‘The Elizabethan religious settlement was successfully established in the years 1558 to 1603’ Assess the validity of this view

Elizabeth successfully introduced her religious settlement in 1559, it was mainly protestant however it imposed aspects of Catholic beliefs which was significant as Elizabeth’s lack of force to completely shut out all Catholic views prevented any major rebellions during her reign and contributed in the acceptance and conservation of her settlement proving to be successful in the long-term establishment of the settlement. This can be viewed as a crucial change compared to Edward’s reign as he faced a popular reaction against his original settlement which also resulted in the rise of rebellions.

The settlement enacted in Elizabeth’s first parliament, January – April 1559 which was significant as it established royal supremacy and set out the way the Church was to be organised. Elizabeth’s settlement consisted of The Act of Supremacy 1559 which was crucial as it repealed the heresy law which allowed Elizabeth to make the Church protestant. This act also made the queen ‘supreme governor’ of the Church of England and demanded an oath of supremacy from all clergymen and church officials therefore consolidating Elizabeth’s power. According to Catholics only God was viewed as the head of church, Elizabeth’s change from ‘head’ to ‘governor’ is significant as it illustrates Elizabeth’s reasonable and compromising approach which contributed in preventing drastic rebellions or oppositions to the settlement. Overall this Act was significant as it provided Elizabeth with the legal authority, she needed to make changes and act in matters of the Church.

The Act of Uniformity was also introduced in 1559 and demanded that everyone should go to church at least once a week or pay a fine of 12 pence. This was not particularly significant as although there was a potential fine it was not tightly controlled by Elizabeth as she was lenient and did not really follow up on it. This Act was significant however. As it specified the single use of the book of common prayer which was a modified version of Cranmer’s strongly protestant book in 1552, it was a more acceptable version reinforcing the ambiguity between Protestantism and elements of Catholicism which potentially contributed to the success of the religious settlement in the early years.

The Royal Injunctions of 1559 controlled the appearance of Churches as nominated ‘visitors’ inspected the churches providing specific instructions such as the removal of ‘superstitious’ objects, the purchase of an English copy of the bible and Erasmus’s paraphrases, the celebration of Eucharist on the communion table not the alter and the suppression of Catholic practices such as pilgrimages. This was a significant turning point as it implemented clear Protestant views within the Church and supressed catholic views.

Overall, the settlement was significant as it can be viewed as a compromise. Elizabeth was pressured from the radical clergymen and the ‘puritan choir’ who forced her to accept a more protestant prayer book than she had really wanted. However, it can be argued that Elizabeth was also pressured from Catholic bishops and conservatives who strongly opposed the Uniformity Act as they believed the settlement was too protestant.

By 1563, Elizabeth had achieved the settlement she had largely desired. Catholic faith was not completely supressed however they found it difficult to practice their faith in public. This was significant as it sparked the emergence of puritanism which consisted of those who viewed the settlement as incomplete in the 1560s and 1570s and they wanted to further reform the church to remove any remaining Catholic practices. This was crucial as it portrays that Elizabeth’s ambiguous approach did not prove successful among everyone and instead it contributed in portraying her settlement as incomplete.

This led to the Vestiarian controversy in 1566 where several church figures refused to wear the clerical dress based on the Act of Uniformity as it was seen as Catholic and therefore superstitious. Archbishop Parker retaliated by confirming the settlement by issuing ‘advertisements’ which was significant as it contributed to the establishment of the settlement and made certain vestments compulsory. 37 London clergymen who refused to support this lost their positions. This resistance was significant in Elizabeth’s establishment of the settlement as it portrays how determined Elizabeth was to preserve her settlement. Overall puritanism was not particularly significant in threatening the religious settlement as it was dealt with before it had the opportunity to rise and become more serious. However, the puritans were significant as they illustrated the dissatisfaction of the failure to completely abolish Catholic practices. This portrays the religious settlement as less successful due to the lack of clarity resulting in the lingering of unanswered questions.

The Presbyterian movement was one aspect of the Puritan movement and believed that the Church of England should be reformed in its structure and forms of worship and emerged in reaction to the Vestiarian Controversy. The Presbyterians opposed Elizabeth’s religious settlement by voicing their criticisms via pamphlets. This was extremely significant as although Elizabeth could supress the opposition, their ideas were written and in circulation therefore portraying them as a more significant threat that was difficult to control. Furthermore, Presbyterianism attracted some high ranking support including the Earl of Huntingdon and the Earl of Leicester illustrating that they were more difficult to supress due to the higher status figures involvement therefore portraying them as a more significant threat to Elizabeth’s settlement as people listened to them for example Cartwright was a Cambridge academic causing his higher status to draw significant attention to his criticisms and ideas.

The Presbyterian movement grew significantly in the 1580s and the involvement of high-status figures allowed them to attempt to bring changes about via parliament, as Pete Turner and Anthony Cope introduced bills in parliament to replace the book of common prayer and replace it with a new book however, this was unsuccessful. This was still extremely significant as it provides evidence of their power emphasising the threat towards Elizabeth’s settlement. However, the rejection of the passing of the bills was crucial as it resulted in the decline of Presbyterianism as it illustrated that further reform was unlikely.

In retaliation to this, the Arch Bishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift issued Three Articles, these demanded acceptance from the clergy of the royal supremacy, the prayer book and the thirty-nine articles. This was a significant method of regaining control as few puritan clergy were prepared to break with the church by refusing the three articles. However, by treating radicals and moderates alike, it was significant as it caused despair amongst clergymen.

Separatism was the most extreme form of puritanism as its aims were to separate from the Church of England altogether and create independent church congregations without the queen as supreme governor. In 1593 the Act against Seditious Sectaries allowed the arrests of separatists. The leaders of the movement were tried and executed for the circulating of ‘seditious books’. This can be seen as a very significant opposition to Elizabeth’s settlement as they wrote their ideas down and circulated them therefore although Elizabeth executed the leaders, she could not control their ideas that were already in circulation. The execution of the leaders is also significant as it illustrates the scale of their threat towards Elizabeth’s settlement despite being small in terms of size, this resulted in her executing them as they were a serious opposition and Elizabeth was willing do whatever it took in order to establish and preserve her religious settlement.

Initially Catholics were tolerated but they had to pay fines if they failed to attend church services – though these were rarely demanded. This was significant as the less forceful control resulted in many Catholics preserving their beliefs by becoming outwardly Protestant. The Northern Rebellion of 1569 provoked a less tolerant attitude toward Catholics and the Pope also ex communicated Elizabeth in 1570 and called on all loyal Catholics to depose her. This is a significant turning point for Elizabeth as it forced the Catholics to choose between their beliefs of Catholicism or their monarch.

The ex-communication of Elizabeth also acted as a catalyst for the more severe Acts against the Catholics during the 1570s and 1580s. In 1571, the publication of papal bulls in England became treasonable. From 1575 to 1585, Catholic priests trained abroad and came to England to uphold and spread Catholicism. These Catholic missions were a treasonable offense however they were the Catholics last attempt to grasp onto their faith and maintain it privately in priest holes. Mainly only the rich could afford such services. Overall this was not significant as there was no intention to form a rebellion it was merely for conservation of faith purposes however the secrecy of this could potentially be seen as a threat to Elizabeth’s religious settlement as she was completely oblivious to this. This however can be seen to have been neutralised by the harsh laws passed such as in 1581 non-allegiance to the queen or church became treasonable, saying mass was punishable by a heavy fine and imprisonment and the fine for not attending church was raised to £20 a month and more tightly controlled. To further illustrate the limitations of success of the catholic missions, an act was passed in 1585 which made it treasonable for catholic priests to enter England.

In conclusion, Elizabeth’s retaliations to any potential threat or opposition was fundamental in the successful maintenance of her religious settlement as it allowed Elizabeth to shut down any potential threats allowing her to actively defend and preserve it in order to fully establish the religious settlement.