

# Religion and its importance of in 16th century england research paper

[Countries](#), [England](#)



## **Introduction**

During the 16th century, many changes occurred in England. This was because of the various religious factors that shaped the politics of England. In addition, most of the literature during this period played a major role in shaping English Literature. The Hamlet was one of the ideas that played a significant role in defining religion and literature in England. Religion during the 16 century resulted to conflicts between the Catholics and Protestants. The conflicts that began between the pope and King Henry VII saw England became a Protestant country. The struggle also resulted to changes in sacraments. The Protestants only adapted three of the sacraments that were used by the Catholics. In addition, these conflicts inspired Queen Elizabeth to influence the Church. What was the importance of religion during 16th century in Early England? Religious movements, Catholicism, Christianity, English reformation, and Protestant reformation played a key part in shaping religion in Early England.

## **History and Origin of the Church of England**

Because of increased enlightenment in England, Henry VIII destroyed the papal power through his government. The government at the time viewed that the Roman Catholic had gained a lot of authority. According to Short, Thomas, Vowler, A Sketch History of the Church of England to the Revolution 1688 (5), the King together with his subjects' was in view of discarding the concept of temporal authority of the pope. Furthermore, they resented the fact that the clergy at the time has excessive wealth and power. Their views on the diminishing the power of the clergy represented most of the wishes of

the enlightened members of the society.

Consequently, the actions of the government resulted to the enlightenment of many people in the society. Despite the actions of Henry's governments resulting to increased persecution of people of the protestant faith, a huge step was made towards the reformation in the church (Short 5). Short (6) provides details of execution of Christians in Scotland who rebelled against the Catholic Church.

As the Catholic Church continued to lose a firm standing in England, the Church of England started to attain most of its settlement during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Despite the Church of England being influenced into growth by King Henry the Eighth, Elizabeth promoted the protestant faith in England. In addition, the queen demonstrated a lot of support at the time for the protestant faith, which was being attacked constantly by Puritanism. Craik, James, and John M'Gill, *The Origin of the Church of England*, as Represented in Macaulay's *History: Assailed and Defended* (7) note that the queen had much power in the Church. In addition, the parliament had entrusted the queen to punish heresy and any kind of religious abuse. Furthermore, the queen used the bishops as her ministers (Craik and M'Gill 7). The queen also had the authority to appoint the superior members of the clergy.

## **Religion Movements**

Firstly, different religious movements influenced religion in England. Cressy, David and Lori Anne Ferrell. *Religion and Society in Early Modern England: A Sourcebook* (6) argue that the most common religious movement in early

England was Puritanism. This phenomenon emerged and gained popularity during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Puritanism played a key role in shaping religion in early England.

This concept of Puritanism resulted in many people campaigning for renewal in the Church of England. This, however, did not transform the position of the clergy in the Church of England. A good number of the puritans in Elizabeth's reign were concerned with the detection and absolute removal of the popery ideals that were present in the Church; (Cressy and Ferrell 6).

Puritanism challenged the way things were done in the Church of England. In addition, the puritans during 1570 declared and justified that no scripture supported the episcopacy process that was widespread in the Church of England. This episcopacy was part of the Roman legacy that the puritans were adamant in abolishing it. The Presbyterians acknowledged episcopacy as being unethical to the new reformed Church of England.

Moreover, an important aspect of Puritanism was personal reformation (Cressy and Ferrell 6). This allowed the puritans to exercise their puritan values and at the same time obey the rules of the Church of England. The religious puritans often rebuked the poor, the drunkards, and all those that were socially inferior. This resulted in the development of a reformation of manners as a means of Cultural Revolution (Cressy and Ferrell 6). The papal excommunication by the queen heavily stressed Catholic community in England. Most of these Catholics were charged fines for not attending church while others met in private for fear of being reprimanded. Cressy and Ferrell (6) suggest that most of the English Protestants viewed the conquest over the Spanish Armada as a triumph over the power of the Anti-Christ. The

puritans and the Catholics thought that King James VI would lift the constraints on religion after being crowned as the king of England, but instead he upheld the English episcopacy concept. This resulted to rejection of most puritan agenda.

## **Catholicism**

Secondly, Catholicism shaped the basic religious activities in England. Cressy and Ferrell (2) argue that traditional Roman Catholicism in early England was well liked strong and lively. In early England, people placed much emphasis on spiritual needs.

Most people during this period in England were satisfied that the religious activities met their spiritual needs. In addition, these religious activities enabled them to connect with God and their ancestors. Many of the events involved communal and religious observances, which were normally, marked by bonfires and processions on the saint's day; (Cressy and Ferrell 2).

With the issue to meet spiritual needs, most people turned to the church to satisfy, their needs. This created a link between the festive and devotional elements of worship. Religious drama was a common scene in the church sites.

Consequently, during this period, most of the commoners believed in praying for the dead and temporary punishment. In addition, many of the people made gifts for the church and were comfortable with the Holy Communion sacrament featuring the real presence of Christ. The ordinary English resident cared little for authority from Rome. After England had become an independent jurisdiction away from Rome, the 1534 Act of supremacy

enabled the king to be the highest leader of the Church in England. However, soon after the act of Supremacy came into use, the politics during this period resulted to the challenging of the Catholic Church and its beliefs by the Protestants (Cressy and Ferrell 2).

Nevertheless, Mary's rule in England was marred by the persecution of Protestants. Most of the endowed Protestants were able to go to exile in Switzerland and other low countries. Those who fought for their faith paid the consequences with their lives. Queen Mary's reign in England resulted to almost three hundred killings of Protestants in fire.

## **Christianity**

Thirdly, rise of Christianity is most evident during the Sixteenth century. Cressy and Ferrell (1) argue that, during the sixteenth and seventeenth century, religion became a key aspect in the English society. Christianity changed the way social and political activities were handled both individually and by the government.

Most of the social, domestic, and political ideologies were put in plain biblical and theological terms. The concept of Christianity presented a framework understanding of complex ideas by providing a platform for discussion of issues governance at both the State and individual levels; (Cressy and Ferrell 1).

Through Christianity, complex issues could be handled with ease. In addition, Christianity dealing in places such as the markets was refined to portray respect for the ideals, which Christianity represented. There was the observance of proper conduct during the Sabbath. The influence of the

different Christian rituals and faith on individuals was noticeable.

Furthermore, this offered different levels of emotional, spiritual, and intellectual appeal to the people.

However, the conflict of the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestants made Christianity a key issue from the reign of King Henry VIII up to King James VI (Cressy and Ferrell 1). The conflict to define what true Christianity meant affected every individual in England. This conflict resulted to major changes in the structure and authority in the church. Evangelical preachers, theologians' university scholars, and priest all played a part in shaping Christianity in England. The magistrates and the monarchs also played a part in shaping Christianity in England.

Likewise, the process of defining the new Christianity in early England included negations, persecutions through which diverse constituents in England conflicted and sometimes agreed on certain issues. The different Protestant and Catholic views played a crucial role in changing the political and social life in early England (Cressy and Ferrell 2).

## **English Reformation**

Fourthly, English reformation was a crucial part in reducing the Catholicism influence in England. Pendrill, Colin. *The English Reformation: Crown Power and Religious Change 1485-1558* (58) suggest that the main reason that caused the English reformation was the fallout between King Henry VIII and the pope. This was because the pope had refused to acknowledge that King Henry VIII had never been properly married to Catherine of Aragon. Some historians, however, argue that the divorce was not a crucial part in English

reformations. In the book *The English Reformation*, Charles Dickens believes that reformation agenda gained popularity because of widespread anticlericalism and increased levels of corruption in the Church of England (Pendrill 58). Dickens work on the Protestants shows that reformation occurred due to the English intellectuals adopting continental reform ideas and demanded changes in the Church. Consequently, the Kings divorce only concurred with the timing of the reformation and was not a major reason why the reformations occurred.

Conversely, there are reasons that justify King Henry VIII perspective of the English reformation. Firstly, by 1527, the Kings wife had grown old and was unable to bear him children. The King believed that, without a son, a succession crisis could occur in the event of his death (Pendrill 59). In addition, the King believed that he had no son because he had married his brother wife. With this reason in mind, King Henry VIII requested the pope to annul his marriage, but the pope declined. King Henry resulted to other means to ensure that his marriage annulment.

In 1533, King Henry decided to declare the marriage illegal, which in the end resulted to England breaking away from Rome. To ensure that his marriage was declared illegal, Henry ensured that all the Bishops of England supported him and took royal control of the church. This resulted in the crown acquiring a lot of power, which led to an uprising against King Henry's reforms; (Pendrill 139).



## **Protestant Reformation**

Furthermore, the protestant reformation began around 1300 and 1400 period when many of the Christians lost confidence in the Church ability to provide religious leadership. The church was overly concerned with the worldly affairs. In 1506, the pope decided to rebuild St. Peters Cathedral in Rome. The pope raised fees to finance this project from what Christians paid for in marriage, funerals, and baptism fees. Furthermore, there was the sale of indulgences. An indulgence was the decrease in the number of punishment a sinner would endure in purgatory after death. Martin Luther who argued that a person could not buy God's favor challenged this behavior of the Catholic Church in Rome. Key issues raised by Luther challenged the way Rome conducted its activities.

Luther believed that God would grant a person salvation even if he did not do good works. Luther's teachings had a great effect on the protestant reformation in England. Firstly, Luther rejected the notion that good works would guarantee someone salvation. Secondly, Luther declared that the issue of authority of the pope in the church was not mentioned in the bible and thirdly he emphasized that an individual did not need a priest to interpret the bible; (Gray 40).

Besides these changes, a major reform that occurred was in the sacrament that was offered by the church. Gray, Madeleine. The Protestant Reformation: Belief, Practice, and Tradition (40) note that Luther's challenge of the sacraments that were offered by the Catholic Church at the time resulted to most reformers doubting whether some of the sacrament had any meaning at all. In addition, the influence of the German Lutheranism resulted

to changes in certain things such as the sacrament. Initially seven, the sacrament were reduced to just three (Cressy and Ferrell 2). Gray (43) further maintains that after writing the book on Babylonian Captivity of the Church, Luther was convinced that sacrament of marriage, ordination, extreme unction and confirmation were not sacraments.

## **Conclusion**

What was the importance of religion during 16th century in Early England? In conclusion, the differences that exist today between the Catholics and the Protestant movements are because of the conflicts and struggles that took place in early modern England and Europe. Issues such as the number of sacraments that are taken today in the Protestant churches can be easily be explained by the ideologies of Martin Luther, a German monk who challenged the corrupt behaviors of the pope and Catholic Church between the 1300s and 1400s. The Kings action led to the separation of England from Rome's authority. Another factor that stimulated reformation in England was the fact that the crown had gained a lot of power. Furthermore, the reformation process continued even after King Henry's reign. During Queen Elizabeth's reign, major changes occurred in the church. Her strong beliefs in the church led her to take control of the church and in the end utilized the bishops of England as to carry out her will.

Some of the reasons that resulted to reformations in the 16 century have a similarity to the way most of the Protestant churches are carrying out their activities. Currently, churches are increasingly tolerating perverse human behaviors. Issues such as ordaining homosexuals in some protestant

churches may lead to a new reformation in the 21st century. Furthermore, bible-teaching schools are rewriting the bible to conform to their own ideologies. The only thing that remains is a trigger that will start a new reformation in the 21st century churches. Religious movements, Catholicism, Christianity, English reformation, and Protestant reformation played a key part in shaping religion in Early England and even in current times.

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