

## **CHAPTER VIII**

### **ENGLAND BREAKS WITH THE ROMAN CHURCH**

#### **1. Reformation Tendencies in England**

It is often stated that the divorce of King Henry VIII of England from Catherine of Aragon was the cause of England separating from Rome, but upon deeper reflection it hardly seems possible that the English people and English clergy should take so momentous a step just that their king might be free to marry another woman. There were many factors at work in England which were seeking to alienate the English people from Rome, and had it not been for these underlying factors, Henry's divorce would not have had the result that it did.

For one thing, the Wyclif tradition had never completely died, and the Lollards were still strong at the time of the Reformation. (See the first chapter on Wyclif and the Lollards.) For another thing, there was evidence in England of a strong feeling of British nationalism. The pope was regarded more and more as an Italian foreigner who wanted to interfere in English national affairs and who delighted in sending foreigners to England to fill high offices, and to whom England had to pay enormous sums of money in taxation. There was considerable opposition to the fact that the Church of Rome owned about one fourth of the land in England on which it paid no taxes and from which it derived a vast income. In addition, there was the humanist movement in England under Erasmus which by going back to the original Scriptures could not fail but point out the vast difference between Christianity at the times of the apostles and the grand political and religious organization known as the Church of Rome. Last but not least, the Lutheran movement had penetrated into England and was gaining ground. The groundwork was laid, and all that was needed was a spark to set off the explosion.

#### **2. Henry VIII and Catherine**

Henry VIII at first was an enemy of the Reformation. In 1523 the pope had conferred upon Henry the title, "Defender of the Faith" because of what Henry had written against Martin Luther; and, strange to say, the king of England still holds this title. We cannot escape the story of Henry's divorce. He was not the first-born son of his father Henry VII; he had had an older brother Arthur. Arthur had been married to a Spanish princess, Catherine, the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, Arthur being 15 and Catherine, 16 at the time of the marriage. However, Arthur died a very short time after the marriage, and the expressed purpose of the marriage, namely that of cementing the ties between England and Spain, came to naught. Arthur's brother Henry was then heir to the throne, and it was suggested that if Henry should marry Catherine, everything would work out as originally planned, but there was a law of the Church which prohibited a man from marrying his deceased brother's wife. An appeal was made to the pope, and on the basis of the testimony of Catherine's father confessor that she and Arthur had really never lived as husband and wife, the pope granted a dispensation for Henry to marry Catherine, Henry being six years her junior. A daughter, Mary, was born to Henry and Catherine, but no sons.

Henry's fancy soon turned to a beautiful dark-eyed brunette by the name of Anne Boleyn. Now according to the Catholic Church, there can be no divorce, but if it can be proved that there

was something wrong about the manner in which the first marriage was entered into, then it is possible for the Church to declare the marriage null and void. As a matter of fact, the church asserts that the marriage never existed, and while the man and woman must do penance for living in adultery all that while, they are nevertheless both free to marry whomsoever they please. Henry sought thus to have his marriage with Catherine declared null and void. He put forth some good reasons, at least they seemed good to him. He said that the marriage was made possible in the first place only by a special dispensation, and that this dispensation was based upon testimony that Catherine and Arthur never lived as man and wife. He asserted that he had proof to the contrary. He further argued that heaven itself was frowning on the marriage inasmuch as no son was born to be heir to the throne. The pope would perhaps have been glad to grant Henry's request, but the pope had just patched up matters with the powerful Charles V and it so happened that Charles V was the nephew of Catherine of Aragon, and Charles was in no mood to allow his aunt thus to be humiliated.

Henry then ignored the authority of the pope, and had the high ecclesiastical court of England declare his marriage to Catherine null and void. This was in 1533, and the next year parliament passed a series of laws forbidding all payments to Rome and all oaths to the pope, and allowing the king to nominate all bishops. A little later the Act of Supremacy passed making the king the highest authority in the English church. Thus the break with Rome was complete.

### **3. The Church under Henry VIII**

The Church of England had separated from Rome, but it was by no means Protestant in our sense of the term; it was really a Catholic Church minus the pope. The Six Articles of Faith were adopted in 1539 in which the Catholic doctrine of Holy Communion was upheld, and priests were still to remain unmarried. Private masses and confessions to a priest were still obligatory.

### **4. Protestantism under Edward VI**

Henry had married Anne Boleyn. She had borne him a daughter Elizabeth, but soon Henry declared her guilty of adultery and she was beheaded. Henry then married Jane Seymour who bore him a son Edward. Twelve days later she died. This son became Edward VI of England after Henry's death in 1547. Under Edward, the English church became very definitely Protestant, first largely under Lutheran influence and later under Reformed influence. In 1549, the first Book of Common Prayer was published which showed very strong Lutheran influence, but this was revised in 1552 and made more "Reformed." The next year, the Forty-Two Articles of Religion were adopted which were very definitely Protestant in the Reformed sense.

### **5. "Bloody Mary"**

Edward died, there was no male heir to the throne, and Mary, the daughter of Catherine of Aragon became queen. She was decidedly Catholic and was married to a very devout Catholic, Philip II king of Spain. Mary tried to bring all England back to the Catholic fold, and in doing so many Protestants were persecuted and even put to death. Thus Mary received the title of "Bloody Mary."

## **6. Settlement under Elizabeth**

Mary was queen from 1553 to 1558, and at her death, Elizabeth, the daughter of Anne Boleyn became queen. Under Elizabeth the Church of England again became Protestant, though the Protestantism was of a milder type. In 1559, a second act of supremacy abolished all relationship to the pope, and the Book of Common Prayer of 1553 was again revised. All worship was to be conducted according to it. The Prayer Book of 1559 is substantially the Prayer Book which is still in use in the Church of England and in the Protestant Episcopal Church today. In 1563, the Forty-Two Articles of Religion were revised, and they now became the famous Thirty-Nine Articles which are still the official statements of faith of the Church of England of the Protestant Episcopal Church of America.

## **7. Characteristics of the Anglican Church**

The Church of England did not like the Reformed Churches abolishing everything that had been a part of the medieval heritage. Like the Lutheran Church, it has retained altars, crosses, crucifixes, vestments, liturgical services, the Church Year, and many other practices which the more radical Protestants regard as marks of Catholicism. Therefore it is often asserted that the Church of England, or the Protestant Episcopal Church, is “just like the Catholic.” However, in spite of these assertions, we must remember that in the Thirty-Nine Articles the Romish doctrine concerning purgatory, adoration of images and relics, invocation of the saints is termed “a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded on no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God.” The sacrifice of the mass by which it is asserted that Christ is offered anew for the sins of the living and the dead is termed in the Thirty-Nine Articles “a blasphemous fable and a dangerous deceit.” This is not Catholic! The Church of England does, however, insist on its bishops and requires that only those can conduct the services of the church who have been ordained in an unbroken line from the Apostles. This they call the doctrine of “apostolic succession.” On the Lord’s Supper, the Church of England is Calvinistic. The first sentence of the distribution of the elements as contained in the Book of Common Prayer was the only one given in the edition of 1549, and might well be understood in a Lutheran sense. It reads: “The body of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life.” The second sentence, which was added in 1552 and retained in the 1559 revision, definitely states the Calvinistic idea that the soul feeds on Christ by faith, and that it is not in with and under the bread and wine that both believer and unbeliever receive the body and blood of Christ. The second sentence reads, “Take and eat this is in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thy heart by faith with thanksgiving.”

## **FOR DISCUSSION**

1. What paved the way in England for the Reformation?

2. What was the relationship of Henry's wives to the course of the Church of England?
  
3. What was the nature of the English Church under Henry, under Edward, under Mary and under Elizabeth?
  
4. Is it true that the Church of England is "almost like the Catholic Church"?
  
5. Is there a marked similarity between the Church of England and the Lutheran Church? Are there any marked differences?

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Read *Luther, Biography of A Reformer*, Chapter 12, February 18, 1546, pp. 197-208.

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