

# [The primary motive for the dissolution of the monasteries was financial essay](https://assignbuster.com/the-primary-motive-for-the-dissolution-of-the-monasteries-was-financial-essay/)

In 1538 Henry began the dissolution of the monasteries. He did it under the pretexts of their being either unprofitable or corrupt, but it is widely held that there were other reasons for the policy, especially as Henry stood to benefit from it. Firstly, there was a financial motive.

Henry had fought wars which he could not afford and the Royal coffers were running low. The monasteries had money in abundance, both in actual currency and in land. One school of thought, therefore, suggests that Henry dissolved the monasteries in order to tap their wealth. However, there are other reasons that cannot be ignored. It is no coincidence that at the same time as the dissolution Henry was in a legal battle with Rome over the legality of the Papal dispensation allowing him to marry Catherine of Aragon.

By dissolving the monasteries, Henry stood to put pressure on opposition to his cause, and hasten the decision which he hoped would eventually come in his favour. As Henry battled with Rome, it became apparent that despite being king, he did not have complete sovereignty in his own country. Being an extremely proud man, this would not have agreed with Henry, so it is arguable that the dissolution was an effort to impose his authority on the Church. Having considered the above reasons it is logical to reject the statement, “ the primary motive for the dissolution of the monasteries was financial.

” Although finance was one of several important causes, it is not sufficiently more important than other causes to merit being called the primary cause. Indeed, the divorce case was more significant in that it was a trigger event, causing Henry to act more quickly than he would normally have done – although the money was running low, it was not at a critical point. It cannot be disputed that money was a key cause of the dissolution. However, it is not logical to state that it was the sole cause, as the financial situation was not so critical as to make the policy imperative.

This is why Henry was able to take his time and dissolve the monasteries piecemeal, serving his plan of putting gradual pressure on Rome, rather than dissolving them all at once and acquiring more money in one go. Sectarian Catholic historians argue that although the Crown was not desperate for money, the protagonists were motivated by greed. Randell states “[Catholic historians] were able to present evidence that both Henry VIII and Cromwell were motivated by greed in their decision to destroy the monasteries. In particular, they took great pleasure in drawing attention to the fact that Thomas Cromwell made a conscious effort to enrich himself at the monasteries’ expense. ” However, it should be noted that like all sectarian sources, Catholic writers from this period of time were not reliable sources as they rejected objectivity in favour of defending a position to which people of their faith would traditionally subscribe. Another cause was the corruption of the monasteries and their straying from Benedictine values.

As prayer became a commodity, the monasteries became very rich and poverty vows were forsaken. This ties in with the financial causes as it was the monasteries’ source of wealth. As a devout Catholic, it displeased Henry to see this corruption. Protestant sectarian writers cite this as a key reason. They observed the expenditure of the monasteries and looked at the spread of wealth within them.

From this, they concluded that Henry had dissolved them because of their corruption. However, they don’t consider that Henry could have disliked corruption not because of the associated spiritual issues but because it was an easily tappable source of income both personally and for the Crown. It is impossible to conclude, therefore, whether corruption constitutes a spiritual or financial reason to dissolve the monasteries. Since there is good evidence on both sides, it appears that it would be both a financial and religious cause, and so was a key cause. In addition to this it gave Henry a highly valid reason to dissolve the monasteries, notwithstanding his real, less valid, motives.

A key reason for the dissolution was the legal battle between the Crown and Rome. It is no coincidence that the dissolution of the monasteries took place at the same time, and as such it can be regarded as the trigger event. Despite this, it can still be argued that finance was the main reason to dissolve the monasteries, as it would have been necessary to sustain Henry’s policies. Therefore, the legal battle can be regarded as the reason for the timing of the event, but as only a secondary cause for the policy itself. What can be concluded from this is somewhat ambiguous.

It is impossible to tell Henry’s exact motives for reformation, as his personality makes several ideas possible. Firstly, as a devout Christian he would have been angered by the decline of Benedictine values at the hands of many monasteries. However, he was also a shrewd man, and neither of the key advisors involved – Wolsey or Cromwell – were adverse to personal luxury. This makes financial motivation seem similarly likely. Because there is no conclusive evidence to suggest that the main motivation was financial, the statement has to be rejected.