

## *Appendix 6: The English Reformation*

In the body of this book, I argued that although the history of Israel in the old covenant, and the history of the *ekklēsia* in the new covenant, both record serious departures from Scripture, even so God used the old-covenant history, and continues to use the unfolding new-covenant history, to bring about his eternal fixed purpose. In this Appendix, I want to argue that the English Reformation serves to illustrate this point: although events were deeply spoiled by sin, even so God brought good from those events, and accomplished his purpose by means of them while he, himself remained untainted. And there is no doubt that although the Reformation was not an unmitigated success, even so God certainly used it – and worked in and through it – to effect massive changes for good. Nowhere is this more true than in England.

I will not repeat the complicated history, but simply try to highlight its significant aspects to make my case. The principal characters in the drama were:

**King Henry VIII**, an immoral, arrogant, suspicious and dictatorial monarch, who lived and died a Catholic – a Roman Catholic until 1534/5 and, thereafter, an English Catholic with himself as virtual Pope.

**Anne Boleyn**, daughter of Thomas Boleyn, niece of Thomas Howard – both men playing key roles in the history (see below). She became Henry's second wife in 1533, the pair being openly married by Thomas Cranmer – another key player (see below). She certainly came to adopt evangelical principles, while remaining heavily embroiled in the Catholic religion (she heard mass on the day of her execution, for instance).

**Thomas Boleyn**, the father of Anne, a power-hungry courtier who made it his ambition to raise his family to high rank within the royal court. In that, he succeeded beyond his wildest

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dreams, but at awful cost: his daughter Mary became Henry's discarded mistress, his son George was unjustly accused of incest, and beheaded, and his daughter Anne became queen but was executed for alleged adultery, incest and treason.

**George Boleyn**, son of Thomas, brother of Anne, who rose in influence within the royal court. He came to adopt evangelical views and, by his oratorical skills, played a major role in securing the break of the English Church with Rome, and its submission to Henry as its Supreme Head. He was executed two days before his sister, having been condemned on the false charge of incest with Anne.

**Thomas Howard**, uncle of Anne, was a ruthless courtier responsible for much of the 'heavy (that is, dirty) work' in Henry's court. It was he who arrested Anne.

**Thomas Cromwell**, a statesman who rose from lowly birth to become Henry's chief political minister. He was the principal advocate and creator of the English Reformation. It is almost certain that he played a major role in meeting the king's wishes – Henry wanted to be free of Anne and marry Jane Seymour – and thus he engineered Anne's downfall. He himself was executed (after the *débauche* of his failure over another queen – Anne of Cleves) in 1540.

**Thomas Cranmer**, a prelate who became the first Archbishop of Canterbury in the English Church. He became resolutely evangelical, and played a major role in doing the king's bidding – which he regarded as his overriding duty – and was, therefore, highly instrumental in bringing about Henry's divorce from his first queen – Catherine of Aragon – which became the catalyst for the English Reformation. Queen Mary, Catherine and Henry's daughter, eventually came to power, and took her revenge, having Cranmer executed in 1556.

**William Tyndale**, although he was out of the country, nevertheless, with his translation of Scripture from the original languages into English, and with his book *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, had a major influence on Henry through Anne

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Boleyn, and thus played a major role in the English Reformation.

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The events of Henry's court during the 1520s and 30s were tumultuous for all the characters who played their part in them: many of them having a spectacular rise through the ranks to reach a high – if not the highest – position, but many of them also having catastrophic and precipitate falls, some of them even to the executioner's axe on the block or death by burning at the stake. Leaving aside the characters themselves, England, itself, during those turbulent years underwent the most radical change. While, alas, Christendom maintained its all-dominant hold on State and Church, and although the power of the papacy was not eliminated, nevertheless from the mid 1530s until the present day Rome has never recovered its grip in England, even though it has never ceased trying to regain its power. But the fact is that as a result of those events in Tudor England, millions have come into spiritual liberty and the true experience of Christ and his salvation.

Having said that, my point in this Appendix can be simply stated. All the good that came from the English Reformation – and much good did come from it – *that* good was brought about despite the appalling mix of carnality, political intrigue and manipulation, self-seeking, sexual immorality, cruelty, and the like, during those years when Henry was king. All the parties involved – even the best of them – were utterly blinded by Christendom. I am referring to the misunderstanding and misapplication of Old Testament texts; Cranmer's obsession with carrying out the king's will (his Christendom confusion made him regard such obedience to be God's will); Tyndale's book, which, though so instrumental, was based on Christendom thinking; and so on. In a very real sense, therefore, the events of the English Reformation were an appalling tragedy for all concerned. And yet, even so, without in the least being tainted by sin, God brought immense, long-term good from it.

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And that is the point. It illustrates what I said in the body of the book about God bringing good out of both covenants – old and new – despite Israel’s apostasy during the time of the former, and the *ekklēsia*’s descent into Christendom during the latter.

God is not tainted, nor man exonerated. But God’s will is Triumphant.