

Access to history

An Introduction to

STUART BRITAIN

1603–1714

COLLIERIE



Hodder & Stoughton

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THE TUDOR LEGACY: BRITAIN IN 1603

CHAPTER

1

POINTS TO CONSIDER

The material in this chapter is essentially background material, chosen to enable you to familiarise yourself with the nature of politics and government in this period. The activities and exercises included in the main text and at the end of the chapter are designed to help you understand how government worked, in theory and in practice, and the key issues and problems that concerned people at the time. The better you understand what James I inherited from his Tudor predecessors, the more able you will be to assess how effectively he dealt with it. You can also begin to examine the nature of the problems that led to the English Revolution. Although this chapter will do little more than introduce the issues, it will provide you with the basis for examining how they developed, a question which is considered in later chapters.

KEY ISSUE

How secure was the monarchy that James inherited in 1603?

1 The British Kingdoms

By 1603 the process of uniting the British kingdoms had already begun. Wales had been conquered before 1500, and was incorporated into the English kingdom by three Acts of Union passed during the reign of Henry VIII. These had introduced English law and the system of county government based on Justices of the Peace, so that Wales was governed as an integral part of England. Henry had also extended the traditional claim of English kings to be 'lord of Ireland' into a claim of kingship. While this proved difficult to enforce in practice, strategic needs made it essential. The Protestant Reformation had divided Europe, and after Henry rejected the authority of the Pope and seized control of the English Church in 1534, there was a serious danger of Catholic reprisal. Since the majority of native Irishmen and Old English settlers remained Catholic, Ireland offered a potentially convenient base for an invasion, and it was therefore necessary to assert English control there. English influence, which had been limited to the area around Dublin known as the Pale, gradually increased through the sixteenth century. Irish chieftains were persuaded to accept English titles of nobility. Successive rebellions provoked by the arrogance of some

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What was the relationship between the different parts of Britain and the people who lived in them?

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Why was the
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English administrators provided the excuse for extending English military control. In the 1590s a major rebellion led by Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone was defeated by Elizabeth's generals, and after a period of uneasy peace, the Earls of Tyrone and Tyrconnel, the last great chieftains of Ulster, fled to Spain in 1605, leaving the English in control of the whole island.

There had been similar problems between England and Scotland ever since the failure of English attempts to conquer Scotland in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. By securing a marriage between his daughter Margaret and James IV of Scotland in 1502, Henry VII had hoped to bring the two kingdoms together, but the more aggressive policies of Henry VIII had ensured that traditional hostilities lingered, and had encouraged the Scots to maintain an alliance with France. The accession of James as ruler of both kingdoms in 1603 brought an end to national hostilities, but left the matter of the relationship between the English and Scottish peoples in doubt. While James and his heirs had a natural desire to create greater uniformity of government and perhaps even to unite the two kingdoms, there were deep-seated cultural differences both within Scotland itself (see the map on page 14) and between the Scots and English. There was also a bitter legacy of hostility and warfare. The English feared an invasion of Scots seeking wealth and opportunity, while the Scots feared the loss of independence and resented English arrogance. In these circumstances, the problem of ruling multiple kingdoms and of regulating relationships between them became one of the most significant issues facing the Stuart monarchy.

ISSUE

Why was this a period of religious conflict?

2 Religious Divisions

The problem of ruling separate kingdoms was made more difficult and complex by religious divisions that cut across national borders. The Protestant Reformation had shattered the religious unity of Europe, and resulted in reform taking its own course in different areas. While there is no need to discuss the Reformation in detail here, it is necessary to understand some of its main features and effects, because they influenced the political and cultural development of the British kingdoms in important ways.

a) The European Reformation

Christianity in Western Europe had developed under the control of the Catholic Church, centred in Rome and led by the Pope, who claimed to have inherited the power given by Christ himself to the disciple Peter. In different countries the Church was administered by

bishops who were often chosen by the monarch, although they received their spiritual power from the Pope. The key features of Roman Catholic belief were:

- ▼ that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had sacrificed himself on the Cross to atone for human sins;
- ▼ that humans could avoid the punishments of hell and reach heaven once they died by believing in Christ and following his word;
- ▼ that the knowledge of Christ's word and the power to help human souls had been passed to Peter, and from him to those whom the Church ordained as priests;
- ▼ that this power was exercised by the priests in the ceremonies and sacraments ordered by the Church. The most important of these were the Mass, which re-enacted the Last Supper of Christ and his disciples, and the confession, in which the priest could forgive the sins of those who truly regretted them;
- ▼ that it was the duty of the Church to enforce its rules and doctrines, so that souls were brought to God.

The implications of these beliefs were that Christians could only reach God through the Church, and that the clergy were a special order, separated from the laity (non-clergy), and superior to them. Over the years the Church had become increasingly wealthy and powerful and, like many powerful institutions, had lost some of the spiritual strength that had justified its position. By 1500, there were many complaints that religion had become mechanical, faith had degenerated into superstition, and the leaders of the Church had become embroiled in politics and luxurious self-indulgence.

This was the background to the protest mounted by Martin Luther, a German monk who challenged the authorities and demanded reforms. Unlike most reformers, Luther challenged the ideas as well as the practices of the Church. The core of his argument was:

- ▼ that salvation – in which the human soul gained a place in heaven with God – could not be guaranteed by the Church or by good works, but only by individual faith;
- ▼ that God offered salvation as a free gift to those who believed in Him and followed Christ;
- ▼ that belief came from private prayer and study of the Bible, the Word of God;
- ▼ that church ceremonies and sacraments only symbolised internal faith, and too many encouraged ignorance and superstition;
- ▼ that, in God's eyes, priests and laity were equal, meaning that priests had no special powers; while the Church remained important as a source of guidance, teaching and preaching, there was no justification for the wide-ranging authority claimed by the Catholic Church.

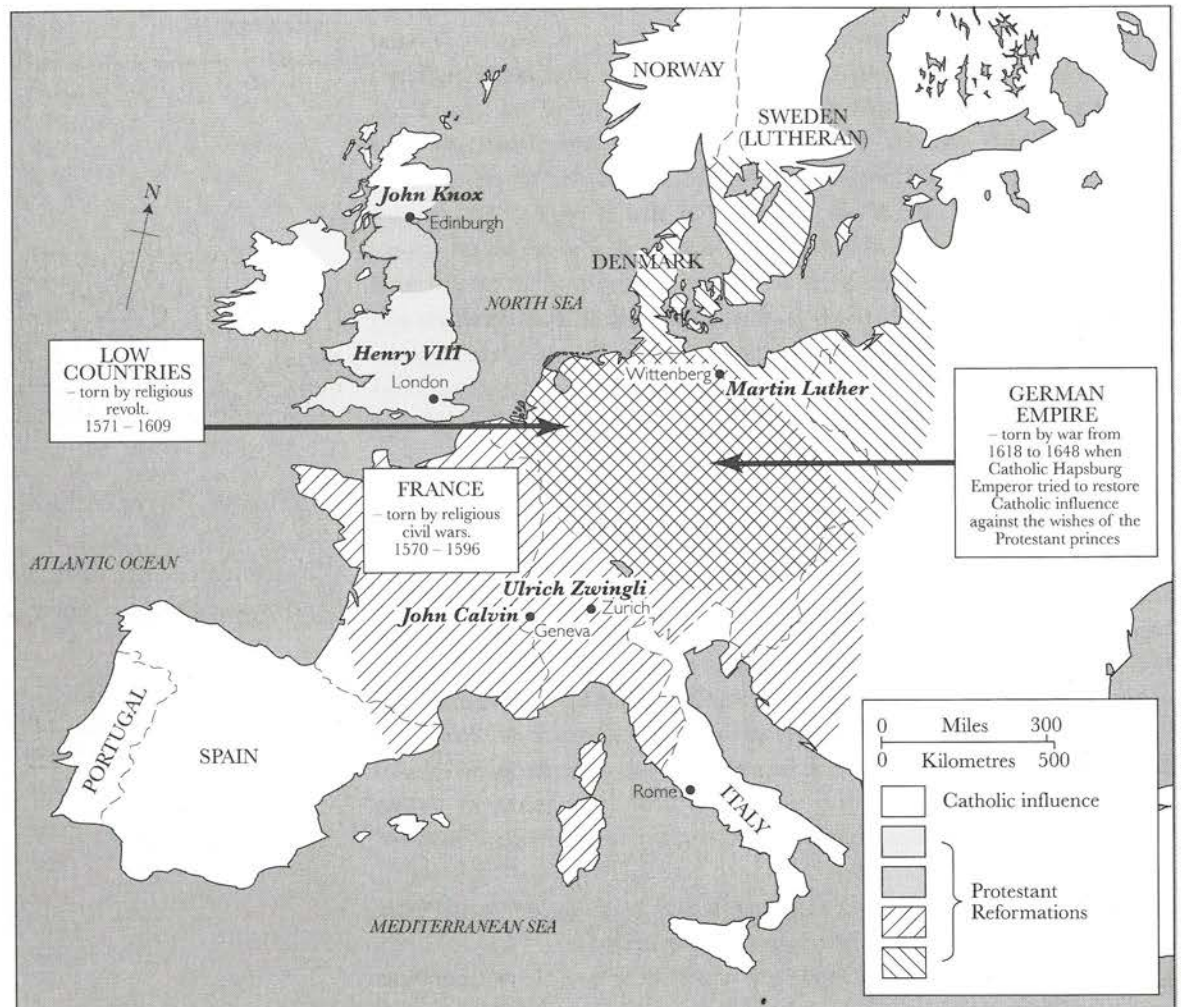
SACRAMENTS

Sacred acts or ceremonies. The key point about sacramental religion is that taking part in the ceremony is considered to be a sacred act in itself, regardless of the spirit or level or understanding of the laity who take part. This gave great power to the Church that organised the sacraments, and could encourage mechanical or superstitious acts by the congregation.

The Counter-Reformation

This process of internal reform, known as the Counter-Reformation, began with the Council of Trent in 1570. The authority of the Pope was reinforced, administration was improved, and many of the scandals that had provoked Luther's protests were eradicated. The resulting renewal of faith, and of papal authority, strengthened the loyalty of Catholics and the fears of Protestants, and led to war in Europe. It also contributed to Catholic plots against Queen Elizabeth and James I, and to the anti-Catholic paranoia that affected many English Protestants in the seventeenth century.

Figure 3 The religious map of Europe showing major wars and civil wars.



By 1603, most of southern Europe was predominantly Catholic, as was Ireland. England and Scotland had Protestant Churches. Northern Germany was mainly Lutheran, and Switzerland was dominated by Calvinist churches, which were also influential in parts of Germany and Holland. France was officially Catholic, but with an accepted Protestant minority known as Huguenots.

The Pope and the leaders of the Church responded by declaring Luther a **heretic** and driving him out of the Church. He was not the first reformer to suffer this, but the rulers of Saxony, where Luther lived, protected him from the Church and its allies. This allowed him to develop and publish his views. Those who took up his ideas became known as Protestants, and by 1550 there were Protestant churches in much of Germany and Scandinavia as well as the Netherlands and England. Thereafter, the Catholic Church began to reform itself internally in a Counter-Reformation, and to reassert the authority of Rome and the papacy.

In 1570 the Pope's decisions were declared to have the authority of God himself. The new spirit was represented by the establishment of the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits. Its founder was an ex-soldier, Ignatius Loyola, whose vision of a missionary order was based on the concept of soldiers of Christ. By the end of the sixteenth century Europe was divided between a militant Protestantism which rejected the authority of the past and looked for its rules and inspiration to the Bible, and a militant Catholicism determined to recover its control and destroy heresy.

b) Britain and the Effects of the Reformation

In England, the Reformation was carried out on the instructions and in the interests of Henry VIII. Henry was no Protestant, and his seizure of the Church and its property was motivated by a desire for power and wealth, as well as the need for a divorce in order to marry Anne Boleyn and, hopefully, to produce a male heir. Nevertheless, by rejecting the authority of the Pope he placed himself in the Protestant camp, and was forced to grant positions of influence in the Church to men with Protestant ideas. The result was a genuinely Protestant Reformation carried out during the short reign (1547-53) of his son, Edward, which his Catholic daughter Mary could not entirely reverse during her even shorter reign (1553-8). Her persecution of Protestants and her links with Spain (she married the heir to the Spanish crown) created a backlash against Catholicism. Perhaps equally important, her persecution drove some Protestants into exile in Europe, where they came into contact with other Protestant groups.

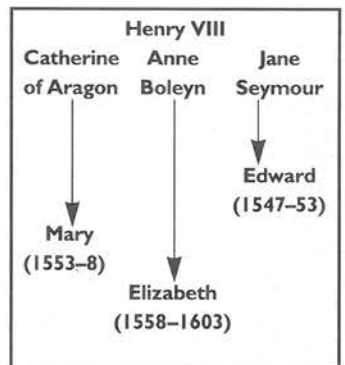
The development of Protestant ideas posed a number of problems for government. Luther argued that the rules for church government, as well as salvation, could be found in the Bible, and that the Christian monarch, or godly ruler, had the power and responsibility of interpreting and enforcing them. However, the Bible — part history, part mythology, part poetry — was often unclear and contradictory, and men and women who believed that their salvation

HERETIC

The name given by the Roman Catholic Church to anyone who challenged its teachings or denied its beliefs. Heretics could be 'excommunicated' (expelled from the Church) or imprisoned. Ultimately, if they refused to give up their views they were handed over to the civil authorities to be burned alive.

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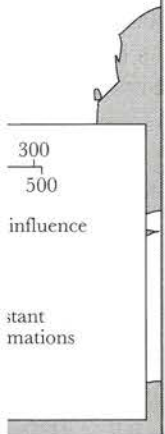
How did these issues create political conflict in Britain?



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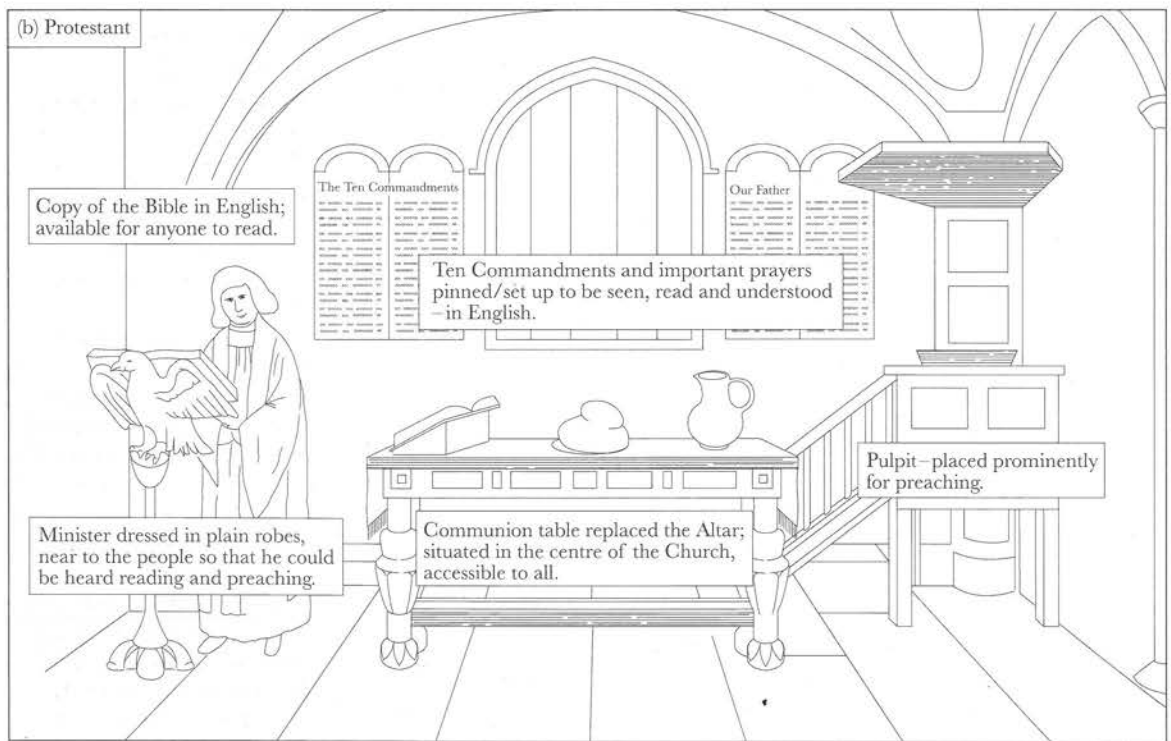
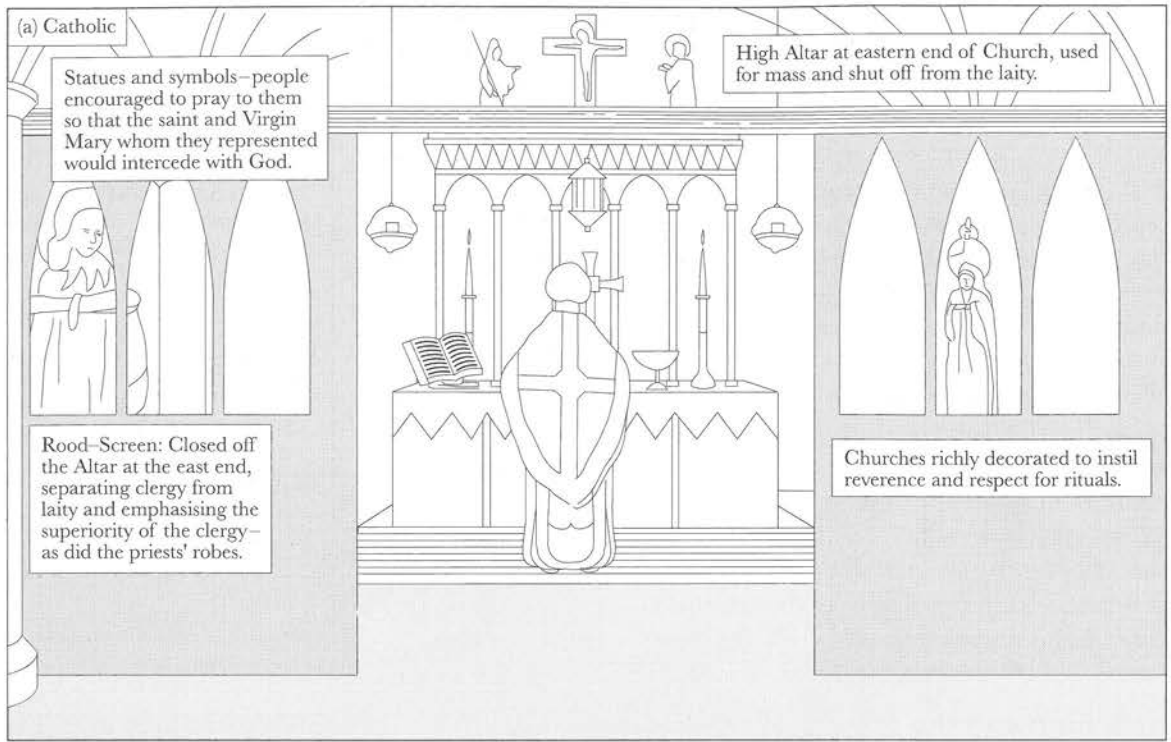


Figure 4 The key differences between Catholic and Protestant ideas.

depended on it were inclined to interpret it for themselves. The result was that Protestant ideas soon began to develop in different ways, and the varied and piecemeal nature of reform in different areas reinforced these differences. By the time of Mary's death, there was considerable variation of opinion on what constituted a 'true' church.

The model favoured by many was that established by the French reformer, John Calvin. Calvin had extended Luther's ideas about salvation to establish the doctrine that some people were predestined to be saved, because they were able to accept the gift of salvation and the disciplined Christianity that went with it. The sign of such **predestination** was the ability to live a godly life and accept the rules of a godly church. The idea that God would exclude some souls from a gift that He granted freely was in some ways illogical, and would be rejected by later religious leaders, but such assurance of salvation did encourage great dedication and commitment among Calvin's followers. The result was that many exiles returned after Mary's death, determined to reform the Church along Calvinist lines. This meant getting rid of all traces of Catholic ceremonies and rituals (see Figure 4) and allowing ministers to concentrate on preaching the Word of God and ensuring that their parishioners lived godly lives (whether or not they wanted to!). In Scotland the reformer John Knox was able to establish a Calvinist system known as Presbyterianism, but in England the reformers came up against a Queen who was more interested in political control and religious peace than in their cherished schemes of reform.

As the daughter of Anne Boleyn, whose marriage to Henry had never been recognised by the Catholic Church, Queen Elizabeth was bound to establish a broadly Protestant form of worship when she came to the throne in 1558. But as a skilful politician she recognised the need for healing and reconciliation in the religion of England. The result was the Elizabethan settlement, and the establishment of an Anglican Church which sought to provide a compromise, a 'middle way' between the Catholic and Protestant extremes. Undeniably Protestant in doctrine, it retained many of the familiar ceremonies and services inherited from the Catholic Church, as well as bishops, whom Elizabeth appointed and controlled and who therefore maintained her authority. It was able to satisfy the needs of most of her subjects but, like most compromises, it left dissatisfied minorities at both ends of the spectrum (see Figure 5).

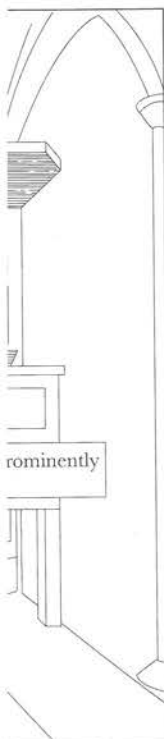
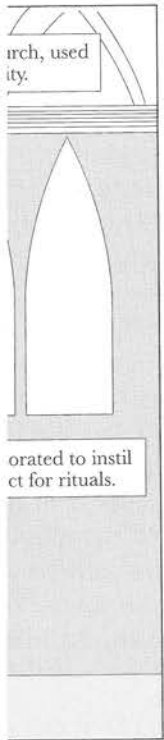
A minority of English Catholics gave primary loyalty to the Pope; their treason in attempting to replace Elizabeth with the Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots and their links with Spain did much to 'create anti-Catholic feeling in England. More significantly, a Protestant minority was dissatisfied with a half-reformed Church, and sought to

PREDESTINATION

The Christian belief, expounded by Calvin and his followers, that God chooses beforehand those to whom He will grant salvation.

PURITANS

Those who believed that the Church of England fell short of the 'true' church, because of the remaining traces of Catholic ceremonial and the failure to establish and maintain effective discipline among members. The existence of leaders like Thomas Cartwright, a Cambridge scholar who put forward a model for further reform along Presbyterian lines in 1570, encouraged historians to think of Puritans as an identifiable movement within the Church. However, recent research has emphasised the variety of opinion among 'Puritans' and the extent to which they shaded into mainstream thinking.



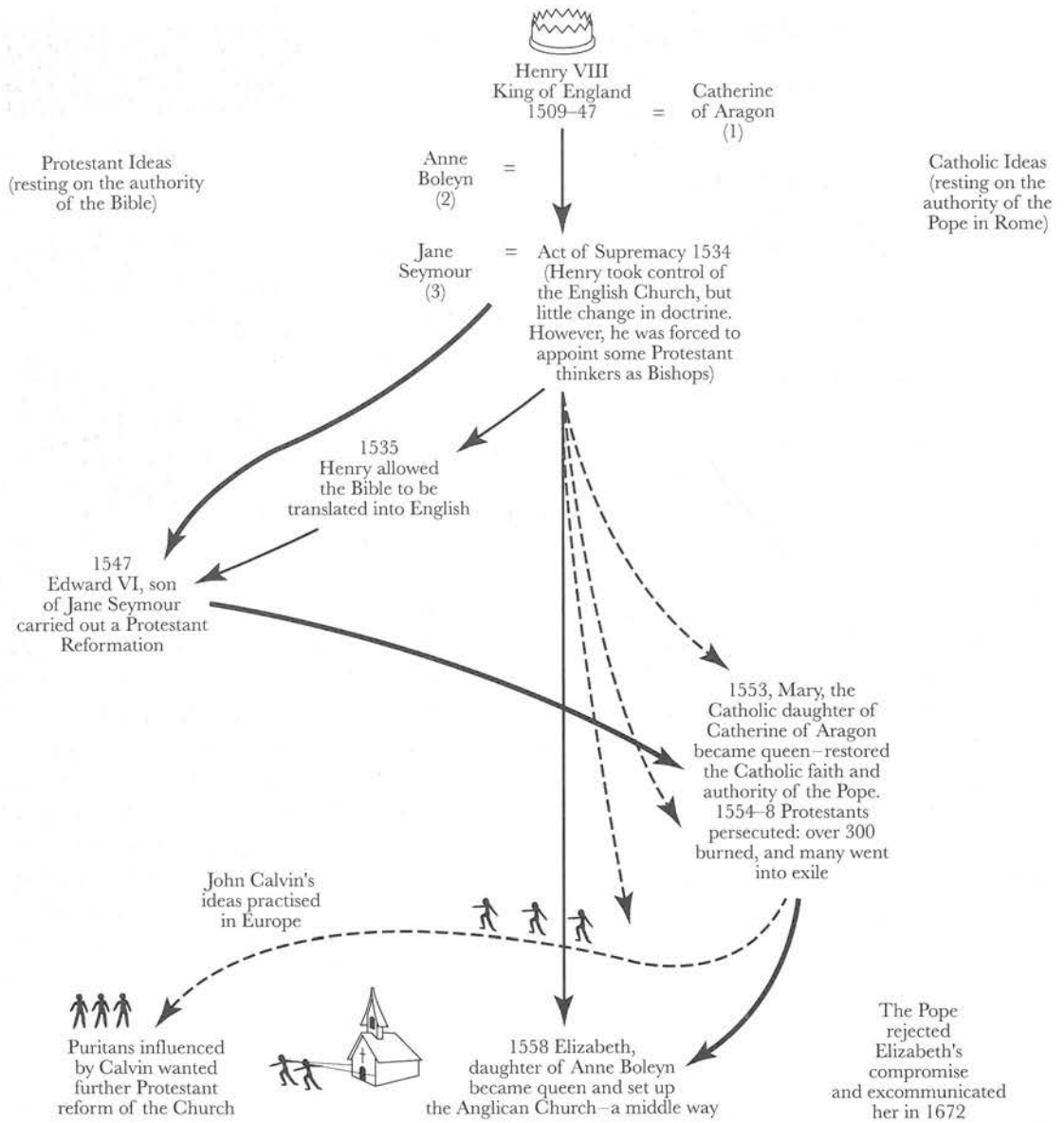


Figure 5 The Tudor pendulum.

persuade or pressurise the Queen into further change. Their desire for further purification of the Church led them to be nicknamed 'Puritans'. In the 1570s attempts were made to introduce reforms through Parliament, prompting the angry Queen to forbid such discussions and raise political conflict over MPs' rights to free speech. Having lost this battle, Puritan preachers attempted to change the Church from within. Elizabeth, who was determined to maintain the system of bishops as the best 'method of ensuring her own, royal control, suppressed their meetings and silenced their protests. The result was that James inherited a legacy of religious divisions across

Why would these developments encourage religious confusion and division in England?



JOHN CALVIN (1509–64)

John Calvin was the most influential Protestant reformer after Luther. He established his own church in the city of Geneva. His doctrine became dominant among Protestants in France, Switzerland, Scotland and the Netherlands and to an extent within the early Church of England. It's core was the idea of predestination which claimed that God divided humanity into 'saints' who were predestined to follow the path of true religion and escape sin, and sinners, the 'unregenerate' who were condemned to hell. The sign of sainthood lay in a daily struggle to avoid sin and to carry out God's will in daily life, a struggle that required the discipline and support of a Calvinist Church. These gave great authority to the minister and certain senior members of the congregation (known as elders or presbyters) to control the behaviour and lives of their followers. Only those who were able to accept the restrictions entailed by this discipline could be sure of salvation.

The harshness of this doctrine led it to be first softened (by an implied expansion of the number of possible saints and reduction of the number of irretrievable sinners) and later challenged by other reformers. It also came to be abused by some known as Antinomians, who argued that since they were predestined to heaven by God, they need not fear to sin in their daily life. For most Calvinists, however, the belief that, as long as they genuinely sought a godly life, they could be sure of ultimate victory over sin, was a powerful inspiration. They could serve God in whatever capacity they had – as a merchant or labourer as well as a minister – and any success was evidence of God's approval, as well as enhancing the reputation of God's people. The task was not easy, and it was important that the church to which they had access should support them with good preaching and instruction, and not hinder them by unnecessary and possibly corrupting ceremonies and sacraments. Hence Calvinist enthusiasts required the correct forms and organisation within their church, to reflect doctrine in practice as well as in words.

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three kingdoms. In Scotland the Presbyterian Church dominated the lowland areas, but a sizeable Catholic minority remained in the Gaelic highlands. In Ireland the majority of the population remained Catholic, and the loss of traditional chieftains encouraged the people to look to Catholic priests as leaders in the community. English control, however, led to the imposition of an Anglican Church as the official Church of Ireland, while Protestant settlers, especially those from Scotland, who settled in Ulster, brought an extreme Protestant or Presbyterian tradition. In England the established Church was Anglican, based on Elizabeth's 'middle way', with a small Catholic minority who remained loyal to the Pope. Within the Church, however, there was a significant movement seeking to achieve further reform.



Define the meaning of Calvinist, Puritan, Presbyterian and Anglican. Explain the main points of difference between them.

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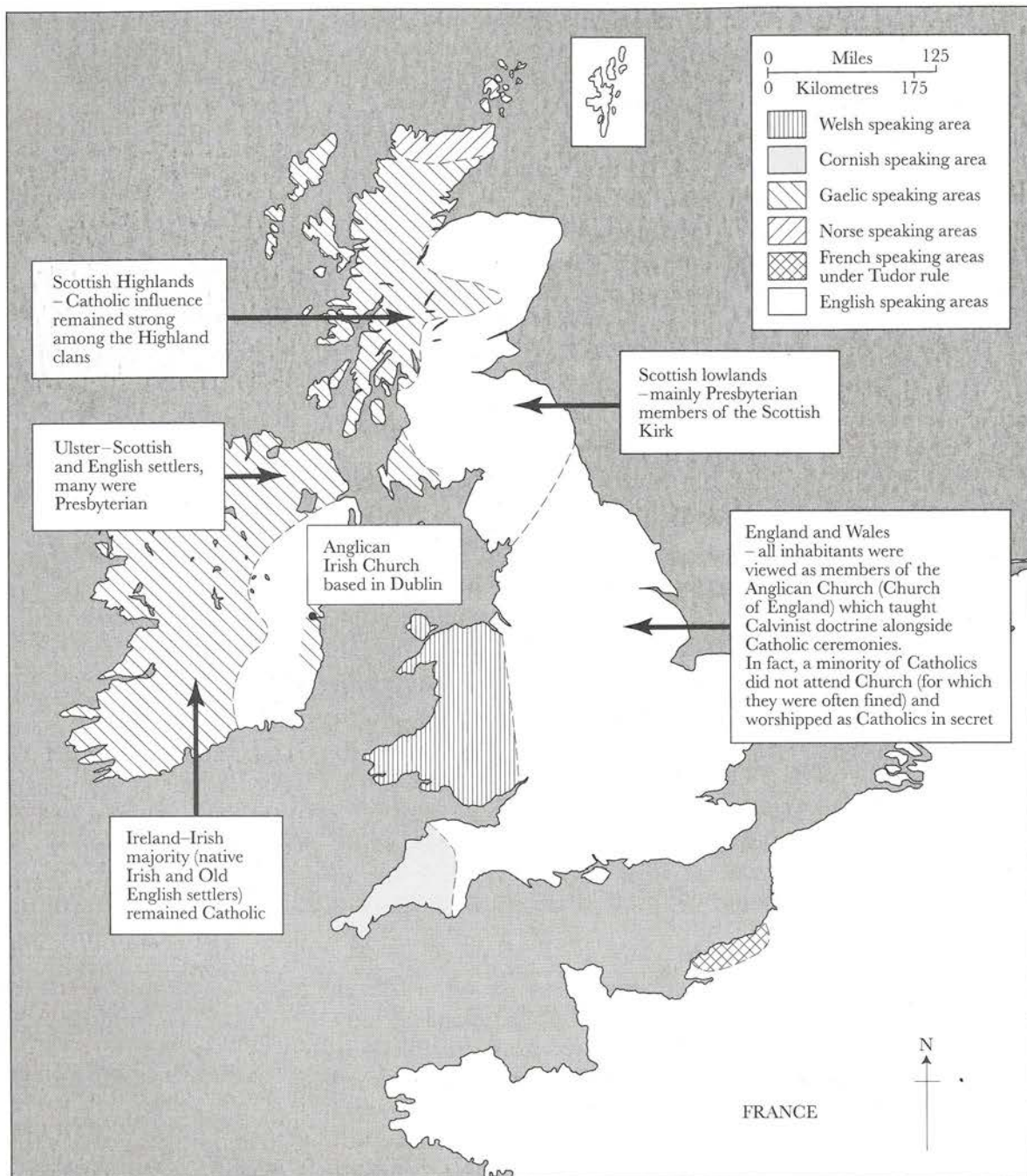


Figure 6 The religious map of Britain.

Why it was so difficult for different churches to coexist peacefully at this time, especially in Britain.

