

WORLD HISTORY Handout

Name _____

ELIZABETH I - Religious Settlement of 1559

Elizabeth I quickly needed a religious settlement for Tudor England after years of religious turmoil her subjects had experienced. This came in 1559 and is known as the **Religious Settlement**. While Tudor society may still have had a less than positive viewpoint of women and their role in society, few doubted that Elizabeth was a queen of ability and that her intelligence and ability was as good as many men in the Privy Council. Therefore, when Elizabeth announced that there had to be a religious settlement for her people, there were no dissenters among her advisors. Elizabeth simply could not accept that religious turmoil was normal for England, though this had been so in the previous thirty years. She pushed hard for a settlement that all would take on board.

Ironically the simple accession of Elizabeth in 1558 made any desire for a settlement so much more difficult. On the death of Mary and the accession of Elizabeth, many hard-line Protestants returned from mainland Europe (where they had fled for their own safety during the reign of Mary) in the full expectation that they were returning to a state where Protestantism was the one and only tolerated religion. However, many Catholics had remained in England on Elizabeth's accession because of the conciliatory tone she had taken on religious issues. Both parties were bound to clash and threaten any form of religious settlement. The sudden influx of Protestants from Europe alarmed perfectly moderate Protestants and Catholics alike who had remained in England. At Mary's funeral oration, Bishop White stated: *"The wolves be coming out of Geneva and have sent their books before, full of pestilent, doctrines."*

London, in particular, became a base for these Protestant hardliners. It would have been very easy for them to stir up the capital's poorer population, especially if they had a scapegoat – the Catholics. Elizabeth tried to control the behavior of these men but within a very large and densely populated city, this proved to be very difficult. Radical Protestants forcefully entered churches and began preaching extreme Protestant views to those members of the public who had followed them in. Elizabeth had to issue a proclamation that stated that such acts of public disorder would not be tolerated and that any religious settlement would go through Parliament. It was highly likely that the House of Commons would support the new queen without trouble. However, Elizabeth herself fully expected more delays from the House of Lords where Catholic bishops still maintained their power and titles, regardless religious settlement would have Parliament and the Queen's seal of approval.

Elizabeth had another reason for treading carefully. There were both Protestant and Catholic rulers in Europe who were keeping a very close eye on the religious situation in England. Protestant leaders in northern Germany expected Elizabeth to take up the cause of the Protestants. However, Elizabeth was also very aware that two very powerful Catholic states were also keeping a close eye on the religious events in England. In 1559, Spain was still seen as an ally. After all, the late Queen Mary Tudor had been married to Philip II of Spain. Also the last thing Elizabeth wanted to do was to anger Catholic France and push the French government even more into a relationship with Scotland. Therefore, any religious settlement had to satisfy both camps and this took a great deal of skill to achieve.

In England, the Convocation (assembly of Bishops and Clergy) stated its belief in "Papal supremacy" and its support for the doctrine of transubstantiation, which is the idea that the "bread and wine" actually become the body and blood of Jesus Christ. This was clearly a snub for any form of conciliation towards the Protestants who would view "Papal supremacy" and the Catholic view of communion as wrong.

The religious settlement did recognize "Royal supremacy" within the church. The Act of Supremacy made Elizabeth Supreme Governor of the Church and church officials were required to take an oath of obedience to Elizabeth. Neither zealous Catholics nor Protestants were willing to accept a woman as Head of the Church, so Elizabeth compromised and took the title "Supreme Governor of the Church" as opposed to "Head of the Church."

The heresy laws passed during the reign of Mary Tudor were repealed and the celebration of Communion in both kinds was confirmed. Catholic bishops in the Lords were hostile to this but were eventually outnumbered in voting terms and the Act of Supremacy was confirmed. The arrest and imprisonment in the Tower of two Catholic bishops during the Easter recess of 1559 may have also 'persuaded' some Catholics in the Lords that it was in their best interests to support the new Queen.

The Act of Uniformity (1559) was Elizabeth's attempt to ensure as many believers as was possible could find salvation. The 1552 Prayer Book was to be used in services while the wording of the 1549 Prayer Book was to be incorporated into the Communion service, so that a generous interpretation as to what was meant by the 'real presence' could be incorporated into services.

Religion was a highly contentious issue in Tudor England. Many held views that put them firmly into one corner or the other. The 1559 Religious Settlement was an honest attempt to bring tolerance to as many as possible, but it could never have satisfied the wishes of those who were at the religious extremes. Only one Catholic bishop took the oath to Elizabeth – all the rest refused and lost their office. However, only 4% of all lower clergy refused to take the oath to the Queen.

QUESTIONS

Why did Elizabeth feel she needed a religious settlement for England?

Why did many Protestants flee England for the European mainland during the rule of Mary Tudor?

What were Radical Protestants doing that Queen Elizabeth stated would not be tolerated?

Why did Queen Elizabeth expect longer delays to get her religious settlement through the House of Lords?

Why did Queen Elizabeth not want to upset France with her religious settlement?

What was the religious compromise over the issue of Communion?