Prayer Before Studying Theology:

O Lord who hast taught us that all our doings without love are worth nothing,
send thy Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of love,
the very bond of peace and of all virtues,
without which whosoever liveth is counted as dead before you:
Grant this for thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.
--Book of Common Prayer

The English Reformation

In the late medieval period, there was a strong strain of popular anti-clericalism and a desire to be able to read the Bible in the English vernacular (not Latin) and to abolish certain abuses within the church, i.e. the cult of relics, the use of images in worship, indulgences conceived as payment for the forgiveness of sins, transubstantiation, etc. This was particularly true among the Lollards who persisted (though persecuted) until the beginnings of the English Reformation. (On the latter, see Richard Rex, *The Lollards*, New York: Palgrave, 2002)

Renaissance humanism also came to form the minds of educated Englishmen in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. This brought a desire to read the New Testament in the original Greek, going beyond the conventional, approved interpretations of the Latin exegetical tradition and the *magisterium* (teaching authority of the Pope and the Roman hierarchy. There was also a closely associated desire to reform the Church, which led to an eager reading of Luther's early works.

<u>William Tyndale</u>

Perhaps the best known of these humanists-turned-early reformers was William Tyndale (c. 1494-1536). After earning his bachelor's and master's degrees at Oxford (1512 and 1515 respectively), he lectured for a year at Oxford and then went to Cambridge to study Greek and became a part of the reform movement. He resolved to translate Erasmus' Greek New Testament into English, following the pattern of Luther who had translated the Bible into German. To avoid ecclesiastical harassment, he went to Germany, conferring with Luther and Melancthhon at Wittenberg, tried but failed to have his translation of the New Testament printed at Cologne (had to flee when the project was discovered), finally settled in Worms where the first copies of his translation were printed in 1526 and then in Antwerp, where more copies were printed. The cost of printing and distributing the Bibles was assumed by certain British merchants who did business on the Continent. The English bishop Cuthbert Tunstall strongly opposed the distribution of Tyndale's English NT and managed to buy up most of the copies, publicly burning them. Undeterred, Tyndale brought out a new, corrected edition and pirated editions also appeared on the Continent and were distributed in England. Tyndale moved first to

Antwerp and then to Hamburg, where he and Miles Coverdale prepared an English version of the Hebrew Pentateuch. They then moved back to Antwerp, where the English Pentateuch was printed in 1530 and distributed in England. Tyndale's opposition to Henry VIII's remarriage made it impossible for him to return to England so he remained in Antwerp revising the NT and translating Joshua to II Chronicles into English. Betrayed, arrested and imprisoned in 1535; in the following year he was executed by strangulation and his body burned His final words are reputed to have been, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes!"

Henry's Marriages and Separation from Rome

Catherine of Aragon was first married to Henry's older brother, Arthur, but they had no children. When Arthur died five months after his marriage, Henry VIII (1509-1547) hoped to retain his bond with the Emperor Ferdinand through marriage to Catherine. Special dispensation was sought from Pope Julius II for this marriage to take place in 1509, since it was in violation of ecclesiastical law (see Lev. 20:21: "If a man takes his brother's wife, it is impurity; he has uncovered his brother's nakedness. They shall be childless."). Julius approved this request, holding that the marriage of Arthur and Catherine had never been consummated. Unfortunately, although Catherine bore Henry eight children, only one—a girl, Mary—survived; there was no male heir. At this point, Henry desired to annul his marriage to Catherine and marry Anne Boleyn but Pope Clement VII could not accede since Catherine's nephew, Charles V was Emperor and ruler of Italy and would not agree. Henry arranged for an ecclesiastical court to declare his marriage to Catherine invalid (now, it was argued, Arthur and Catherine had consummated their marriage and Catherine's subsequent marriage to Henry was therefore annulled). The Act of Restraint in Appeals (1533) made Henry the king "who owed no submission to any other human ruler" and made appeal to the pope to be a form of treason; this resulted in 1534 in complete separation from Rome.

There followed a very confusing period in which the Church of England tried to determine what was to be believed (no longer Catholic, was the church Protestant?). Minor reforms were made (transubstantiation no longer a required belief; the number of sacraments reduced from seven to four). In the wake of popular uprisings, protests from the older bishops and the northern provinces, there was a movement back to fairly traditional Catholicism (seven sacraments and transubstantiation) and enforced clerical celibacy but the king also seized the assets and lands of the monasteries (1536) and allowed one copy of the Bible in English to be placed in every parish church (1538).

Edward VI and the Regency (1547-1553)

When Henry died and his son Edward VI (son of Jane Seymour; ruled 1547-1553) reigned, the regents who oversaw his reign (Edward Seymour, then John Dudley) inclined toward Protestantism, moving toward a moderate Calvinism. In 1547, restrictions upon Catholic practices, were passed, visitation of parishes began to examine the clergy and recommend reforms, and a number of foreign Protestant theologians came to England in the wake of the defeat of the German Protestants at the Battle of Mühlberg, which returned southern Germany (including Strasbourg) to the Roman Catholics and placed limitations upon Lutheranism in other areas. The two most famous were Martin

Bucer (who later assisted Cranmer with the preparation of the 1552 prayer book) and Peter Martyr Vermigli, both of whose works are still well worth reading.

The 1549 prayer book (First Prayer Book of Edward VI) was more Catholic than Protestant.

- Note the exorcism before baptism (p. 45 of the 1999 edition);
- The prayer which refers to the contrition of the sick as the basis for seeking the forgiveness of sins (p. 71)
- Anointing the sick with oil (p. 72);
- Prayers for the dead (p. 78);
- (Still this is a far cry from the prayers of Cuthbert Tunstall, Tyndale's opponent, which were later reprinted in 1558 during the Marian reaction, which
    - speaks of the merits of Jesus "and of his most holy mother Mary and of all the saints,"
    - appeals for the forgiveness of sins based upon "perfect contrition, entire confession and continual amendment of life,"
    - offers "prayers for the living and the dead" and
    - endorses the efficacious intercession of the departed saints for the living.)

Thomas Cranmer, archbishop of Canterbury since 1533, revised it in accordance with suggestions made by Martin Bucer, who had been made Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, so that it become a moderately Reformed book broadly acceptable to most English Protestants. Some old customs, like kneeling at communion, were retained but it was explained that these were no longer to be interpreted in accordance with the old understandings (i.e. transubstantiation and eucharistic adoration) (cf. the Black Rubric). Cranmer also developed the Forty-Two Articles to test clergy for conformity to the broadly Protestant position that was now being taken.

<u>The Marian Reaction (1553-1558)</u>

Unfortunately Edward, who had always been rather sickly, died in 1553. According to a plan brokered by John Dudley (earl of Warwick, duke of Northumberland), the 16-year-old Lady Jane Grey, daughter of Henry VIII's niece, was to ascend to the throne. To secure his power, the duke arranged for his son to marry Jane. However, the people wanted someone closer to Henry by blood, who could carry on his popular legacy and was not associated with the recent changes made by the regents and the church reformers. They therefore supported Mary, the daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon. The sense one has of Mary is of a rather haughty individual who was still nursing the wounded pride associated with her mother's rejection. She flaunted her Spanish heritage (which increasingly alienated her supporters) and against the counsel of Parliament married Philip II who was a member of the Spanish royal family and, like Mary, a convinced Roman Catholic. In 1554, England was publicly restored to obedience to Rome and a cruel persecution of Protestants followed. Protestant leaders survived only by fleeing to the Continent, but most of the socially prominent Protestants and the Protestant higher leadership was executed, including Lady Jane Grey, beheaded at the Tower of London in 1553 and Archbishop Cranmer, burned at the stake in 1556. Besides alienating the people and creating new sympathy for the persecuted Protestants, Mary's foreign policy was a disaster. Her Spanish courtiers gave her poor advice and

under her rule the English lost the last of their holdings in France, the port of Calais. Her marriage was also troubled and she never bore a child prior to her death in 1556.

The Elizabethan Settlement (1558-1603)

The throne therefore passed to Elizabeth, the daughter of Ann Boleyn, who felt it strategic to reaffirm the independence of the English Church from Rome (and Spanish influence) and to arrive at a watered-down compromise between those with Catholic sympathies and the moderate Calvinists. The 1552 prayer book was lightly revised to remove anti-Catholic material and some of the more Catholic material from the 1549 prayer book was restored. The Forty-Two Articles were reduced to Thirty-Nine Articles, which were often vaguely Protestant, except for number 29, which appears to teach a Reformed view of the Lord's Supper, and some anti-Anabaptist polemic.

Throughout Elizabeth's reign, Philip II of Spain, in collusion with the Pope and other Continental powers aimed to return England to the Catholic fold. The destruction of the Spanish Armada in 1588 brought in a new era of relative peace.

The Recusants and English Catholicism

Initially those who opposed the English Reformation and sought to continue the traditions of medieval English Catholicism had some liberty to speak out and publish tracts. Those who took this stance were called "Recusants." By the time of the Elizabethan settlement, public advocacy of Catholicism was prohibited and the movement went underground, having to clandestinely publish material (e.g. on the Continent). A number of noble families remained staunchly Catholic and were tolerated but deprived of access to the political and educational systems.

Those who were strongly identified with the Catholic position or desired to become Catholic priests/members of religious orders fled to France and established a peculiar form of English Catholicism. English priests were trained in special seminaries at Douai and Rheims in France and there was also an English College in Rome. These priests were then sent back to England to clandestinely engage in ministry. Ultimately they had little influence upon the broader society, since they tended to live (covertly, of course) with Catholic nobles in rural areas and function as family chaplains. When they had initially engaged in itinerant ministry among the ordinary people they lacked a stable means of financial support and were easily recognized, betrayed and executed.

Perhaps the most notable among these English Catholics in exile was Father Augustine Baker, who belonged to the English Benedictine Congregation in France. Well known as a spiritual director and writer on prayer and spiritual disciplines, some of his works are still worth reading today, particularly *Holy Wisdom*. He and the members of his congregation also preserved, recopied and published a number of important late medieval English mystical works, including Julian of Norwich and the *Cloud of Unknowing*.