



Filiere: English Studies

Semester 3

Module: 19

British Culture/ US Culture

Instructor: Dr. Rachid Agliz

Lecture 7: Religion in Britain

-It is important to point out that in the sixteenth century, there was a big change in the way some Christians worshipped God. At that time in history, most people were Roman Catholic and the Pope in Rome was in charge of all the Christian church. In other words, he was qualified as the head of all the Christian church.

-In 1517, some drastic changes took place in the English church. A German monk called Martin Luther decided to lead a breakaway from the Roman Catholic Church. He protested against the institution's values and teachings. The new Christians called themselves 'Protestants' because they were, in fact, protesting against the Roman Catholic Church's teachings and customs. The word Protestant is made from two latin words: Pro and Testari. Pro means publicly and testari means to bear witness or to protest. The Protestants demand for reform led to this crucial period of history called the reformation.

-People in Tudor times were very religious and were in fact ready to die for their beliefs. It was very difficult for them during the 118 years the Tudor kings and queens ruled to cling or to stick to one specific religion. They were most likely forced or compelled to change their religion depending on the religion of the reigning monarch.

-There were major changes in the church during the reign of the Tudor kings and queens. England started as a catholic country and ended up being a protestant one under the rule of the Tudors.

-One may wonder why religion has undergone so many changes during the Tudor times. In fact, religion in England changed depending on the views of the monarch. As a matter of fact, people most often felt confused. They were told to change what they believed and they were even ordered to change the way they worshipped God and ultimately were compelled to change the way they decorated churches. Many laws were passed about religion. Most of these laws were passed by the kings and queens who wanted to make people follow the same religion that they did. Consequently, when the first Tudor kings came to the throne, England was a Roman Catholic Country and the head of the church was the Pope in Rome, Clement VII.

- England was a catholic nation under the rule of Henry vii (1485-1509) and during much of Henry viii's rule or reign (1509-1547). During this period, church services were held in latin.

-When Henry VIII came to the throne, he was a devout catholic and defended the church against Protestants. Henry VIII did not in fact agree with their views.

-In 1521, Pope Leo x honored Henry VIII with the title "Defender of Faith", because of his support for the Roman Church.

-The English church will later on be split from Rome. Hence, when the pope refused to grant Henry VIII a divorce from Catherine of Aragon, Henry split off the English church from the Roman church. Rather than the pope, the king would be the spiritual head of the English church. (This period is referred to as Reformation). The Roman Catholic faith believed in marriage for life. It did not recognize, let alone support, divorce.

-King Henry VIII declared himself as the supreme head of a new church of England. This is referred to as the act of supremacy and reformation. This change within this sacred institution marked the start of centuries of religious conflict in Britain.

-Despite being cut off from Rome, England, retained much of the doctrine and the practices of Catholicism.

-Henry viii broke with Rome because the pope in Rome would not grant him a divorce with his wife, Catherine of Aragon, because divorce was against church policy.

-The year 1535 saw Henry viii order the closing down of Roman Catholic Abbeys, monasteries and convents across England, Wales and Ireland. This act was known as the 'Dissolution of the Monasteries'.

-Until Henry's death in 1547, although split off from Rome, the English church remained catholic country. It was not until Henry's son, Edward VI and his advisors, that England became a Protestant country.

-England as a Protestant Country

-Henry's son Edward was given protestant teachers and was brought up as a strict protestant.

-Under King Edward VI (1547-1553), England became a protestant nation. King Edward VI was a devout protestant and introduced a new prayer book. During his reign, all the church services were held in English. Catholics were treated very badly and catholic bishops were persecuted and locked up.

-England as a Catholic country

-Under Queen Mary I (1553-1558), England was again a Catholic nation. Mary was a devout catholic. The pope became the head of the church again. All church services changed back to Latin.

-During the last three years of her rule, 300 leading protestants who would not accept catholic beliefs were burned to death at the stake. This earned her the nickname of "bloody Mary".

England as a Protestant country

-Elizabeth was actually raised as a Protestant. Under queen Elizabeth the first (1558-1603), England was again a protestant nation. It was under her reign that the Anglican church (church of England) became firmly established and dominant. Elizabeth did her best to sort out the problem of religion in Great Britain. At that time in history, Elizabeth wanted England to have peace and not to be divided over religion. She tried to find ways which both the catholic and protestant sides would accept and be happy. She did not call herself the head of the Church of England, instead she was known as the supreme governor of the English church.

-Although Elizabeth insisted on protestant beliefs, she still permitted many things from the catholic religion such as bishops, ordained priests, church decorations and priests' vestments. She also produced a prayer book in English and even allowed a Latin edition to be printed.

-It is interesting to note that Elizabeth the first disliked and even punished extreme Protestants and extreme Catholics who tried to convert people to their faiths.

-Apart from this, church services were also changed back to English.

History of Religion in England

-Britain used to be a Roman Catholic Country. In 1533, during the reign of Henry VIII, England broke from the Roman Catholic Church to form or to establish the Anglican Church.

-Why did England become a Protestant country?

-Henry VIII, the king, wanted a divorce. He wanted a son and his wife only gave birth to daughters. He asked the Pope for permission to divorce, but was refused. Henry VIII became very angry and decided to make his own church. Henry VIII became the leader of the church of England. He had the Bible translated to English and the people who believed in this new religion were called Protestants.

-In 1553, Mary became queen. She changed the country back to Catholicism and burned Protestants who would not change at the stake.

-In 1558, Elizabeth the first became queen. She changed the church back to Anglican and it has been the official religion of England since.

Reformation and Restoration

-According to those who believe in reformation, it is a return to pure Christianity cleaning the church from all corruption. But the non-reformists consider it as an act of heresy against the church.

-In England, the reformation actually started differently from other European countries like Germany and Switzerland. In 1527, Henry VIII was 36 years old and his wife Catherine of Aragon was 42. They had only one daughter, Mary. Henry decided to divorce because he wanted a male heir. But at that time in history, following the Roman Catholic Church norms, divorce was out of question.

-Thus, the first stage of reformation started by the pope's refusal to grant a divorce to Henry, who decided to separate from the Roman church and establish an Anglican Church and consequently declaring himself as the supreme governor of the church. His second wife Anne Bolyne gave him a daughter called Elizabeth. Then, Henry married Jane Seymour who died after giving birth to Edward.

-The second stage of reformation has begun with the succession of Edward VI who carried out religious reforms. He basically refused pictures of saints in the church except the picture of Jesus. He has the bible translated so that the English could make use of the prayer book. In addition to this, he abolished the act of confession. But he died at the age of 16 (1553) without having finished the reformation.

-After this event, Mary took over, she was catholic. She was the first queen in England. She never forgave her father for divorcing her mother so she started persecuting those who defied her. So, Catholicism became hated in England. Luckily and fortunately, she only ruled for five years. (1553-1558).

-Last but not least, the third stage of reformation starts with the succession of Elizabeth the first to the throne. She was a protestant and strongly believed in the new church. She aimed at a sort of compromise which could make as many of her people satisfied. She, first of all, restored the Church of England and gradually introduced the English prayer book and declared herself as the supreme governor of the church. She did not execute those who were against her but instead they were doomed or obliged to pay a fine. Still, the puritans were not

really happy and satisfied with the reformation. According to them, members of the church should be elected and there should be no hierarchy within the church. They were antimonarchist and for the republic. As they started to be dangerous for the queen, she started persecuting them but some of them fled to the new world. (America).