

Local responses to the english reformation essay



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Robert Whiting presented a brief historical background of the English Reformation. His historical background had generally two functions. First, it would serve as the focal point or framework of his main arguments.

And, it would function as a sort of validating theme for future researches on the English Reformation. At first glance, his historical background appeared to be in congruence with official history; that is, history accepted and validated by the scientific community. However, once the reader finished evaluating his main points in the book, facts would emerge that seemed to contradict official history. The contradiction though, appeared minor and to some extent insignificant to alter the history of the English Reformation. Historical Background In 1527, Henry VIII had become obsessed with the necessity of putting aside his wife, Catherine of Aragon, the younger daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. In lieu of his objective, he sent a special request to the Roman See asking the Pope to review Henry's marriage to Catherine.

The pope refused to grant the request on the ground that Henry's marriage with Catherine was valid and binding. Unable to persuade the Pope to grant marriage dissolution, he asked numerous universities in Europe for their opinions upon the merits of the 'divorce' matter. The replies though were inconclusive. In 1530, he declared himself as the 'supreme head of the Church in England.

'The parliament approved of Henry's act since it would increase the coffers of the kingdom and temporarily relieve the former's tax burdens. The final break with Rome was imminent. Catholics who refused to acknowledge the

king as the head of the Church of England (or those who refused to take the Oath of Supremacy) were executed. Several important people like Thomas More and Bishop Fisher of Rochester were beheaded. The abolition of the monasteries followed suit. Many elements of the old faith were kept by Henry (through the parliament).

Edward VI continued his father's policy and expanded the new religion to all regions of England. This was slightly reversed by the succession of Mary, Henry's Catholic daughter to Catherine of Aragon. Mary, known in history as 'Bloody Mary' attempted to restore Catholicism in England. She married a Spaniard and executed more than 300 heretics.

With the people on the verge of unrest, she died. Her sister, Elizabeth, became the next queen of England. During her reign, Anglicanism was firmly grounded in country. Main Points of the Book Some of the book's main points were purely drawn from official history. The more important points were essentially created through a systematic and empirical analysis of facts. Here were the main points in Whiting's book: 1) In the first stage of the English Reformation, traditional Catholics exhibited strong resistance; 2) Common people aligned with the crown were either supportive or indifferent toward the new system; 3) In the second stage of the Reformation, all ties to the Papacy were cut.

The English people were forced to believe that by law, the papacy had no religious jurisdiction over the English Church. Local responses varied as both traditional Catholics and the new converts fought for supremacy (in the case of Catholics, survival). Whiting also presented points that were based on

empirical findings. Here were as follows: 1) There was no evidence to indicate that during the reign of Queen Mary, the Anglicans accepted leniently Catholicism to avoid persecution; 2) And, there was an essential change in the doctrines and practices of the Church of England (which fully separated it from the Roman Church; 3) Thus, English Protestants acted more provocative than Catholics in any time of the English Reformation (especially in the reign of Mary). Methods Two primary methods were used to validate the author's points.

The use of secondary data was obvious in proving the first three points of his thesis. The use of biographies and written narratives were essentially salient in constructing his other points. This second method, by conventional standard, was used to measure the perception of the English people to the English Reformation. Parish records were gathered from all parts of England to assail the impact of the Reformation during the reigns of Mary and Elizabeth. Issues and Assessment To a layman, Whiting's book seems to be an ordinary historical narrative which aims to prove that the impact of the English Reformation to selected sectors of the English society varied.

This is generally a correct observation. Notwithstanding the lack of dialectics or even constructive diabolism in the book, the book was lacking in two respects. First, it did not enumerate possibilities (which is common in assessing the validity of any hypothetical assertion. Second, the author failed to systematically prove his main points, probable because the thesis was unclear from the beginning.