

Memo. to Dean King.

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The English Reformation
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The English Reformation:

As is no doubt, true of the movement as a whole, the Reformation in England represents the collapse of an out-moded institution before changing social and political conditions. This process is especially evident in the English movement however. Here we have not so much the story of the church reforming itself, & being swept by a movement of thought, but rather the story of a church being conquered by the crown. It would seem that the English Reformation is more likely to interest the constitutional historian than the church historian. The developments of highest significance to come out of it were constitutional rather than religious. In the latter respect it must be said however that religious change was evident, and that the resulting church was so constituted as to open it to a more gradual process of reform influences.

This political and social motives seem to be the main ones in bringing about the reformation. There was of course the teaching of Wycliffe and the Lollard movement. This influence continued on to reformation times. There was the liberalizing influence of the renaissance and the humanist movement. However, ideological factors seem to have played the part of undercutting loyalty to the old church, rather than of leading on to actual revolt. Other factors provided the activating motives. These were political and social.

In England, of the sixteenth century, the church was still a strong economic and political power. The six hundred monastic houses owned one tenth of the land. Much other wealth was in the hands of the church under the guise of various kinds of benefices. The churchmen were influential in politics. Because in the majority of cases they were the only learned men, they held many administrative positions, both local and national. They held the majority in the upper houses. They were governed by special courts whose supreme court was the Papal curia, not the crown. Certain offences were considered subject to this type of jurisdiction.

As things went on, the crown gathered around itself a new type of person. He was not loyal in the same old way, to the church. As the social sick of Feudalism was breaking down, its religious aspect could not prevent itself from being shaken. Thus the king surrounded himself with a group who were anti clerical. They opposed the special privileges given to the courts Christian, they opposed the fabulous wealth of the church

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they opposed to corrections. The unproductive activity or lack of action, of its orders, and especially they were well the king in any opposition against external authority even if it come from Rome. The administration had passed to a group who had no loyalty to the church. In an attempt to build a strong Tudor monarchy, Henry VIII could come to this group and expect support. It was gained, not without unfavourable concessions, but nevertheless his treatment of the church was enough, in accord with their sentiments that there was little reaction.

In the English Reformation we have the capture of the church by the Crown. To make this encroachment statutory Parliament was used. The result was that Parliament came to look upon itself as the head of the church. The church property, church law and administration and finally doctrine and ritual come under the jurisdiction of the crown. Increasingly parliament sees itself as possessed of these powers.

The story is a long one and there are many uncertainties. Henry, a convinced Papist in religion, desiring an heir for the throne who will keep a strong Tudor dynasty in England, is forced by Papal opposition to his annulment to join the anti-papists. There had been anti-papal feeling before. In 1515 the house of commons had attempted to limit the benefits of clergy. Some spoliation of church lands had been accomplished. However when it appeared that Wolsey was unable to reconcile the two aspects of his career during the negotiations for Henry's Annulment, the King called the long Parliament. It was definitely anti clerical. It met first in 1529. Minor legislation was enacted, mostly by way of limiting the scope of the church courts. Henry thus accused the church of breaking some ancient fourteenth century legislation. In 1532 the Convocation submitted, it agreed to pay a large fine, and to look upon the king as last court of appeal for the church. No action was to be taken except on the King's consent: This submission was embodied in an act of Parliament. From hence on, almost without exception, the changes in church legislation, doctrine or ritual, come not from convocations but either Crown or Parliament.

We next have the two acts of 1532 and '34 and the "Restraint of appeals": All acts which freed the English church from legal or economic tie to the Roman see, but which did not restore it to its primitive independence. Royal was substituted for Papal authority. And bishop Cranmer annulled Henry's first wedding. The pope

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The Pope approved the division and excommunicated both Bishops and King. The Act of Supremacy followed. The Break with Rome had come completely and the Crown was in control of the Church. A commission investigated the conditions in the monasteries and their lands were confiscated.

As yet there was no change in doctrine and liturgy. In 1536 Henry published his Manual of Christian Instruction. Here as well as in the "Institution of the Christian man" the religious views were still firmly Roman. Some Protestant influences can be seen. Only three sacraments are emphasized. The Direct worship of saints and images is denied and the belief in Purgatory is doubtful. However mass and the celibacy of the clergy was retained in English usage. Perhaps the greatest contribution in Henry's reign to the English Reformation proper was the printing and distributing of the Bible in English.

In 1539 the passing of the "Six Articles" demonstrated the King's opposition to a truly Protestant Reformation. Here Henry is made a civil offence although in the attempt to defend himself the result is actually a strengthening in fifteenth century demands. This, as in all Henry's religious policies, demonstrates a constitutional, rather than a religious change.

Under the young King Edward's reign and Somerset's regency, Protestantism as such makes some advancement. Parliament approved laws which favoured the Roman Party. Crown was the money spent in the reform of ritual & liturgy. Religious spies returned as the "Six Articles" were repealed. Foreign Protestants came into the country. Between 1547 & '48 the cup was administered to the laity, images were removed and the celibacy of the clergy was abolished. The first and second Prayer Book showed drastic changes in the direction of Protestantism in the matter of public worship. Transubstantiation was denied and vestments simplified. The act of Uniformity established these doctrinal and ritual changes in statutory form. The 42 articles established its doctrine.

Under Mary the Roman reaction went too far. In re-instituting papal authority and attempting a restoration of Church lands it angered the People. However it did establish a strong Church which knew what to expect from ambitious monarchs.

Thus Elizabeth was faced with a determined Roman Church. However by means of cautious Politics she got the Parliament to pass a new supremacy act. With some changes Edward's act of Uniformity was passed again.

The oath of allegiance was demanded of all university graduates and clergy. The 42 articles were revised and in their final form of 39 were passed by Parliament. Here the language was ambiguous enough to satisfy both radical and conservative elements.

Elizabeth, in the interests of a strong orderly kingdom, saw fit to oppose both Catholics and Protestants of the extreme type. In 1568 the Government demanded the enforcement of a declaration. Puritan sentiment which dominated parliament was opposed and finally questioned by the Queen. The Bishops remained quiet and were satisfied with retaining the episcopacy set up under Royal authority. The English Church had taken its final form.

In the English Reformation we have a social and political rather than a primarily religious movement. The leaders were statesmen rather than religious men. It was strongly national. Its main characteristic is its compromising nature. In the interests of order the middle course was taken in almost all instances. Very radical changes came in the forms of worship, rather than in either doctrine or church government. The result however was a church suited to the spirit of the times and containing enough freedom to permit the slow growth of protestant ideas.

The English Reformation differed from the continental Reformation in its dominant motives. Doubtless in both Germany and Switzerland political and social motives played their part, but they weren't primary. There was nothing in England to compare with Luther's opposition to the sale of indulgences. In England the leadership came from the crown or from civil authorities. The religious reformers attempted to take advantage of the political and social changes in the interests of religious reform. However they did not lead the movement as did Luther, Calvin and John Knox. Especially in Calvin's case we have a contrast, where the church grew in control over the state.

In England there is no bold religious reformer with a doctrine of church and state which characterizes the subsequent church. Rather we have the story of the civil government gaining control over an institution whose political loyalties seemed to be originally outside the country.

Of all the nations, Scotland is perhaps most like England in her reformation. We have the break with the Papacy from the same political motives. It follows national lines. It is supported by a national party. However whichever motive was primary, the reformation in religious lines was much more thorough.

The Romish Religion is now thoroughly rejected. Parliament seems to have the same interestⁱⁿ and power over church affairs but the leadership comes from the Church in the person of John Knox, rather than from the civil authorities. The General Assembly is a power in the new nation and its opposition to the Sovereign is the result of Her downfall.

As has been said, it is not true to say to the Continent and Scottish reformation any political and social aspects, but it is true that here, in comparison with England, there was a great deal more interest in the religious side of reform. In the case of Norway especially. It was the effective cause. The conservatism of the English and the fact that that country was farther advanced in its commercial and nationalistic revolution were no doubt factors contributing to that state of affairs.