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ELIZABETH'S CONSOLIDATION AND UNIFORMATION OF THE CHURCH OF
ENGLAND

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Upon the death of Mary I, Elizabeth Tudor went from illegitimate child to heir of Henry VIII. Hers is a remarkable journey that turned her from a captive in the Tower of London to one of England's longest-reigning monarchs. Even more remarkable is how she and parliament reformed the Anglican Church to legitimize her reign. With threats from both within and outside Britain, including the Pope, France, Scotland, and religious extremists, uniting England under one church was a crucial step for Elizabeth to solidify her claim to the throne. It is critical to note that, unlike the Edwardian reformation led by then-Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, Elizabeth's motivation for reformation was purely political. Accordingly, "external conformity of behavior was of much greater concern to the state than religious opinion."[1] Therefore, Elizabeth I used her first months in office to draft a uniform religion for England that would keep her political opponents at bay.

Some of these religious and political opponents included the pope, France, Scotland, and to a minor degree, Spain. To start, papal authority posed a challenge to Elizabeth's legitimacy as monarch.

Pope Paul IV, famous for his intolerance of heresy, started with a diplomatic means of trying to persuade the Protestant queen to marry a Catholic monarch; this way, England would continue Queen Mary I's Catholic regime, and maintain Rome's influence over Britain.[2] Initially, upon hearing of Elizabeth's succession, the pope made a list of demands that included

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1. Kirby, WJ Torrance, 2006, "Lay supremacy: reform of the canon law of England from Henry VIII to Elizabeth I (1529-1571)," *Reformation and the Renaissance Review* 8, no. 3: 363, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials,* EBSCOhost (accessed October 17, 2016).

2. Booth, Ted W., 2014, "Elizabeth and Pope Paul IV: reticence and Reformation," *Church History And Religious Culture (Online)* 94, no. 3: 317, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials,* EBSCOhost (accessed October 17, 2016).

Elizabeth's submission of England to his divine authority; if she did not comply, Rome would continue to see her as Anne Boleyn's illegitimate child, without claim to the throne.[3]

In dealing with the pope's demands, Elizabeth first sent an ambassador to Rome to buy her time—time to work with Parliament to secure a religious settlement independent of Rome's influence.[4] Aware that her actions of confiscating monastery money, and destroying Catholic church images would warrant her excommunication, Elizabeth showed shrewdness in her timing of diplomacy to Rome as a time-buying ploy.[5]

Eventually, she was able to pass the Acts of Supremacy and of Uniformity in 1559 right under the pope's nose; however, the pope held out hope that England could be re-Catholicized with a possible marriage between Elizabeth and the Holy Roman Emperor's son, so he did not excommunicate her before his death in 1559.[6] Because Elizabeth kept her European counterparts guessing as to her marriage, strategically sent diplomats to Rome to buy her time, and negotiated temporary peace with several threatening Catholic countries, she put the Pope in a place of inaction long enough to set her religious policy into motion.

France and Scotland

Since Mary I's health declined, France planned to put Mary Queen of Scots on England's throne. In her wedding to Francis II of France, Mary Stewart was effectively declared queen of England, Scotland, and France, as the then-king of France and her father-in-law, Henry II, placed

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3. Ibid., 319.

4. Ibid., 321-322.

5. Ibid., 319.

6. Ibid., 333.

the arms of all three countries under her portrait[7]. In this way, not only would England be brought back under Catholic control, but would also belong to France. To counter this threat, Elizabeth and her advisors fortified the Scottish border against French invasion, demanded French Calais back under English control, and made outward appearances of peace with France.[8] France, in return, sent ambassadors to Rome to urge the Pope to declare Elizabeth illegitimate and Mary Stewart legitimate queen of England through her ties to Henry VII of England.

Questioning Elizabeth's divine right effectively declared war, but Elizabeth chose to negotiate a peace with both Catholic Scotland and France in *Cateau Cambreisis*, on April 3, 1559, sidestepping the Pope's influence once again.[9] With Sir William Cecil leading her Privy Council, and Sir Francis Walsingham in charge of her intelligence network throughout Europe, Elizabeth was able to negotiate this treaty. Through her intelligence connections in Scotland, Elizabeth knew that gaining other Protestant pockets of support within the two countries would only be possible if she reformed England; in this way, she could rely on these Protestant supporters abroad to counter potential attacks from Scotland and France[10]. Protestant support was Elizabeth's strong point in convincing France and Scotland to make peace in the beginning years of her reign.[11] Ultimately, Cecil's genius political undermining of the Scottish monarchy would lead to peace between England and Scotland in the Treaty of Edinburgh (1960), but the initial

7. Ibid., 323.

8. Ibid., 323.

9. Ibid., 329.

10. Hughes, Phillip, *The Reformation in England*, 5th ed. Vol. 3, (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 8.

11. Ibid., 8.

Protestant support abroad for a Protestant queen was essential to warding off foreign threats in the first twelve months of Elizabeth's reign.[12]

Catholics within England and Scotland

With so many Catholic forces working abroad to end her reign, Elizabeth also had English Catholics looking to overthrow her and put the both legitimate and Catholic Queen Mary of Scots on the throne.

Toward the end of 1558, Elizabeth ordered that Catholic preaching was specifically limited to the Gospels and the Ten Commandments. Worship was restricted to the Lord's Prayer and Creeds in the English tongue.[13] The intent of this injunction was to stave off priest-led uprisings until her parliament could enact religious reform to unify the country.

In addition to Catholic opponents, some Protestants also challenged Elizabeth's reform laws. While Edward VI's reformation had been orchestrated by influences from Strasburg and Zurich, two "cities on the hill" in Christendom, Elizabeth's reformation was much less appealing to Protestants exiled during Mary I's reign, who returned from exile expecting the Protestant queen to make radical reforms favoring their religion.[14] Some clergy exiled in Zurich were given major dioceses; they made demands of the Queen to not allow major theological freedom to Catholics or show a state endorsement of Lutheranism.[15] This was mainly because the clergy,

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12. Ibid., 10.

13. Booth, 331.

14. Fincham, Kenneth, and Peter Lake, eds. *Religious Politics in Post-Reformation England*, (Woodbridge, Suffolk, United Kingdom, The Boydell Press, 2006), 44.

15. Ibid., 52-53.

especially Richard Cox and Edmund Grindal, were in communication with Zurich leaders and hoped to form London into another city on a hill. Geneva leadership had the same idea, but because of their deplorable association with John Knox, the Scottish reformer, and his sexism toward female leaders, Elizabeth rejected their attempts to influence her reforms[16].

Puritans, after reviewing Elizabethan reforms, were dissatisfied and wanted to take the reformation a step further to purge the Anglican Church of all traces of Roman Catholicism. Specifically, they took issue with those allowances made to clergy to wear vestments and ornaments evocative of Catholicism.[17] But, as with her other religious challenges, Elizabeth saw the Puritans as a threat to her political power, albeit a minor one; they would not accept the acts which she and her counselors established to secure her throne.[18] In 1574 through 1576, she prevented the Puritans from gathering and prophesying, again utilizing her monarchy to control England's religion and strengthen her throne.[19]

Although the tactics mentioned above gave Elizabeth some advantage over her enemies, it was the 1959 religious settlement that was the most effective in solidifying her reign. As mentioned before, Elizabeth was not concerned with transforming England into an idealized, uniform Protestant society like Geneva or Zurich; rather, she and her council were more interested in "ensuring the conformity of 'all manner of canons, constitutions, and ordinances…

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16. Ibid., 52-53.

17. Kirby, 364.

18. Fincham, 54.

19. Ibid., 56.

with the Royal Supremacy."[20] In fact, requiring an oath of loyalty to the Supreme Governor of the Church of England, and standardizing church practices (not making spiritual demands like Edward IV and Mary I) were key steps Elizabeth took to securing loyalty to her monarchy. Catholics and Anglican bishops alike opposed the proposal that the Queen, being a woman, should take the place of Biblical Peter and succeeding popes to become "Supreme Head on earth of the Church of Christ in England". To avert this possibility of "domestic trouble" as well as to appease the bishops, who had all voted against every reform since Elizabeth's coronation, the title was changed to "Supreme Governor", emphasizing her political authority to, "exercise any spiritual or ecclesiastical jurisdictions" that belonged to her.[21] The oath of loyalty also required all clergymen and statesmen to swear fealty to the Supreme Governor.[22] This act, along with the reinstated Act of Uniformity, ensured that the Queen was protected from religious threats of Rome, Catholic nations, and dissenters within the Anglican Church.

Modelled after Edward VI's original law, the Act of Uniformity standardized the Anglican Church's liturgies, prayer book, and communion in order to allow the most people salvation and to achieve common ground between the supreme state and subordinate clergy.[23] It also, paradoxically, reduced ambiguity in church practices by dictating exactly what every congregation should say during church, while allowing for relatively broad interpretations within those wordings to reduce conflicts of the spiritual nature between clergy and the state. In the

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20. Kirby, 356.

21. Fincham, 30.

22. Ibid., 31.

23. Ibid., 32.

essential, Elizabeth's government demanded uniformity, but in the nonessential minute details of the faith, they allowed flexibility to preserve some religious peace.

In creating the Act of Uniformity, Elizabeth's council eliminated many previous church practices as being "too burdensome" and "abused"; but to maintain peace, leeway was given to more traditional clergy, who used some Romanesque vestments and ceremonies to "[retain] discipline and order".[24] Overall, the prayer book passed in parliament easily, as it was simply a more conservative form of Thomas Cranmer's 1552 version used during Edward VI's short reign[25]. In an effort to compromise, though, saints' days were included, anti-papal prayers discontinued, and allowance of more ornate vestments were made to partially appease English Catholics. Elizabeth's political power came from her relatively ambiguous wording that allowed flexibility for interpretation within a very uniform set of prayers, baptism, marriage, and funeral liturgies.[26] For example, the wording of the Communion confirmed the "real presence" of Christ, allowing for a broad interpretation that allowed both consubstantiation and transubstantiation.[27] It is in this paradox of ambiguity allowing for relative freedom of worship and specific uniformity concerning preaching that Elizabeth was able to pull Anglicanism together under one common liturgy with some placating flexibility.

Although many criticized the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity as theologically questionable, Elizabeth's parliament was able to pass both, which proved effective in bringing

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24. Cressy, David and Lori Anne Ferrell, *Religion and Society in Early Modern England*, (New York: Routledge, 1996), 43-44.

25. Ibid., 40.

26. Ibid., 48-56.

27. Hughes, 32.

relative stability to England. After decades of religious and political turmoil, Elizabeth managed to execute policies both domestic and abroad which gave England the solidity of a strong monarch amongst imminent threats from Europe and within the country. In the end, Elizabeth needed to enact Protestant reforms not for the sake of her people's spirituality, but for the sake of her own legitimacy as queen.

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