1 The Origins of the Wars

POINTS TO CONSIDER

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the causes of the crisis that enveloped Charles in 1640, but that is not the same as explaining the causes of war. The crisis created circumstances in which the war became possible, but not necessarily likely and certainly not inevitable. Given that Charles inherited a peaceful kingdom in 1625, it would be easy to assume that he played a major part in its causes, but it is possible that the appearance of tranquility was deceptive, and that tensions and difficulties were already mounting beneath the surface. In reading this chapter you should try to establish a clear picture of the problems that Charles I inherited, and of how his handling of them created a crisis in government in 1640.

1 The Origins of the Crisis

a) The Legacy of the English Reformation

KEY ISSUE In what ways did the Reformation of the 1530s contribute to the development of a crisis between King and Parliament?

Many historians argue that the roots of the seventeenth century crisis lie in the Protestant Reformation that took place in England a century earlier, when King Henry VIII seized control of the Church in England and declared himself to be its head in place of the Pope in Rome. He was able to do this because a German monk named Martin Luther had successfully challenged the Pope's authority in Germany, and Luther's supporters (known as **Protestants**) had carried his ideas to England and other countries. Henry was no Protestant – his interest lay in the power and wealth that he could gain from the Church – but he called on Protestant support and enabled Protestants to gain powerful positions in the new Church of England. This was to have considerable significance for the future. By denying the authority of the Pope, Protestants had to rely on the Bible to provide rules and guidance in religion, and the Bible could be interpreted in different ways. By assuming control of the Church, Henry took on the power, and therefore the responsibility for deciding between competing interpretations, and for enforcing his decisions in matters of conscience.

The Reformation in England is symbolised by three significant events: the Act of Supremacy (1534), the publication of the Bible in

English (1537) and the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536–9. The Act of Supremacy gave Henry VIII supreme power over the doctrine and organisation of the Church. Kings had always been able to influence appointments and call on the help of the Church in government, but Henry now claimed the kind of spiritual authority that allowed him to decide what beliefs were acceptable, and how they should be reflected in the daily services and ceremonies that were to be used. The Act made his power legally enforceable by Act of Parliament, the highest form of law in England. This meant that the King could punish anyone who refused to accept his authority in religion, but it also meant that future monarchs could only change the situation by passing a new Act of Parliament. Therefore, when Henry's son Edward introduced a new Protestant order of service in 1549, and when his daughter Mary tried to restore the authority of the Pope in 1554, they both needed the support of parliaments to make the changes enforceable. By the time Henry's second daughter, Elizabeth, became queen in 1558, there had been a long series of parliamentary settlements involving the Church, royal power, and even the succession to the throne.

The dissolution of the monasteries in 1536–9 transferred most of the wealth of the Church into the hands of the laity (non-clergy). The monasteries had been immensely rich, owning about one-third of all the land in England, and with this land went control of many parish livings and their tithes (a tax of about 10 per cent paid by the people of the parish to provide an income for the local priest or minister). All of this wealth was transferred to the King, but in order to secure the support of the nobility and gentry for the changes that he was making, Henry granted a proportion of it to his servants and supporters. He also sold a great deal of land to pay for his wars against Scotland and France, with the result that much of the monastery land passed into the hands of the nobility, gentry, and even wealthy merchants and farmers who were benefiting from the growth of trade and rising prices. By the end of the sixteenth century the landed gentry of England were more wealthy and numerous than ever before.

They were also better-educated and more important in government than at any previous time. Following the Reformation, the intensely personal and Bible-based Protestant faith spread in England. If knowledge of God came from the Bible rather than the Pope, people wanted to be able to read it for themselves. The spread of grammar schools brought an end to the Church monopoly of education, and widened access to schooling for the laity as a whole. The loss of monks and religious orders meant that royal administration became increasingly reliant on laymen, increasing job opportunities and access to wealth, especially for those with some legal knowledge. To enforce royal authority across the country, the Tudors relied greatly on local magistrates named Justices of the Peace. They were both legal and administrative officials, dealing with such things as licensing ale-houses and upkeep

f roads, as well as combatting minor crime. More and more of the entry were appointed to carry out such duties in each county. lthough the post was unpaid, it carried considerable prestige and an nhanced status in the local community. It was therefore highly rized, and many of the gentry were encouraged to study law and the lassics in order to equip themselves for such a role.

While none of these developments were entirely new (literacy rates ad been rising for some time) there is little doubt that the effects of he Reformation increased and intensified them. The combination of pportunity and incentive encouraged the development of a more umerous, more literate and more articulate class of gentry who hared the responsibility for government with the monarch and the reater nobility, at both local and central levels. Educated at home or n a grammar school, it became customary for them to spend a short eriod at one of the two universities (Oxford and Cambridge) and ater at the Inns of Court [law schools] in London, in order to prepare for their role as managers of land, tenants, law and administraion in the local community. The more ambitious and the more eedy might well extend their studies and pursue a career in law or dministration, but even those who chose not to do so had some knowledge of these areas, and the confidence that came with it. When such men were called, as they periodically were, to attend a parliament and assist the monarch in matters of state, they were certainly capable of expressing their views and offering advice, welcome or not.

In political terms, therefore, the effect of the Reformation in England was to increase the power of both monarch and parliaments. The King had taken control of the Church, becoming the head of government in both Church and State. He claimed to be God's deputy on earth, with sole power over his people. With its office in every parish, the Church represented a vast propaganda machine, its pronouncements backed by the authority of God himself, and it was now entirely at the monarch's disposal. At the same time, however, the changes had been enacted through parliaments. Parliaments represented the nobility and gentry, with a limited input from the merchants and yeomen [independent farmers]. The events of the Reformation and the changes that followed had made parliaments a more necessary part of government, and involved the ruling class across the country in the enactment of momentous changes at the heart of government. A 'political nation' had been forged in the partnership between the monarch and the ruling class, to the benefit of both and at the expense of the Church. However, if the partners were to seriously disagree, for example over the matters of conscience in religion for which the monarch now took responsibility, it would become apparent that parliament's capacity for obstruction had increased in proportion to its role and powers.

b) The Reign of Elizabeth, 1558–1603

When Elizabeth I became queen in 1558, she inherited a weakened and divided kingdom. Her father's last years were dominated by war in Scotland and factional divisions at Court. At his death the Protestant faction [a group of nobles and courtiers who had personal and political links] assumed control and carried through a religious revolution in the Church, but the death of Edward in 1553 allowed Mary to reverse the settlement and restore the authority of the Pope. As the daughter of Catherine of Aragon, whose divorce had occasioned the break with Rome, she had remained a devout Catholic. Supported by her Spanish husband, Philip, she set out to re-convert England, by force if necessary. The public burnings of nearly 300 men, women and children demonstrated that Protestant ideas had taken root in some places, and could only be eradicated by the use of force. A further 800 Protestants fled abroad to Protestant Europe, where their faith hardened and strengthened while they awaited the opportunity to return. Meanwhile, Mary entered a disastrous war against France in support of Spanish interests, which ended in defeat and the loss of England's last continental possession, the port of Calais.

Elizabeth's first priority, therefore, was to bring about a settlement of religious quarrels which could be widely accepted, and to strengthen her own grip on power. As the daughter of Anne Boleyn, her own legitimacy required a Protestant settlement, since the Catholic Church had never recognized her father's divorce and her mother's marriage. At the same time, she was aware that many of her subjects liked and enjoyed the traditional ceremonies used in the Catholic Church. She therefore sought to establish a compromise. In 1559 the Act of Uniformity was passed by parliament, despite the opposition of Mary's bishops in the House of Lords, and established a new Church of England with the queen as Supreme Governor (as a woman she could not claim to be Head of a Church that did not allow women to become priests). The Church was to be run by Bishops, who would advise the queen and enforce her decisions over doctrine and organisation. In doctrinal terms her preferences were clearly Protestant, but she maintained many of the familiar symbols and ceremonies such as the wearing of clerical robes. Above all, the queen demanded obedience to the forms and set prayers contained in a revised Prayer Book, which instructed the clergy on the appropriate services for use on all occasions.

After 30 years of religious changes, mainly enacted through parliament, the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559 sought to create peace by establishing a middle way between Catholic and Protestant ideas, combining Protestant doctrines with more traditional ceremonies and organisation. It was acceptable to the majority, but came under attack from minorities at both ends of the religious spectrum. A

Catholic minority continued to worship in the traditional way, often in private houses. Many were loyal to Elizabeth, but in 1570 their position was made more difficult when the Pope declared Elizabeth a heretic and ordered them to work for her death and replacement by her Catholic cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots. Thereafter, Catholic plots against the queen and the threat of Spanish invasion combined to create strong anti-Catholic feeling. This was fuelled by memories of the burning of Protestants by Queen Mary, and John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments,* which recounted the story of their martyrdom, became essential reading for English Protestants after its publication in 1563. This also increased support for the extreme Protestant minority whose demands for further purification of the Church gave them the nickname of 'puritan'.

The main purpose of the Puritans was to rid the English Church of any trace of the corrupting influence of Popery, which they regarded as an evil force dedicated to the destruction of true religion. They identified the Pope as the anti-Christ, a servant of the devil, who had corrupted and distorted early Christianity into the superstition of medieval Catholicism, hidden the truth of the Bible in an unreadable language [Latin] and prevented thousands of souls from finding God. Only by removing all unnecessary rituals and replacing them with preaching and spontaneous prayer could true religion be protected from such contagion. In Elizabeth's eyes, however, this would mean the delegation of control in the Church from herself to the individual minister – a notion that she regarded with horror. When the Archbishop of Canterbury, Edmund Grindal, demonstrated sympathy with some of these ideas, Elizabeth suspended him from office.

Frustrated by the queen's opposition to further change, these Puritans turned to their sympathisers in parliament, who introduced legislation to reform the Church in various ways. These schemes were based on the ideas published by Thomas Cartwright (a Cambridge scholar) in 1570, which envisaged a Presbyterian system for the Church [see Definitions on p. 7]. To the anger of Puritan MPs who claimed that parliament had a right to debate such matters, these bills were vetoed by the queen. While she accepted that MPs had a right to free speech in their debates, this did not extend to choosing what subjects to raise, or to introducing laws that affected matters of state – such matters were for her alone. Thus the issue of religious reform raised arguments and debates about the relative powers and privileges of monarch and parliament. Meanwhile the queen set out to destroy Puritan influence in the Church. When Grindal died in 1583 she appointed an uncompromising disciplinarian, John Whitgift as Archbishop of Canterbury, and supported his campaign of persecution against puritans who would not conform to the rules of the Prayer Book. In 1590, Cartwright and others were brought before the Church courts and forced to obey. Thus puritanism was contained, but it was not destroyed, and hopes of further reform continued to motivate a minority who were particularly vocal in parliament.

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POETRY, POPERY AND THE PROTESTANT QUEEN – THE ELIZABETHAN MYTHOLOGY

One of Elizabeth's political skills was her ability to exploit her greatest disadvantage and make it a political asset – her feminity. As a queen in a man's world she needed male support. She obtained it by exploiting her youth and beauty at the time of her accession, to build an image of the Virgin Queen, alone and vulnerable in a hostile environment. In fact, she was a determined and skilful politician, but the image was conveyed to her subjects through the romantic poetry of her courtiers, her portraits and her regular progresses around her kingdom. In the context of a genuine Catholic threat, revealed by a succession of plots against her and the attempt by the Spanish to invade in 1588, she came to symbolize the nation itself, alone in a hostile Catholic Europe. As with any good propaganda, there was enough truth to make the mythology acceptable. The result was a growing sense of national identity based on intense loyalty to the queen, the equation of freedom with the Protestant faith, and a fear of Roman Catholicism [Popery] that bordered on paranoia. While many English Catholics were recognized to be loyal, others were seen as spies and traitors, part of an international conspiracy against England and true religion, centred on Rome and bankrolled by Spanish wealth and power. These perceptions formed a central part of the Tudor legacy to the Stuart kings, and did much to shape political developments in the years before the Civil Wars.

1568:	Rebellion of the Northern Earls, attempting to place Mary Queen of Scots on the throne.
1570:	Elizabeth excommunicated by the Pope and declared deposed from the throne.
1571:	Ridolfi Plot on behalf of Mary, backed by Spain.
1583–4:	Throckmorton Plot on behalf of Mary, backed by Spain.
1586–7:	Babbington Plot and execution of Mary, Queen of Scots.
1588:	The Spanish Armada; beginning of a war with Spain that lasted until 1604.

Definition Box

There are a number of religious terms and labels that historians use in explaining the quarrels over the Church in this period. The term **Anglican** relates to the Church of England, and is used to refer to the broad mainstream of opinion that accepted, and increasingly valued, the compromise established in the Elizabethan settlement. For many ministers and laymen [non-clergy] the combination of Protestant doctrines and traditional ceremonies represented an orderly form of worship based on acceptable rituals, without unnecessary superstition. The range of opinion covered by the term merged into Puritan ideas on the one hand, and extended on the other extreme to a small High Church party, often labelled **Arminian,** who wanted to see greater emphasis on clerical authority and communal rituals similar to those used in the Catholic Church.

The term **Puritan** is best defined as an extreme Protestant view, held by men who feared and disliked any trace of Catholic tradition in the Church, and therefore wanted to simplify the appearance of churches and the services held in them. They emphasised the importance of preaching, private prayer and Bible reading, in establishing a direct relationship with God and a strong personal faith. These views were not different from the mainstream ideas put forward by sixteenth-century Protestants, and adopted by the Church of England, but they were held in a more intense form by those labelled Puritan, and associated with a strong hatred of the Roman Catholic Church, which they regarded as an evil, corrupting influence. Hence they wanted to reform the Church to protect it from Catholic infiltration. They also believed that God ordered the world according to a plan, in which he had **pre-destined** some souls to be saved while others would go to Hell. Those who were to be saved, the 'elect' or 'godly' people, were recognised by their willingness to dedicate themselves to serving God, according to his Will, or **Providence**, which could be discovered by studying the Bible. To feel that you were a part of this group gave great hope and comfort, and led to a dedicated, focused approach to religion. It also meant that access to a teaching Church with a strong ministry was essential.

A **Presbyterian** Church was the preferred version of many puritans, who believed that it offered the best alternative to Popery. Bishops would be abolished, or their powers greatly reduced. Control of the Church would be in the hands of parish ministers who would maintain discipline with the help of lay supporters (Elders). Their duties would include preaching, teaching about the Bible, and overseeing the morality of their

parishioners. While government control of the Church would be reduced, clerical control of the local congregations would produce a disciplined and orderly society. This system had been developed by John Calvin in Geneva and established in Scotland by John Knox in 1568. Many English puritans wanted to see a similar system in England, but not all of them went this far. The English merchants and gentry were used to having some influence over their local churches, and often helped to choose the minister because they had bought monastery land or inherited the right to collect tithes. They wanted to keep these powers. On the other hand, there were a few enthusiasts who, already moving in a much more radical direction, argued that a personal faith could only be practised voluntarily, in separate [**separatist**] congregations. The one thing that the queen, bishops, ministers and ruling class agreed upon, was the danger represented by such uncontrolled activists.

By 1603, therefore, the last 70 years of Tudor rule had brought significant change to English government and society. The Monarchy had been strengthened and the Church brought under its control. The old military nobility and knights had developed into educated governors and administrators, working in partnership with the monarch as a political and social elite, to maintain peace, law and order in the localities. Supported by a national Church, and able to assemble as a national ruling class in the occasional meetings of parliament, they had developed a sense of national identity based on English laws, traditions and the Protestant religion. For forty years the queen had symbolised that identity and drawn on the loyalty of her subjects to strengthen the institutions of Tudor monarchy, but beneath the surface there were tensions and uncertainties as to how those institutions should evolve, and how the ruling partnership should develop in a new era. The last decade of Elizabeth's reign was darkened by war, financial problems and bad harvests. The peaceful accession of James VI of Scotland, a Protestant with healthy sons who became James I of England in 1603, offered a promising new start.

2 The Development of the Crisis

a) James I and VI: Finance, Religion and War

KEY ISSUES What problems did James I experience in his relationship with parliament? How far did James create these difficulties?