Lord Jesus has given us the Holy Spirit as His substitute on earth.

**Regalia** – Emblems worn as signs of royalty.

**Acolytes** – Persons assisting priests or bishops in processions or services.

**Secularism** – The worldview that relates everything only to this present age, without any reference to spiritual, sacred or eternal things.

## **Special Afternote**

Perhaps some of you who have just read this account of the Lord's work are still strangers to Him and His grace. If so, you too need to be converted and re-formed. As the only Mediator between God and you, the Lord Jesus Christ sends you this gracious invitation: "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart: and you will find rest for your souls." (Matthew 11.28-29) Believe it, this invitation is for you.

Notice, He says: "Come unto me," not 'Go to the church, or the priest, or the saints, or Mary, or the psychiatrist.'" Only He can wash away your sin. Only He can set you right with God. Only He can give you peace in your heart. Only He can bear you through every crisis of life. Only He can carry you through the door of death.

And though you have nothing to take with you, take your sinful heart, and your sinful life, and give them to Him. For when He gave His life as a ransom on the cross, it was for sinners just like you. Which would you rather bear, the heavy burden of a guilty conscience and the fear of death, judgment and hell, or the easy yoke of Christ, a clean conscience and the joyful prospect of heaven? Surely the latter. Then "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." (Acts 16.31)



