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4. The Anglican Settlement

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4. The Anglican Settlement

Abstract
Before turning to the radical reformers who regarded Luther and Calvin as too compromising, let us consider another land in which a conservative expression of the Reformation developed. If the first important center of the Protestant movement was a university community, and the second a thriving commercial city, the third was the royal court of England. The English Reformation was an act of state. Until the occasion of his break with Rome, Henry VIII (1509-1547) was considered a faithful son of the Church. He had burned several Lutheran heretics and had written a tract against Luther’s Babylonian Captivity. The pope rewarded these services by giving Henry the title of “Defender of the Faith.” His subjects, however, were stirring. The legacy of Wyclif and the Lollards left a strong deposit of piety and, at the same time, anticlericalism in the English tradition. Furthermore, the monarchy, supported by the middle class, had proved increasingly hostile to the wealth and authority of the Church in England and had already wrung from the papacy important concessions in the direction of a state-dominated church. [excerpt]

Keywords
Contemporary Civilization, Martin Luther, Christianity, Calvinism, Protestant Movement, English Reformation

Disciplines
Christianity | History | History of Christianity | History of Religion | Religion

Comments
This is a part of Section VII: The Protestant Movement. The Contemporary Civilization page lists all additional sections of Ideas and Institutions of Western Man, as well as the Table of Contents for both volumes.

More About Contemporary Civilization:
From 1947 through 1969, all first-year Gettysburg College students took a two-semester course called Contemporary Civilization. The course was developed at President Henry W.A. Hanson’s request with the goal of “introducing the student to the backgrounds of contemporary social problems through the major concepts, ideals, hopes and motivations of western culture since the Middle Ages.”

Gettysburg College professors from the history, philosophy, and religion departments developed a textbook for the course. The first edition, published in 1955, was called An Introduction to Contemporary Civilization and Its Problems. A second edition, retitled Ideas and Institutions of Western Man, was published in 1958 and 1960. It is this second edition that we include here. The copy we digitized is from the Gary T. Hawbaker ’66 Collection and the marginalia are his.

Authors

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Before turning to the radical reformers who regarded Luther and Calvin as too compromising, let us consider another land in which a conservative expression of the Reformation developed. If the first important center of the Protestant movement was a university community, and the second a thriving commercial city, the third was the royal court of England. The English Reformation was an act of state. Until the occasion of his break with Rome, Henry VIII (1509-1547) was considered a faithful son of the Church. He had burned several Lutheran heretics and had written a tract against Luther's Babylonian Captivity. The pope rewarded these services by giving Henry the title of "Defender of the Faith." His subjects, however, were stirring. The legacy of Wyclif and the Lollards left a strong deposit of piety and, at the same time, anticlericalism in the English tradition. Furthermore, the monarchy, supported by the middle class, had proved increasingly hostile to the wealth and authority of the Church in England and had already wrung from the papacy important concessions in the direction of a state-dominated church.
The immediate cause for the English break with Rome seemed anything but religious. Henry severed the ties of his state with the papacy when the latter refused to annul his marriage of twenty years standing to Catherine of Aragon. Henry contended that she had given him no male heir and that there was grave danger, therefore, of civil war and the ending of the Tudor line at his death. In the past the papacy had granted annulments, but now the pope was the virtual prisoner of Catherine's nephew, Emperor Charles V. Convinced that Rome would postpone his annulment indefinitely, Henry took matters into his own hands. He named a new archbishop who granted his divorce from Catherine and regularized his marriage (1533) to Anne Boleyn, a lady of the queen's retinue of whom he had become enamored. Meanwhile, he forced through Parliament (1531-1534) a series of acts abolishing papal authority in England, forbidding money payments to Rome, establishing his children by Anne Boleyn as his rightful heirs, and declaring him "the only supreme head in earth of the Church of England, called Angli­cana Ecclesia." Those few clergymen and ministers of state who refused to acknowledge royal supremacy paid with their lives.

An important step along the road to English Reformation was Henry's suppression of the monasteries (1536) and the appropriation of their vast wealth. While some of this wealth was used to pension the dispossessed religious and to finance professorships in the universities, most of it went to a sizable group of royal favorites. By this procedure Henry created a class of nobles and gentry loyal to the Tudor monarchy in particular, and to his variety of Protestantism in general.

The king vacillated with regard to changing doctrines and rituals. He was interested in removing the Roman but not the Catholic elements from the church of which he was now the supreme head. For example, he had no desire to replace episcopal polity or the authority of apostolic succession claimed by the bishops. However, Henry made a number of important concessions to those desiring introduction of the Scriptures in the vernacular and other reforms in the direction of Continental Protestantism. But, three years after the issuance of the "Protestant" Ten Articles (1536), Henry replaced these with the Six Articles in which he reaffirmed such Catholic doctrines as transubstantiation, clerical celibacy, and withholding the cup from the laity. At the same time there was developing a determined and influential group of thoroughgoing Protestants ready to take over leadership of the English Reformation at the death of the king.

Their chance came during the six year reign of Edward VI (1547-1553), Henry's only son and but ten years old when he became king. It was obvious that he would be dominated by his ministers of state, including the archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556). Cranmer, who had been named archbishop by Henry in 1533, had been responsible for the royal order (1538) that there should be a copy of the Scriptures in English available to the people in every parish church. Now he...
invited a few prominent Continental reformers to assist him in
the task of further reform. With their help, Cranmer prepared
a doctrinal statement for the Church of England (1551) and,
more important still, his Book of Common Prayer (1549), printed
in English and intended for public and private worship. How-
ever, Cranmer and Edward's other advisers lost popular support
both because they pressed religious changes too rapidly and be-
cause some of them were corrupt.

When on Edward's death the throne of England went to Mary
(1553-1558), Henry's daughter by Catherine of Aragon, the stage
was set for an intense reaction. It was Mary's earnest desire
to return her land to the fold of Rome. She was successful in
having the English church brought again under papal control
(1554) but she was unable to restore the lands which her father
had confiscated. Mary rapidly lost favor with her subjects
when, against the express wishes of Parliament, she married the
ardently Catholic Philip II of Spain, and when she initiated a
rigorous persecution of Protestants in England. Prisons were
filled, and about three hundred persons, a third of them clergy-
men, were executed for their faith. The telling propaganda
which these martyrs (including Cranmer) made possible, together
with the growing hatred of "Bloody Mary" and her political de-
signs, turned many, perhaps most, Englishmen against Rome. Mary
died in 1558, childless and sick at heart.

As the religious pendulum swung back from the extremes un-
der Edward and Mary, it approached stabilization in a compromise
usually referred to as the Elizabethan settlement. When Eliza-
beth (1558-1603), Henry's daughter by Anne Boleyn, came to the
throne she was neither ardently Protestant nor Catholic, but
devotedly English. The settlement which she favored was Prot-
estant in statement of faith but formal and Catholic in practice.
The Thirty-Nine Articles, a slight modification of Cranmer's
erlier doctrinal formulations, were adopted in 1563. The Angli-
can tradition has preserved these Articles as a valuable guide,
but it has not regarded them in as definitive or restrictive
fashion as Lutherans regarded the Augsburg Confession or Calvin-
ists the Canons of the Synod of Dort. Actually, The Book of
Common Prayer, revised and prescribed by law for use in all
churches of the realm, was a more authoritative expression of
the Elizabethan settlement. The Anglicans were more interested
in obtaining uniformity in traditions and forms of worship than
in matters of belief. This prayer book has endured to become a
bond that holds together the diverse elements of the Anglican
Reformation. Together with the English translations of the
Bible accomplished by various scholars and culminating in the
King James Version (1611), it became an influential pattern for
the religious life of the English-speaking world and a signifi-
cant source for its literature.

The Elizabethan settlement was legally accomplished by the
Act of Supremacy (1559) in which, by the queen's tactful direc-
tion, she was named the "supreme governor" instead of "supreme
head" of the church, as her father had been. While the majority of Englishmen accepted this settlement as a good compromise, there were those who were violently opposed to it. A small Roman Catholic party, largely in exile, sought to carry on an undercover movement to replace the queen and the faith she championed. More openly, a larger group called Puritans worked for a Calvinist theology and polity in the English church. Unlike the waning Roman party, the various types of Puritans became stronger. It was not until after a civil war and a short period of dominance in the seventeenth century that this Puritan tide subsided. Only then could the Anglican settlement really be called an accomplished fact (1660).

The Anglican position as a reaction to the attacks from both Roman and Puritan quarters, and as an attempt to find a middle way between the two, was expressed by a clergyman and writer of the Elizabethan period, Richard Hooker (1553-1600). The following are brief excerpts from his work, Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity (1594-1600):

Two opinions therefore there are concerning sufficiency of the Holy Scripture, each extremely opposite unto the other, and both repugnant unto truth. The schools of Rome teach Scripture to be so unsufficient, as if, except traditions were added, it did not contain all revealed and supernatural truth, which absolutely is necessary for the children of men in this life to know that they may in the next be saved. Others justly condemning this opinion grow likewise unto a dangerous extremity, as if Scripture did not only contain all things in that kind necessary, but all things simply, and in such sort that to do anything according to any other law were not only unnecessary but even opposite unto salvation, unlawful and sinful. Whate­soever is spoken of God or things appertaining to God otherwise than as the truth is; though it seems an honour, it is an injury. And as incredible praises given unto men do often abate and impair the credit of their deserved commendation; so we must likewise take great heed, lest in attributing unto Scripture more than it can have, the incredibility of that do cause even those things which indeed it hath more abundantly to be less reverently es­teemed. I therefore leave it to themselves to consider, whether they have or not in this first point overshot themselves; which God doth know is quickly done, even when our meaning is most sincere, as I am verily persuaded theirs in this case was.......

They which measure religion by dislike of the church of Rome think every man so much the more sound, by how much he can make the corruptions thereof to seem more large. And therefore some there are, namely the Arians in reformed churches in Poland, who imagine the canker to have eaten so far into the very bones and marrow of the church of Rome, as if it had not so much as a sound be­lief, no not concerning God himself, but that the very belief of the Trinity were a part of antichristian corrup-
tion; and that the wonderful providence of God did bring to pass that the bishop of the see of Rome should be famous for his triple crown; a sensible mark whereby the world might know him to be that mystical beast spoken of in the Revelation, to be that great and notorious Anti-christ in no one respect so much as in this, that he maintaineth the doctrine of the Trinity. Wisdom therefore and skill is requisite to know, what parts are sound in that church, and what corrupted.

Neither is it to all men apparent which complain of unsound parts, with what kind of unsoundness every such part is possessed. They can say, that in doctrine, in discipline, in prayers, in sacraments, the church of Rome hath (as it hath indeed) very foul and gross corruptions; the nature whereof notwithstanding because they have not for the most part exact skill and knowledge to discern, they think that amiss many times which is not; and the salve of reformation they mightily call for, but where and what the sores are which need it, as they wot full little, so they think it not greatly material to search...

Wherefore to end this point, I conclude: First, that under domains of infidels, the Church of Christ and their commonwealth were two societies independent. Secondly, that in those commonwealths where the bishop of Rome bareth sway, one society is both the Church and the commonwealth; but the bishop of Rome doth divide the body into two diverse bodies, and doth not suffer the Church to depend upon the power of any civil prince or potentate. Thirdly, that within this realm of England the case is neither as in the one, nor is in the other of the former two: but from the state of pagans we differ, in that with us one society is both the Church and commonwealth, which with them it was not; as also from the state of those nations which subject themselves to the bishop of Rome, in that our Church hath dependency upon the chief in our commonwealth, which it hath not under him. In a word, our estate is according to the pattern of God's own ancient elect people, which people was not part of them the commonwealth, and part of them the Church of God, but the self-same people whole and entire were both under one chief Governor, on whose supreme authority they did all depend.... *