

---

## SIGNIFICANT CHANGE THROUGHOUT THE TUDOR REIGN?

---

Lisa J. Wiswell\*

During the Tudor period, England underwent immense change. Many of these changes occurred in the earlier part of the 16th century, however, in order to stave off further disaster for the Tudors, they were consolidated under the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. The changes in politics, religion and society were instrumental in creating an “early modern state” and nationalism in England. In fact, she did not solve any of the problems that she inherited. Instead, she passed them to the Stuarts as Henry, Edward, and Mary had passed them to her. Ultimately, the impending problems led to the revolution in the 17th century. To understand the extent to which Elizabeth’s reign consolidated changes in religion, politics, and society, we must first look at how England was prior to the changes.

When Henry VII defeated Richard III in 1485, during the War of the Roses at Bosworth, England was full of problems and disorder.<sup>1</sup> There was no standing army or police force, and the kingdom was full of crime. At this time, there was no central government, sovereignty, or bureaucracy. Instead, the people that aided the king in running the country ran his household as well. This was called a household government.<sup>2</sup> The members of the “government” were servants to Henry as well, thus, they were continually moving from castle to castle with the king. There was no set pay, and bribery was often prevalent among administrative officers. This household government and the old set of institutions was employed under Henry VII and under the first half of Henry VIII’s reign, while Cardinal Wolsey served as Lord Chancellor, the most powerful man in England.<sup>3</sup> By the 1530s, Thomas Cromwell, replacing Cardinal Wolsey, came to power and renovated the medieval institutions, creating what Elton called the Tudor Revolution.

---

\* Lisa Wiswell is a senior majoring in history. She is an Elman Scholar recipient, and the Ralph Ketcham Prize recipient for combined academic excellence in history and contribution to the life of the history department. Her main concentration is modern American history, however, she became interested in English history while taking a class with Professor Chris Kyle and continued to study the Tudor period under Professor Joseph Levine, for which this paper was written. Lisa plans continue to pursue her interest in history after graduation, and hopes to teach high school American history in the future.

<sup>1</sup> G.R. Elton, *England Under the Tudors*, 3rd Edition (New York: Routledge, 1991) 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>3</sup> George, Cavendish, “The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey” in *Two Early Tudor Lives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962) 18.

In only “eight years he [Cromwell] engineered one of the few successful revolutions in English history, and he achieved this without upsetting the body politic.”<sup>4</sup>

According to Elton, the institutional changes profoundly affected the constitution of government leading to the creation of the early modern state and nationalism in England. National sovereignty was the most important ingredient of this revolution. The 1533 Act of Appeals determined that “England is an independent state, sovereign within its territorial limits.”<sup>6</sup> Another ingredient of the Tudor revolution, as defined by Elton, included the royal supremacy over the Church, ultimately replacing the Pope in England with the King, asserting that Henry VIII was the “True Monarchy” in England.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the Act of Supremacy and the creation of the “Supreme Head” title became a religious and secular matter. This act was created by parliamentary statute, establishing a precedent that Henry’s children would follow. Although Henry was the king and could enforce his will authoritatively, he chose to involve the Parliament, namely the House of Commons, “in order to make acceptance of the changes easier and advertise the unquestioned unity of king and people.”<sup>8</sup> Parliament legitimized the reformation.

Cromwell also made administrative reforms. He “took over a government dominated by that revival of household methods which had been Henry VII’s great achievement. But the polity which Cromwell envisioned, and largely achieved, needed national government.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, Cromwell was responsible for establishing a working bureaucracy in order to create institutions that were able to function independent of the monarchy (although this did not occur under Tudors).<sup>10</sup> He was also responsible for setting up new agencies of finance and revenue courts, secretarial departments, the Privy Council, and the central government. Under the new administrative reforms, the people that worked in this bureaucracy were salaried (meaning paid regularly, which cut back on bribery) and their job was in a fixed location. The central government was located at Westminster, thus, bureaucrats no longer were required to travel from castle to castle with the royal family. The changes in English government created by this Tudor revolution were indeed, the commencement of the early modern state in England.

When Henry VIII inherited the throne, England was still a Roman Catholic state. Cardinal Wolsey ran the government under Henry and exercised supreme authority of the

<sup>4</sup> Elton, 159.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 180-1.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 182-3.

church as well.<sup>12</sup> According to George Cavendish, Wolsey being made chancellor endowed him “with the promotion of an archbishop and cardinal, legate also *de latere*, thought himself fully furnished with such authorities and dignities that he was able to surmount.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, Wolsey held great power in England, yet he became too greedy and epitomized the anti-clerical sentiment of Englishmen during the Tudor period. Elton argued that “Wolsey combined the powers of both king and pope...he revived the laity’s dislike of a foreign potentates pretensions.”<sup>14</sup> This dislike was because “no Englishmen in an age when temporal nationalism first became a fully realized doctrine wanted to see an Italian prince interfere in their affairs.”<sup>15</sup> Englishmen saw all that Wolsey was arrogant, extravagant and ostentatious and anti-clericalism grew.<sup>16</sup> In *Utopia*, Thomas More, perhaps analyzing ecclesiastical lavishness in England, explained that Utopians “by every means in their power they make gold and silver a mark of ill fame.”<sup>17</sup> He said that clergy and aristocrats were generally lazy, and wasteful in their extravagance.<sup>18</sup> This atmosphere contributed to the anti-clerical sentiment in England during the Tudor period. Along with English anti-clericalism, Henry also had personal reasons to break with Rome. Henry needed the papacy to grant him a divorce from his first wife, Catherine of Aragon. After years of refusal, Henry sought alternative ways to achieve his will, in which he believed he was right and just.<sup>19</sup> Backed with the strong dislike for clergy and foreign interference in English affairs, Henry began his attack on the papacy. By doing so, Henry needed to dispose of Cardinal Wolsey and appoint an able secular man who could navigate through these problems and solve the religious matters in England.<sup>20</sup> In 1531, Henry found Thomas Cromwell.

Cromwell was successful in evicting the pope from England, securing the divorce and, most importantly, creating an English nation and early modern state, reconstructing the body politic.<sup>21</sup> This caused a series of statutes authorized by parliament, granting the English Monarch supreme authority over church *and* state. In the Act of Appeals of 1533, Henry established the: “realm of England is an empire, and so hath been accepted in the world, governed by one supreme head and king having the dignity and royal estate of the imperial crown of the same...he being also institute and furnished by the goodness and sufferance of Almighty God with plenary, whole and entire power.”<sup>22</sup> In the Supreme Head

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>13</sup> Cavendish, 18.

<sup>14</sup> Elton, 109.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas More, *Utopia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964) 86.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 71-2.

<sup>19</sup> Elton, 114.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 129.

<sup>22</sup> *Statutes of the Realm*, 344.

Statute of 1534, the Monarch is able to reform the church and is “the only Supreme Head in earth of the Church of England called *Anglicana Ecclesia*.”<sup>23</sup> Therefore, parliamentary statute established King Henry as Supreme Head of the Church and the State, designated by God. Finally, an act requiring an Oath of Allegiance to the Monarchy and Church of England by all church and state officials, all landowners, and all members of the universities was implemented.<sup>24</sup>

Between these acts, in 1533, Thomas Cranmer was appointed in order to lead the English Church away from Rome and declaring Henry’s marriage to Catherine void.<sup>25</sup> In 1539, the Six Articles Act, embodying orthodoxy and full catholic doctrine, in which Henry favored, such as “transubstantiation, the need for auricular confession, the sanctity of monastic vows, communion under one kind only, the justness of private masses, and the illegality of clerical marriage” however, it was never fully operative while Cromwell was in office.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, “the establishment of the royal supremacy and the creation of the Church of England are fundamental breaks with the past, giving the English Church a new unity, a new organization, new authorities under God, though not as yet a new doctrine. It was a jurisdictional revolution in the church, not a religious revolution.”<sup>27</sup> However, when Henry’s 9-year-old son, Edward VI, became King in January 1547, a religious revolution was soon to approach.<sup>28</sup>

Edward’s uncle, the earl of Hertford was appointed as Protector of the realm and Duke of Somerset after Henry’s death.<sup>29</sup> Just as Wolsey and Cromwell ran the realm for Henry, Edward’s Lord Protectors ran England once again. Under the Protestant Protector Somerset, further radical religious changes in England were made creating the Protestant Reformation. The first reform in religious doctrine culminated in the *Edwardian Prayer Book* of 1549. The prayer book was a gradual approach to Protestantism from Henry’s new Anglo-Catholic Church. Perhaps its abolishment of many sacraments and ceremonies was its most lasting and efficient effect. Faith only, or the belief of Luther that faith in God and His written word was the only necessity for salvation, required the eradication of ostentatious Catholic ceremonies. These ceremonies, like Wolsey, were seen as lavish and wasteful. The cause of the abolishment of “certyn Ceremonies was, that thei were so far abused, partly by the superstitious blyndness of the rude and unlearned, and partly by the unsociable auarice of such as sought more their own lucre, than the glory of God.”<sup>30</sup> The Church of England, following Lutheran doctrine, abolished every sacrament (penance, confirmation, orders, marriage, and last rites) except baptism and communion. Luther kept these because

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 364.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 367.

<sup>25</sup> Elton, 132-3.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 165.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 202.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 203.

<sup>30</sup> *The Edwardian Prayer Book*, 325.

although no sacrament could get you into heaven, these two were useful for commemoration and were observed in the Bible.

Prior to the Protestant Reformation, Church service was in Latin, meaning most people could not understand, “so they heard with their eares onely; and their heartes, spirite, and mynde, have not been edified thereby.”<sup>31</sup> To remedy this, the Edwardian prayer book demanded, “All thynges shalbe read and songe in the Churche in the Englyshe tongue, to the ende that the congregacion maye be thereby edified.”<sup>32</sup> Since the Protestant claim that faith *only* will save a person’s soul, they must understand scripture in their own language. This also contributed to English nationalism. One common language (Latin was not necessary unless you were a member of the upper class and valued a humanist education) now consecrated by one uniform religion meant that all Englishmen had fundamental commonalities.

In order to enforce the prayer book, the Act of Uniformity made it the only legal form of worship. However, questions remained as to which sect of Protestantism to follow. Therefore, in 1553, Thomas Cranmer produced a statement of faith for the English church by writing his Forty-Two Articles. These articles were a compromise between Lutheran and Calvinist creeds.<sup>33</sup> It was a reaction to the Six Articles written in 1539 under Henry VIII embodying Catholic doctrine.<sup>34</sup> The Forty-Two Articles, however, would not have time to come into effect. Edward VI died in 1553 and because of Henry’s 1543 Act of Succession, his staunchly Catholic daughter, Mary, would become Queen.<sup>35</sup> The Prayer Book of 1552 and the Forty-Two Articles of 1553 were instrumental in the Protestant Reformation in England; however, it needed much more time in order to create a solid Protestant foundation in England.<sup>36</sup> Instead, the religious crisis in England became much graver under Queen Mary.

When Mary came to the throne in 1553, she sought to undo all that her brother and father had done that moved away from the Roman church. She did this by her father’s precedent of using parliament to achieve her goals. According to Elton, “Mary’s own single ambition was to restore England to the papal obedience, to save – as she saw it – her country from mortal sin.”<sup>37</sup> Mary felt compelled to turn to parliament because her brother and father had and because “she and everybody knew...any attempt to declare the Henrican and Edwardian legislation null and void – which since it contravened canon law, Mary adjudged it to be – without giving parliament a chance to safeguard the interest of the new owners would lead to rebellion.”<sup>38</sup> The first parliament in October 1553 derived that the religious situa-

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 321.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 323.

<sup>33</sup> Elton, 212.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 213.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 212.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 215.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 216.

tion could return to the end of Henry VIII's reign but the state would not get involved with the enforcement of Catholic orthodoxy.<sup>39</sup> While parliament was willing to give the queen most of her requests, they refused to return Church lands and restore the monasteries that were dissolved under the Tudor Revolution because it made many members of the House of Commons wealthy land owners and members of the gentry class.<sup>40</sup>

Mary felt desperate. She sought the aid of other rigorous Catholics and soon after married Philip II, son of the King of Spain and Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. The marriage created a solid Spanish-English alliance.<sup>41</sup> While this marriage was not a happy one for Mary and produced no heir to the throne, for a brief time, it ended the problem of whether to side with Spain or France after a struggling war on the continent.<sup>42</sup>

Mary had Papal Legate, Reginald Pole, come to England to aid the restoration of Roman Catholicism. Parliament met again in November 1554 and agreed to repeal all the anti-papal and anti-ecclesiastical legislation passed since Cromwell came to power under her father.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, old heresy laws were reenacted and new treason laws were passed. Many Protestants fell victim to these laws during Mary's reign. While some fled from England to avoid persecution, hundreds of others were burned at the stake. John Foxe illustrated these horrors in his *Acts and Monuments, the Book of Martyrs*, highlighting two men, Hugh Latimer and Doctor Ridley. Both were members at Oxford and tried for treason. They were found guilty of protesting that the Eucharist was not "Christes body and bloud is not in the sacrament under the formes of bread and wyne."<sup>44</sup> Because Latimer and Ridley would not conform to Mary's doctrine, they ultimately were burned at the stake, as many others were under the reign of Bloody Mary. They remained martyrs for their Protestant cause and were instrumental in creating further anti-Catholicism in England.<sup>45</sup>

By October 1555, parliament grew resentful of Mary's persecutions, thus, she would not be able to make any more headway in returning England to a Roman Catholic state. By 1557, France and Spain were at war again, and Mary sent English troops and finances to aid her husband's efforts.<sup>46</sup> Englishmen disapproved and soon after, they began to see Spain rather than France as the national enemy.<sup>47</sup> Mary died in November 1558, after only five years on the throne. Henry's last heir, Elizabeth, would be next to inherit the throne. Along

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 217.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 217.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 215.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 215.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 219.

<sup>44</sup> John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments, the Book of Martyrs*, 442.

<sup>45</sup> Elton, 220.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 222.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 223.

with it, however, she would inherit every problem conceivable in England and needed to consolidate an array of problems created by Henry VII, Henry VIII, Edward and Mary as discussed above.

The immediate problem Elizabeth needed to solve was that of religion. The last two reigns had not lasted long enough to create any solid religious foundations, however, Elizabeth's reign of 45 years was long enough for the changes she made to stay intact. Her concern was not for which religion England would take up, it was for loyalty from people in her realm, regardless of their own personal beliefs.<sup>48</sup> For this reason, Elizabeth stalled making decisions, because she did not want to alienate any group or else she risked revolt.

From the beginning, it was clear England would not remain Catholic. The stain of Protestant blood under Mary was still fresh, and Elizabeth had a responsibility to compensate for it.<sup>49</sup> Thus, she decided to gradually drift away from Rome (she herself was not excommunicated until 1570).<sup>50</sup> She had to work with parliament if any of the Elizabethan settlement was "to be constitutional and enforceable, and parliament was now a much less manageable ally."<sup>51</sup> However, Elizabeth chose loyal and able men to counsel her, such as Matthew Parker, new Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, and William Cecil. While there was great opposition in parliament between the radical Calvinists and the Catholics, with the aid of these men, Elizabeth was successful in navigating through the opposition.

Following her father's precedent, Elizabeth's first move was to draw up a new Act of Supremacy in 1558-9 making her Head (but not governor as Henry had been) of the Church. The Act of Supremacy gave Elizabeth the power and jurisdiction "as by any spiritual or ecclesiastical power or authority hath heretofore been...exercised."<sup>52</sup> This made Queen Elizabeth essentially the Pope in England and created the new Anglican Church. The second statute was the Act of Uniformity in which Parker modified the Edwardian Prayer Book to determine the legal form of doctrine for the Anglican Church.<sup>53</sup> The Elizabethan settlement, then, "created a Church Protestant in doctrine, traditional in organization, and subject not to a lay pope but to the queen-governor in parliament."<sup>54</sup> Next, parliament required an Oath of Supremacy; however, those that would not take it were treated with great leniency because as long as Englishmen were loyal to the government, Elizabeth was unconcerned with their religious beliefs. Less than three hundred of eight thousand beneficed clergy were actually deprived during her reign.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 264.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 265.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph Levine, *Elizabeth I: Great Lives Observed*, (Prentice-Hall, Inc: Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1969) 79.

<sup>51</sup> Elton, 269.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 274.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 274.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 275.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 276.

The puritans in parliament tried to make the Prayer Book and the settlement more radical because they believed it was still too Catholic.<sup>56</sup> In 1563, the Thirty-Nine Articles, a modification of Cranmer's Forty-Two Articles during the reign of Edward VI, were passed "Although they were closely related in both text and spirit to the Edwardian Forty-Two Articles, many changes distinguish the two statements of doctrine."<sup>57</sup> An act of parliament in 1571 made it mandatory to subscribe to the articles. The articles were Protestant, saying that "the articles of the Church of *England* do contain the true Doctrine of the Church of *England* agreeable to God's Word: which We do therefore ratify and confirm, requiring of all our loving subjects to continue in the uniform profession thereof."<sup>58</sup> However, the puritans in parliament thought they were not protestant enough, because they were Lutheran rather than Calvinist.<sup>59</sup>

The creation of the Anglican Church was justified with historical evidence that the English Church had always been an Apostolic Church, thus, not a Roman Church. Archbishop Parker examined the Anglo-Saxon Church and determined that it was not a Papal Church, thus, England had always rejected the papal church, providing Elizabeth with historical justification to create an Anglican Church and the break with Rome. Elizabeth then issued a Declaration stating that "it remaineth further to be considered...what we have done...in the profession of Christian Religion...and in this part we would it were indifferently understood, that...we know no other authority, either given or used by us, as Queen and governor of this realm, than hath been by the law of God and this realm always due to our progenitors, sovereigns, and kings of the same."<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth set up a historical argument justifying to the Catholics and puritans in parliament that she would not make any further concessions to either side.

While some Englishmen were divided on personal religious beliefs, by the war with Spain in 1585, they were bound by their English patriotism and nationalism. Spain declared war on England because "as the king of Spain grew older he changed from a politician to a fanatic: the cause of the Church began to dominate all his plans."<sup>61</sup> Aligned with the papacy, Philip II went to war with England because of their rejection of Rome. By 1587, Spain launched an attack. Both sides carried insufficient ammunition and less than fifty effective fighting ships.<sup>62</sup> At the battle of Gravelines, the Spanish Armada was virtually destroyed. This was seen as an act of divine intervention for the English. Since they were grossly unprepared, and weaker than the Spanish, they believed that God had created the storms that

<sup>56</sup> Elton, 289.

<sup>57</sup> "The Thirty-Nine Articles" (as published and annotated in *The Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America*, 1979. (The 1979 version indicates the text of the 1571, 1662 version) 678.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 679.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 678.

<sup>60</sup> Levine, 75.

<sup>61</sup> Elton, 367.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 373.



destroyed the Armada, creating the legend that, “et dissipate sunt: God blew and they were scattered.”<sup>63</sup> Nationalism began to grow under King Henry, especially after the dedication of the “New Years Gift” by John Leland to write histories of the ancient people of England, and for the first time to create a map, giving Englishmen a sense of history and geography.<sup>64</sup> However, the creation of an English Bible and the patriotism gained from the war with Spain under Queen Elizabeth were instrumental in creating English nationalism, as well.

The fundamental changes in politics and religion led England into an early modern state. However, this was not a solid transformation into the sovereign, bureaucratic state we recognize today. Elizabeth accepted Cromwell’s changes in government and consolidated them so that there were specific departments of state, one fixed location at Westminster, and bureaucrats were paid by the crown. The government, however, was still limited. By law, “the militia could not be compelled to serve overseas,” thus, there was still no standing army.<sup>65</sup> While there was the North Council and the Council of Wales to bring some order to the far-reaching corners of England and Scotland, there was no effective police force in 16th-Century England. The monarch was unable to rule effectively and help bring lawfulness throughout the country. The judicial process was faulty too. Defendants were treated as guilty until proven innocent. There was little freedom of speech permitted in the country, and especially in parliament. In 1576, a puritan member of the House of Commons gave a speech about parliamentary privilege vs. the prerogative of the Crown, and puritan frustration of the Queen’s unwillingness to listen to their pleas for a greater Protestant state. Furious at this blatant attack against Elizabeth, Peter Westworth was sentenced to the Tower of London until parliament dispersed.<sup>66</sup> Thus, this nation and “state,” an invention of the Tudor period, was only a stepping-stone to the modern, sovereign, bureaucratic state we know today.

Elizabeth’s reign of 45 years consolidated the changes made throughout the Tudor period to a certain degree. She was successful in consolidating the changes in religion by creating the Anglican Church and the changes in government by contributing to the creation of the “early modern state” and English nationalism. However, the changes consolidated under Elizabeth did not solve the problems in England. When James and Charles Stuart inherited the throne, they received the same problems Elizabeth and the Tudors had inherited. These problems ultimately led to the 17th-Century Revolution and later the creation of a truly modern state. Yet, it is important to remember that the Tudors were the beginning of this change and although the extent of Elizabeth’s consolidation was small, it was effective in ending the medieval period of England and heading toward a modern state.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 375.

<sup>64</sup> Leland, John. New-Years Gift, xxxviii, xli.

<sup>65</sup> Elton, 359.

<sup>66</sup> Levine, 136.