

LutherFacts #33

During the 1530s and 1540s, as Martin Luther and John Calvin worked to advance the Reformation in northern Europe, the English Crown also oversaw major changes in the nation's religious institutions. From 1534 until his death in 1547, Henry VIII broke with the Pope, closed monasteries, disbanded religious orders, and made modest changes in doctrine and worship. Each of his progeny, over the next half century, left their stamp on the English church. Edward VI sought to go further than his father by adopting distinctly Protestant beliefs and practices—both now associated with Luther and Calvin—and instituted a new Book of Common Worship. In 1553, Mary I came to the throne and attempted to reinstitute the Pope as head of the English church, bring back the old priesthood, and restore the Latin service. Those efforts ceased with her death in 1558. Many reformers who had lived in Germany and Switzerland during her reign returned to urge her sister, Elizabeth I, to resume church reform. She agreed up to a point. Elizabeth broke with Rome and elevated many Protestant ministers to leadership positions, but in the end, the Crown retained control of ecclesiastical matters. Thus, in England, the Reformation that Luther had launched took root but struggled to fully implement fundamental changes in doctrine and practice.