

**WAS THE REFORMATION REALLY WORTH IT?
AN IRENIC DIALOGUE BETWEEN A CATHOLIC AND A PROTESTANT
SPIRITFEST, GRAHAMSTOWN, FRIDAY 8th JULY 2011**

1. SETTING THE SCENE:

International politics/Religion - RN recruiting poster – the time of King George III, Napoleonic wars, probably just before the Battle of Trafalgar (1805) – Napoleon was intent on invading England. He had also got the Pope to crown him as Emperor of the French. “All who have good hearts, who love their king, their country, and their religion, who hate the French, and damn the Pope...” Religion, national survival and politics intertwined for many years.

Religion/politics & Church/state - Wednesday 6th July was the anniversary of the execution of Sir (St) Thomas More – ACSA, and the C of E, remember him as a martyr; the RC Church see him as a saint. Appointed as Lord Chancellor, he refused to support Henry VIII’s efforts to obtain a divorce from Catherine of Aragon, and would not take the Oath on the Act of Succession, which declared the king to be supreme head of the Church of England. At his death he declared that he died “the king’s good servant but God’s first”. (The Man for All Seasons.)

Church disagreements:

- The Great Schism of 1054, between Eastern and Western Christendom. Both leaders – the Pope and the Patriarch – excommunicated the other; both anathematized the other; this was finally revoked in 1967. Church splits happen, sadly; the different sides demonise one another. (cf. Papal bull of 1896 which condemned Anglican orders as invalid through default of both form and intention.)
- The Great Schism - 2 popes 1378 - 1417

Issue of State control: The Anglican Church of Southern Africa formed itself as an Anglican Province, independent from the Church of England, in order to keep itself completely separate from the state. No appeal to the Crown from church tribunals.

2. THE RESULTS OF THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

The Reformation - issues of the time:

Papacy as a foreign, oppressive political power
Popes were temporal rulers, with their armies, political players
The rise of the national states
Indulgences – to shorten Purgatory both for the living and the dead
Superstitions and relics
Resentment at this foreign taxation, interference
Corruption of the church hierarchy
Offices of Bishops and cardinals bought and sold
A desire to return to the simplicity of the early church

A deep questioning of theology

Henry VIII 1509 – 1547 – political reformation
Edward VI 1547 – 1553 – protestant Prayer Book, governance
Mary 1553 – 1558 - Catholic
Elizabeth I 1558 – 1603 – Via Media
James I 1603 – 1625 – Authorised Version 1611
Charles I 1625 – 1649 (Civil War)
Commonwealth – the rule of the Puritans
Restoration 1660 (of monarchy and Anglican Church)
Charles II 1649 – 1685
James II 1685 – 1688
Glorious Revolution 1688
William of Orange - Protestant

Anglican self-understanding, as found in the Declarations made whenever a person is ordained, or receives the Bishop's license:

The Anglican Church of Southern Africa is part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church worshipping the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures, held by the Primitive Church, summed up in the Creeds and affirmed by the undisputed General Councils, to which the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer and the Ordering of Bishops, Priest and Deacons bear witness....

I affirm my loyalty to this inheritance of faith as my inspiration and guidance under God in bringing the grace and truth of Christ to this generation...

The middle way of the C of E between Puritanism and papalism (Richard Hooker *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*). NB WHO DEFINES THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH? Bishops were the ministry founded by Christ, demanded by Scripture and by apostolic practice. Of divine authority.
The Prayer Book.

Continuity with the pre-Reformation *Ecclesia Anglicana* – there were British bishops at the Council of Arles in 314, indicating a Church with order and worship - rooted firmly in scripture and tradition, but now both catholic and reformed.

Freedom and diversity based on the three pillars of scripture, tradition, reason.

Anglo-Catholicism – part of the Catholic Church without being RC
Evangelical – Reformation heritage
Broad Church/Liberal – the theological thought of the mid-1800s, making a place for the biblical and doctrinal criticism.

The Thirty-Nine Articles:

Middle ground between Anabaptists/puritans, and the RC Church.

Essentially the classical doctrines of the Reformed Protestants:

Men are justified by faith alone; the grace of God is received only by men of faith; the Church can teach nothing which Scripture does not contain.

Church governance

The Books of the Bible

Predestination and Election (but not predestination to damnation)

The necessity of ordination

Two sacraments

Communion in both kinds

The nature of the Eucharist

The nature of Baptism

The jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome

No mention of the apostolic succession

The Prayer Book of 1662:

Based on the Prayer Books of 1549, 1552 (Edward VI) and 1559 (Elizabeth I)

Largely protestant in theology, esp in its understanding of Communion, though with

some accommodation made for Catholics. Communion not a sacrifice, no trans-

substantiation; but rather a receiving the body and blood of Christ by faith. The 1989

AAPB has included a more sacrificial understanding of the Eucharist; the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

Church governance

Queen as Supreme Governor of the C of E

Archbishop of Canterbury as first amongst equals

Independent Provinces

Synodical government – bishops, clergy, laity

Election and appointment of bishops

3. WAS THE REFORMATION WORTH IT?

It corrected abuses – up to a point. Standards of clergy training received attention; appointment of clergy to senior positions; did away with much superstition, unhealthy veneration of statues, false relics, ignorance.

It reformed doctrine: it brought scripture back to the heart of the faith and the heart of the church; it restored personal devotion; justification by faith alone; caused a serious re-examination of theology. The Authorised Version of 1611. The Bible was made available in the language of the people.

Restricted papal authority: it removed the interference of the pope in national affairs.

Removed the authority of the pope but **replaced it with the authority of the state** (in the UK) – though this has changed in recent decades; and in countries other than the UK, the church is free to govern its own affairs.

Made space for freedom of thought and debate (ordination of women; sexuality...)

It allowed too much space for disagreement and diversity.

Allowed in time the **development of national churches.**

Churches which were national and not universal.

Damaged the church – persecution; martyrs; attacks on the church; impoverished the church.

Divided the church (though this has happened in the past) – fragmentation has continued apace. NB that Anglicanism – the Via Media – has seen itself as a bridge, holding the middle ground, keeping things together. ARCIC. Anglican Ordinariate.

It went too far. Discarded much that is now being brought back.

It did not go far enough. Bishops; outward signs; hierarchy; structure; authority.

Always reforming: the church is never perfect; always in need of reform, renewal, restoration. Start again? New wineskins?