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Although the experience of most contemporary Canadians has been so increasingly separated from a common past that one can legitimately speak of Christians as well as their secularized fellow citizens as dehistoricized, there remains some value in reflecting on the distinctive natures of the theological traditions which shape us, particularly as we endeavour to formulate closer relationships between formerly separated religious communities. If for no other reason such an exercise can offer some insights into differing 'family systems' that, when properly understood as having established behavioural patterns in earlier stages of a movement, may be better open to explanation and perhaps modification at some later stage. Over the past several years a great deal of attention has been directed to the English Reformation and, as such, to Anglicanism at large and its distinctive place in Christendom. The implications of these historical studies for ecumenical dialogue, if carefully considered, will almost certainly aid in furthering such dialogue and in strengthening the new links between ecclesial communions developing as a result of it.

Distinctive Reformations

For students of the continental reformation (Lutherans among others) who come for the first time to review the path of reform in England, the terrain is strange.[1] In German-speaking lands of the early sixteenth century, reformation movements appear to arise primarily as theological concerns, are almost always developed under the direction of a particular theologian, and find their solution in a surprisingly short period of

time. Thus, Lutheranism formed itself around a single group of doctrines, under a single theologian, and in barely a decade – by 1530, only ten years after the break with the Bishop of Rome – it had formulated the highly sophisticated *Augsburg Confession*. Likewise, a mere two years separated the Anabaptist Conrad Grebel's baptism in 1525 from the formulation of Schleitheim in which the later Mennonite tradition continues to find directive principles.

When one turns to England, however, the landscape is very different. In England no single theologian or church leader stood above others, and reform debates tended to centre not on theological issues but on the form of public worship. Moreover, only with the reign of Elizabeth (and then well on into her reign – by 1570 is the best suggestion[2]) can one speak clearly of a 'reformed' Church of England. Henry VIII was fully 'catholic' to his death in 1547. His debate with Rome over secular authority in England was certainly reshaped by continental religious upheavals of his time, but was not discontinuous with constitutional debates and legal struggles going back well into the previous century and earlier.[3] Indeed, theologically Henry remained fully traditional to his death, and his debate with Rome generally, as well as battles over his first divorce, appear far less disruptive when one reflects that only in 1870 was papal jurisdictional primacy defined.[4] How 'Protestant' the country at large was by the death of Edward VI and the succession of Mary Tudor in 1555[5] may well be a perennial debate, yet Elizabeth's hesitation over the religious issue in the first months of her reign in 1558 makes it clear that much more hung in the balance than those Protestant English exiles returning from Geneva pretended. By the 1580s the Anglican compromise was in place, although it waited on an authorized version of the Scriptures until 1611. *The Thirty-Nine Articles* play an important role in that compromise, but one would hesitate to suggest that they were in any sense as significant for Anglican development as the reverberations of Cranmer's prose in the 1549 and 1552 Edwardian Prayer Books and, above all, in the Elizabethan *Book of Common Prayer* of 1559.

The Question of Continuity

Moreover, contemporary theological debates impinge on English reformation studies in quite a different way than they do in the continental reform traditions. Thus, for twentieth century Lutheranism 'continuity'

and 'discontinuity' are terms which tend to be directed to relationships between the formulators of the *Formula of Concord* and the later Lutheran tradition. Similarly, when links between early Protestants and the church of the late middle ages are pointed to, correspondences are almost inevitably treated in the context of wider discontinuity at the time and understood as necessitated by the then widespread need for reform. Debates over a seedling's roots take as their starting points the distinctiveness of the new growth. In a sense the turn to the now 'old' social history only masks theological questions concerning the nature of reform, the reality of schism, and the problem of the visible unity of the church in space and over time.

For Anglicans the problem of 'continuity' has forced consideration of the integrity of the tradition in a somewhat different way. Particularly because of the ongoing presence of the 'High Church' tradition,[6] the question as to sacramental and episcopal continuity has remained a central one, requiring an understanding of the sixteenth century reform as a 'catholic' reform and the ways in which, like the Tridentine actions of the Church of Rome, that reform was in continuity with the traditional church of the Middle Ages and, above all, the church of antiquity. As a result, the Church of England with its sister bodies in Wales and Scotland and its daughters in the Anglican communion world-wide is understood as a branch of the universal catholic Church as are respectively the Roman Catholic Church and those of the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Thus, the ongoing Anglican concern with the validity of priestly orders, a concern not surprisingly continued among Anglo-Catholic priestly converts to Rome such as the former Anglican Bishop of London, Graham Leonard, when faced with the prospect of *re*ordination in their newly chosen communion. If there is no continuity with the universal Church, as Evangelical Anglicans seem to argue in their emphasis on the centrality of Protestant, discontinuous, themes in the sixteenth-century English reform and as Liberal Anglicans reflect in their general disinterest in the theological implications of this and other topics at large, is not that church in schism and is not the decision in November 1992 to ordain women, aside from decisions on the part of Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christians, an indication of its discontinuity with the universal Church?[7]

The argument is not merely theological. For the past two decades the debate has continued among 'secular' historians as well. The standard Protestant interpretation of the English Reformation was best ex-

plored in A. G. Dickens' highly useful and readable *The English Refor-
mation* (London: Batsford, 1964; 2nd ed. 1989) in which the traditional
Protestant story of Lollard forerunners of reform, biblical translations,
the dissemination of continental Protestant theology, and shifts in statu-
ary and liturgical rulings for its support are told. A short time later G. R.
Elton's *Policy and Police* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972)
offered further support. By the 1980s, however, opposition to such read-
ings were raised by revisionists, chief among whom were Christopher
Haigh and J. J. Scarisbrick. Haigh outlines the position in an introduc-
tion to his edited collection, *The English Reformation Revised* (Cam-
bridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) and develops it in his *Eng-
lish Reformations: Religion, Politics and Society under the Tudors* (Ox-
ford: Oxford University Press, 1993), furthering in many ways Scarisbrick's
The Reformation and the English People (Oxford: Oxford University
Press, 1984) and his earlier and now reprinted standard biography, *Henry
VIII* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997; with new introduction re-
viewing the area of study in the three decades since its original publica-
tion in 1968).[8] As Haigh sums up his *Reformations*:

> So the Tudor reformations had not replaced a Catholic England by a
> Protestant England: the country was divided, and the Protestants were
> insecure; popery had not been crushed; the worldlings had not turned to
> the gospel. For the godly, parish Anglicans were not only failed
> Protestants; they were potential papists...While politicians were having
> their hesitant Reformations, while Protestants were preaching their
> evangelical reform, parish congregations went to church: they prayed
> again to their God, learned again how to be good, and went home once
> more. That was how it had been in 1530; that was how it was in 1590.
> (293, 295)

In light of such an interpretation it is not surprising that the English
Reformation should be as much a concern for Roman Catholics as Prot-
estants, and that the subject should have striking popular appeal for the
former. If revisionist historians are correct, late medieval religion was not
the mass of perdition depicted by its Protestant opponents, and Roman
Catholics Recusant forebears not the treasonous, superstitious dupes of
foreign powers, but noble defenders and martyrs of ancient truths.[9] In
recent years therefore the historical works of Antonia Fraser (of the Catho-
lic Longford family[10] and well known for her popular mystery series with
the sleuth, Jemima Shore) have had startling general coverage. Thus,
her *The Wives of Henry VIII* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992) bespeaks,

as well as a feminist, a religious interest – an interest continued directly in her study of the Gunpowder Plot, *Faith and Treason: Terror and Faith in 1605* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), which points to the wide support traditional religion continued to have in England at the time.[11] Likewise few would have expected the wide sales of Catholic historian Eamon Duffy's equally accessible *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992), outlining the vitality of traditional religion and then tracing the sustained political attack on it through to "the end of the 1570s [by which time] whatever the instincts and nostalgia of their seniors, a generation was growing up which had known nothing else, which believed the Pope to be Antichrist, the Mass a mummery, which did not look back to the Catholic past as their own, but another country, another world" (593)[12]

In part Duffy's work is reflective of a new self-assurance on the part of some elements of English Catholicism[13] and a growing interest in Catholic life in the sixteenth century generally.[14] Patricia Finney's *Firedrake's Eye* (New York: Picador, 1992) and *Unicorn's Blood* (New York: Picador, 1998) trace in fictional mode the political intrigue necessitated by the shifting continuities between the old and the new religious traditions in Elizabethan England (the publisher's claim that her work blends A. S. Byatt with John Le Carre is suggestive, but overblown), while the novelist Peter Ackroyd in *Thomas More* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1998) turns his biographical skills to an earlier Tudor era.[15]

Luther's Foil: Erasmus or More?

Like Anne Murphy in her brief but excellent introduction, *Thomas More* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), Ackroyd takes seriously the revisionary model of More studies established by the Richard Marius biography in 1985 (London: Dent) when he endeavoured to present a "man of flesh and blood" rather than one "for all seasons", although Ackroyd has not gone as far as Murphy in his revision of the revisionists. However one wishes to understand the differences of these two authors in their portraits of More, the issues they raise, particularly when they focus on More's reading of Luther, force one to reconsider some aspects of earlier ecumenical discussions.

For Lutherans and others who trace their theological descent from the continental reformation and who formulate their spirituality primarily

in theological rather than in sacramental and liturgical terms, it is common to place Luther against Erasmus and to initiate discussions of the Protestant/Catholic divide in light of their debate in the mid 1520s. What was at stake in their respective treatises (Erasmus' *De libro arbitrio* [*On the Freedom of the Will*, 1524] and Luther's response, *De servo arbitrio* [*On the Bondage of the Will*, 1525]) were differing views of the action of grace, of human nature, and of justification. As Luther himself put it, Erasmus was the first to understand the real point of the argument. Accordingly, for both Catholics and Protestants one is saved by grace through faith. Catholics, however, work within a medical model, whereby humanity is understood as sick unto death and in need of medical aid. The healing powers of Christ the Physician are available to the dying through the sacraments and in Christ's body, the Church; the sick can receive the grace offered – by faith working through love (according to Galatians 5:6) – and can thereby grow in holiness. Protestants on the other hand understand the issue in terms of a forensic or legal mode: all human beings are murderers, deserving the death penalty. Brought into the courtroom guilty, individuals are declared innocent by a righteous judge and released, justified and yet sinners (*simul justus et peccator*), accepting the grace offered by faith and only be faith, a faith which as described in Ephesians 2:8 bears no modifier: it stands 'alone' (*sola*).

When Lutheranism is understood within the context of the continental reformation and set over against Erasmus, theological and other discussions as well as ecumenical decisions have one particular focus, as they had for example in Aarne Sirrala's 'psychological' concerns in *Divine Humanness*, trans. by T. A. Kantonen (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970) and Harry McSorley's ecumenical reflections in *Luther Right or Wrong: An Ecumenical Theological Study of Luther's Major Work, The Bondage of the Will* (New York: Newman Press, 1969). Matters are framed differently, however, when approached in the context of the More-Luther debate. In this case, as Ackroyd goes somewhat beyond necessity to prove, we have to do with two men, each of whom seems prouder than the other to work out all the possible scatological puns in the Latin language. No doubt More wins the competition. Murphy takes less trouble with such matters, directing attention rather to the real issue: What offended More in Luther's thought was its disparagement of ecclesiological and legal factors. For More Christian revelation was born and interpreted within the visible ecclesial community of common people and theologians, canon law and folk practice, in much the same way as More the

lawyer saw the common law operating.   The common law builds on precedents as does traditional practice. Scripture cannot therefore ever stand 'alone'; it must always be interpreted within a tradition. According to More, Luther swept all this far too simply aside. It was not that More was unaware of abuses in the church of his day; he was as anxious as Luther to remove them, but as he saw it Luther was not cleansing the community, as much as abrogating the basis on which it rested. Thereby his opposition to Luther's Law/Gospel distinction: For More freedom existed because of the law, not aside from it – therefore More's concern (Ackroyd seems to see it as obsessiveness) with deference to authority and his concern with order: only in an ordered society can human dignity be established.

The Problem of Choice: Conversion and Reconversion in the English Reformation Era

There is a temptation for students coming to this discussion from the perspective of the continental Reformation to sweep the More/Luther debate to one side, charging More with having missed the point on 'the article by which the Protestant church stands or falls', and accepting too readily that interpretation of the English Reformation which explains the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a progressive Protestantisation of the nation through the Puritan victory in the Civil War, the Glorious Revolution in 1688, and the final dissolution of 'Roman' inclinations with William of Orange's defeat of James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. In recent years J. C. D. Clarke has seriously questioned this view and its portrayal of the English church in the eighteenth century.[16] Even if one does not accept Clarke's argument in full, however, the studies emphasizing 'catholic' continuity in England through the sixteenth century require one to rethink the de facto nature of English Protestantism. We might now rejoice because of the Lutheran/Roman Catholic consensus on justification, but overcoming the Luther/Erasmus debate does not cure the ecumenical agony. The substantive issues raised by the More/Luther controversy remain, not only in Protestant/Catholic dialogue generally, but as formulated in the long-standing conversations over Anglican identity[17] and in any resulting discussions between Anglicans and 'other'(?) Protestant bodies.

In the historiographical climate as outlined above studies of the con-

version phenomenon in England in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries reach not surprising conclusions. Thus, Michael C. Questier, *Conversion, Politics, and Religion in England, 1580-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and Anthony Milton's much more detailed *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought 1600-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), while not ignoring the theological and personal religious issues leading an individual to make radical religious choices, present to readers the highly complex circumstances of social and political loyalty facing thoughtful Christians of the day, matters which More felt Luther too quickly cast aside. If individual integrity is dependent in large part on that individual's incarnated presence in a social/political setting (the Enlightenment's emphasis on individualism and individual rights had not yet effected its toll on human dignity), will not the social aspect of an individual's existence be a central element, directing any final decision as to which community one will finally choose? The fate of one's soul, not to mention one's integrity and dignity, depends upon it. In Francis Edwards, *Robert Persons: The Biography of an Elizabethan Jesuit 1546-1610* (St. Louis, Mo.: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995) the complexities are made abundantly clear and help to explain why individuals on both sides of the divide were willing to suffer as they did and why others found themselves developing a theological practice that allowed them without a sense of hypocrisy to attend Protestant services while committed to Roman Catholic principles. Their position is engagingly presented in Alexandra Walsham's *Church Papists: Catholicism, Conformity and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Royal Historical Society, The Boydell Press, 1993) and parallels similar Protestant behaviour on the continent where it was designated as Nicodemianism.

Perhaps with no person is the pattern of shifting religiosity within the changing political and social climate more striking than in the case of Thomas Cranmer. The number of biographies devoted to him over the years is not therefore surprising. Cranmer has perhaps never been served better, however, than in Diarmaid MacCulloch's recent *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), winner of 1996 Whitbread Biography Award, of the 1996 James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Biography, and of the 1996 Duff Cooper Prize. As a result of the widespread attention to the volume Yale reissued it in 1998 in paperback. Six hundred and ninety-one pages in nine-point type might not be one's view of

a pleasant Sunday afternoon read, but the length of the volume should not detract the reader, [18] and Cranmer's life requires such bulk, covering as it does almost the whole of the Reformation era in England from the initial legal-theological exercises demanded by Henry VIII's early concern with the legitimacy of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, through the revisions of the *Book of Common Prayer* during the Edwardian years, and into the struggles of faith and conscience which forced even mature thinkers such as Cranmer to give way to the new (or was it 'old'?) Roman reality that faced them with the advent of Mary Tudor's reign in 1555, to recant, and then to recant again, and finally to suffer the horror of a short work from a trial in St. Mary's Church, Oxford to death by fire in front of what in our day is a children's book shop.

For all the theological reconstructions Cranmer faced in his life, MacCulloch makes it clear that it is not for these that he will be remembered, but rather for his liturgical achievement, above all, in the *Book of Common Prayer*, a volume which defines even more than the *Thirty-Nine Articles* (finally formulated in 1562) and Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* what it is to be an Anglican. Once this is understood, it is difficult for even the most aged nineteenth-century liberals who still lurk about the corners of Christendom to muse how a writer of P. D. James' talents could find herself holding so adamantly to what has all the appearances of an out-moded rhetoric in the Prayer Book Society. MacCulloch's closing remarks (their implied chauvinism aside) offer some insight on the matter, as they sum up not only Cranmer's life, but the peculiar reformation he represented.

> For all those who criticize his politics, or find his theology alien, it is Cranmer's language that remains the most enduring monument to Henry VIII's and Edward VI's most faithful servant. Twentieth century scholarship has reminded us just how fundamental is the structure of language to the way in which we construct our lives and our culture. Cranmer's language lies at the heart of our English-speaking culture, which has now become so central to the destiny of the world (632).

MacCulloch's focus on language is what one might expect at the close of the twentieth century and the obsession with discourse theory, but however we may weary of postmodernist chatter, the issue he raises is an important one. The puzzle of Cranmer and of the reformation he represented has become for us the puzzle of our language itself and thus of our own social and communal integrity. In the face of the radical dislocation of modernity, the fracturing of its once-supposed integrated

self, the bankruptcy of the liberal vision as a whole, long-standing theological debates such as those which divided Luther and Erasmus at the beginning of the modern era appear strangely dated, and the conundrums of the individual's relationship with the transcendent somehow irrelevant. As the liberal demand for rights increases and communal sensitivity collapses under the pressure, individual human dignity seems put to flight and, unsatisfied by the characterless complexion of monolithic consumerism, grasps at any appearance of meaningful social stability, even if one established negatively by racist and totalitarian formulae. When the fullest final form of human community is understood solely as a global economy, the problem is exacerbated, and the question arises, in a language more closely formulated to that of Thomas More's, as to the relationship between individuals and their local and universal wider 'family system', that of the whole (*kath'ole*), beyond the provincial prejudices of a local culture or point of view and an ever passing present. It is this question that continues at the base of contemporary treatments of the English Reformation and may explain in part the recent surge of writing regarding it.

Notes

[1]   Recent general reviews of the Anglican tradition are available in Paul Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church* (Edinburgh, 1989). For a general review of the history of Evangelicalism in Anglicanism see Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *Evangelicals in the Church of England, 1734-1984* (Edinburgh, 1988) and for the High Church see his *High Churchmanship in the Church of England* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993).

[2]   See Patrick Collinson, "William Shakespeare's Religious Inheritance," in his *Elizabethan Essays* (London: Hambledon Press, 1994) 218-252, *The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society, 1559-1625* (Oxford, 1982) and compare his *The Birthpangs of Protestant England* (London, 1988).

[3]   For details see R. N. Swanson, *Church and Society in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 1989).

[4]   On issues related to Petrine authority in the context of this article see Wolfhart Pannenberg, "A Lutheran's Reflections on the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome," trans. by Adrian Walker, *Communio* 25/4 (1998), 604-618

[5]   For a biography of Mary see David Loades, *Mary Tudor: A Life* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), a significant improvement on the continuing caricature of

the pious queen as 'bloody'. (Cf. Carroly Erickson, *Bloody Mary: The Remarkable Life of Mary Tudor* [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1978].)

6   For details see, above all, Peter Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship 1760-1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and my review article "Victorian Catholicism and the Oxford Movement, 1990-1996," *Victorian Review* 23/1 (1997), 114-120.

7   The contemporary implications of the question have a long historiographical/theological tradition which goes back to the time of the reformation era itself and is succinctly discussed in Rosemary O'Day, *The Debate on the English Reformation* (London: Methuen, 1986).

8   Fortunately for contemporary students of the period attempting to sort through the various interpretations an excellent, albeit somewhat expensive, collection of primary documents is available in Gerald Bray, (ed.) *Documents of the English Reformation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

9   Note the similar position in *The Remains of the late Reverend Richard Hurrell Froude, M.A. Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford* (2 vols.; London: J. G. & F. Rivington, 1838).

10   Note as well the novels of Rachel Billington (another member of the family), particularly her *Occasion of Sin* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1982)

11   The pattern was already clear in her first major historical work, *Mary Queen of Scots* (London, 1969).

12   Note the supportive parallel collection of texts by R. N. Wilson (ed. and trans.), *Catholic England: Faith, Religion and Observance before the Reformation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993) and its excellent introduction.

13   Note also the popularity of Duffy's *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) and the related six-part television series.

14   Thus the recent attention to the 'Catholic' Shakespeare in North America: Gary Wills, *Witches and Jesuits: Shakespear's 'Macbeth'* (Oxford University Press, 1995), Eric Sams' reflections in *The Real Shakespeare: Retrieving the Early Years 1564-1594* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), the somewhat surprising reprint of John Henry DeGroot, *The Shakespeares* and *'The Old Faith'* (1946) with a postlude by Stanley L. Jaki (1995). Note as well the new edition of Peter Milward's *Shakespeare's Religious Background* (1973; Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985).

15   For further information regarding contemporary British Catholic novelists and their treatment of the sixteenth century and Catholic recussants generally see my "Psychological Integrity and the Reappropriation of the

Catholic Past: British Catholic Novelists in the late 1990s," *The Canadian Catholic Review* 16/1 (1998), 32-44.

16   J. C. D. Clark, *Revolution and Rebellion: State and Society in England in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and *English Society 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice in the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

17   Most recently reflected in the discussions in Canada in George Egerton (ed.) *Anglican Essentials: Reclaiming Faith within the Anglican Church of Canada* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1995) and John Simons (ed.), *The Challenge of Tradition: Discerning the Future of Anglicanism* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1997). The formulations of the debate require reconsideration as well of once supposedly-firm political alliances. Note, for example, the 'left-wing' orientation of 'conservative' Anglo-Catholic Ritualists in the nineteenth century as described in John Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle: The Cultural Politics of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism* (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996) and the contemporary 'radical Orthodoxy' of writers such as John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), beside which traditional 'left' political stances look peculiarly outmoded. For an interesting discussion of the issue as related to Canada see Ron Dart's three-part series published in *The Anglican Catholic* (1998).

18   The bulkier the book, the better it sells, it seems: Thus, in 1995 Eamon Duffy's 652-page *The Stripping of the Altars* (Yale, 1992) and Kevin Sharpe's near 1000-page *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (Yale, 1992) both appeared in paperback.