

The Rule of Religious Law:

Influences and Opinions in English Towns during the Reformation, 1529-1540

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*ABSTRACT Historians have examined religious policy in Henry VIII's reign as a time when Protestantism was becoming the popular religion within England. Henry was breaking away from the Roman Catholic Church in order to make his own decisions and rules about governmental and religious policies, even though he never specifically made Protestantism the main belief for the newly founded English Church. Although many articles have been written on the effects of his policies and his religious leaders during the English Reformation, this research will address the issue of the religious reform in English towns and the effect it had on the English people. The influences and opinions that surrounded these people and Henry during this change may have been a bigger impact than most historians have studied, but without these details, one would not be able to understand why this event took place in the 1530s.*

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Tudor England and its monarchy has become a popular piece of history that many people have always wanted to know more about. Historians have written many articles and books about the Tudors, and a television show has been made about Henry VIII's reign. Many historical events happened during Henry's reign, but one that has been examined multiple times by historians is the English Reformation. During the 1520s, and for following forty years after that, England defined characteristics that were different than any other country in Europe at the time.<sup>1</sup> Religion, especially Catholicism, was being challenged by local and international movements, and the idea of a "new learning" was being discussed and how it would affect the Roman Catholic Church and its teaching.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the role of religion and politics were being brought together with no separation between the two entities; religious and governmental leaders were gaining and losing their powers every day that this reform action continued. As author Ethan Shagan argues, "As old certainties were questioned, old loyalties tested and old practices undermined, the Reformation seemed to dissolve the glue that held together the familiar coherence of the social world."<sup>3</sup> Based upon this thought then, one would question, how these changes affected the common people, the citizens that the country depended on for money and

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur F. Kinney and David W. Swain. "Reformation in England." *Tudor England: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland, 2001), 592.

<sup>2</sup> Kinney and Swain. "Reformation in England," 593.

<sup>3</sup> Ethan H. Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1.

support. Although, according to author Robert Whiting, changes in the English government and its policy have been charted well by many historians,<sup>4</sup> the impact of these policies on the English citizens has not been adequately researched. The reason that there is not a lot of research on the common people is because this is a new method with historians that has become popular. Questions that have been asked by historians include, “How did he [the common Englishman] respond to the assaults launched against traditional activities and institutions? By what internal motivations were his responses impelled? And by what types of external influence were these shaped?”<sup>5</sup> However, these questions would not have applied to every single person in Tudor England; many did not see the need for these reforms. It has been shown that, even Henry VIII could not come up with his own beliefs on religion and politics without the influence of something in his life; Shagan found that “responses to religious change, whether negative or positive, also continued popular politics, since those responses were hardly ever mere affirmations or denials rather were intended to win concessions, sway public opinion and influence policy.”<sup>6</sup> This statement illustrates, then, that the responses of the people could have been influenced by their surroundings, whether it be the government or their own family. This paper will therefore analyze the correlation between English responses to the Reformation with variations in geography, social group, gender, or age.

### **The Shaping of Henry VIII**

Henry was not destined to become the King of England; it was his older brother, Arthur who was going to receive that honor. In the course of a few months though, Arthur’s marriage to

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Whiting, *The Blind Devotion of the People: Popular religion and the English Reformation*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 2.

<sup>5</sup> Whiting, *Blind Devotion*, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Shagan, *Popular Politics*, 20.

Catherine, the daughter of Isabella and Ferdinand of Spain, and his path to the throne ended suddenly because of his death and Henry was now on the way to becoming ruler of England. During Henry's reign, from 1509 to 1547, the country changed its religion from Catholic to Protestant, he married six different women, and had multiple religious and governmental leaders to help solve the great debate of his reign, the English Reformation. This section examines the influences that lead Henry to certain decisions made during his reign and who and what helped to shape the way that he thought about the people, the country, and the world around him.

### *Young Henry*

People have believed that Henry VIII was brought up from a young age to be the monarch of England, but researchers found different information about the education and the raising of Henry in the royal court. As a child, Henry was not educated to be a king. His father, Henry VII, gave his tutors the responsibility of teaching his young son about the Church since he would become a religious official. He was educated in many different subjects, such as theology, Latin and French, philosophy, and other areas of interest by various tutors. By having several tutors with varying backgrounds, their lessons may have subtly hinted at what their beliefs were about events going on in England or laws made by the Tudor government. For example, one of Henry's best-known tutors was John Skeleton. He wrote multiple educational sources for Henry to learn from,<sup>7</sup> but one of the pieces of writing that still exists today is Skeleton's *Speculum principis* of 1501. In this composition, Skeleton illustrated to Henry how to have virtuous behavior like great ancient rulers, such as Julius Caesar or Alexander the Great,<sup>8</sup> and his curriculum was based on the New Learning, known as humanism.<sup>9</sup> This may have caused Henry

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<sup>7</sup> David R. Carlson, "Royal Tutors in the Reign of Henry VII," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 22, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 268.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

to think that his tutors' ideas were what he should believe as well. Henry was known to have a willingness to learn and even when he had become King, he continued his education through reading current works on topics ranging from theological debates to Thomas More's *Utopia*. Not only could his education have shaped who Henry became in later years, but the role of his family in his life may have had some effects as well.

Henry's father was the man who gave Henry everything that he ever needed: an education, a title, and money. Alison Weir found that while Henry was a young child, "the Prince was given no royal responsibilities, nor, it seems, much training in the arts and duties of kingship."<sup>10</sup> However, historians have argued that his father, after the death of his brother Arthur, kept Henry VIII under strict supervision.<sup>11</sup> This may illustrate that Henry's own father did not believe that his youngest son could take on the responsibility of ruling a kingdom since he never received the proper training to govern a country. This could be the case or Henry VII could have been concerned about the health of his only living heir. The actual reason is unknown for there seems to be no records of why Henry's father watched over Henry so closely after his brother had died. Although his father had a great influence over what Henry did, the deaths that occurred in his childhood may also have affected what he thought about life. His brother died in 1502, and just a year later, his mother passed away. With being at the young age of eleven or twelve, these deaths illustrated that Henry had to see death at an early age and learn to grow-up faster while being watched by his father because he was the only male heir. What seems to have been unexamined by historians is the family relationship that Henry VIII had with his father and the ideas of how these deaths could have affected the way that Henry was brought up in the royal

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<sup>10</sup> Alison Weir, *Henry VIII: The King and His Court* (New York: Ballantine Books Trade Paperback Edition, 2008), 10.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

household. Yet, Henry VII was to die only six years after the death of his wife and leave his only living heir, Henry VIII, at the age of seventeen to rule a mighty kingdom.

Since Henry was seen as such a young boy when he came to the throne, some believed that he was not mature enough to take over the country in 1509. He was not educated to become a king, making it seem as though he was not fit for the role that he was placed in. However, the English people rejoiced in his coronation and would exclaim for years to come that he was a “great king who had England’s interests at heart.”<sup>12</sup> Not only did the people believe in him, but he himself believed in what he could accomplish within the realm and outside it as well. He wanted to become a prominent international figure and have the whole world know who Henry VIII was. The reasons for desiring to be known throughout Europe were so that he could be remembered throughout history for his glory in war and emulate his ancestor, Henry V.<sup>13</sup> Many countries and the papacy at the time needed the support of the Tudor dynasty to strengthen their own political situations.<sup>14</sup> By giving his assistance to other countries, the foreign diplomats would help Henry in return, for example, the papacy would allow him to nominate men for church positions, such as a bishop.<sup>15</sup> This idea of being a key figure in history would come to Henry as the debate of Catholicism versus Protestantism would take over Western Europe.

#### *“Supreme Head of the Church of England”*

As Henry was ruling England, his religious views became askewed by theories of divine right and divorce, which brought on new religious laws for the English people to follow.

Through the beginnings of Henry’s reign, he had been a faithful servant to the Roman Catholic Church. He had supported them in religious decisions they made, but also fought against Martin

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<sup>12</sup> Weir, *Henry VIII*, 25.

<sup>13</sup> Arthur F. Kinney and David W. Swain, "Foreign Relations and Diplomacy." *Tudor England: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland, 2001), 267.

<sup>14</sup> Susan Doran and Christopher Durston, *Princes, Pastors and People* (London: Routledge, 1991), 55.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

Luther when he began to contest the beliefs of the Catholic faith. Henry wrote a doctrine titled, *Assertion of the Seven Sacraments*, which was an attack on Luther and his arguments against the Catholic Church.<sup>16</sup> For that reason, Henry was given the title of “Defender of the Faith” in gratitude by Pope Leo X in 1521.<sup>17</sup> However, problems had begun to arise between Henry and the Pope, and in a few years, he would break away from the papacy to have religious control over the Church of England.

Henry had the idea of divine right kingship at the forefront of his mind before breaking away from Rome. Divine right kingship is defined as “a theory which argues that certain kings ruled because they were chosen by God to do so and that these kings were accountable to no person except God.”<sup>18</sup> This theory of divine right kingship was gaining popularity in many countries at the time. However, Henry was the main proponent for this theory for he needed his people to be of the same opinion on personal, religious, and political matters. Henry had his agents search through archives in England in the hope of supporting Henry’s claims that the pope had no authority over the decisions he was making for himself and his country.<sup>19</sup> Not only this, but Henry had enacted laws that would remind his subjects that the king was the supreme head of the whole Church and the people of England,<sup>20</sup> which he believed the people would simply accept.

The Catholic Church was the ruling force behind decisions that were made for laws or politics in religion. The Pope had significant power over countries in Western Europe and he would not support Henry’s desire for a divorce from his first wife, Catherine and allow him to

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<sup>16</sup> Arthur F. Kinney and David W. Swain, "Defender of the Faith." *Tudor England: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland, 2001), 182.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Hooker, “The European Enlightenment Glossary: Divine Right of Kings.” (1996).

<http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/GLOSSARY/DIVRIGHT.HTM>

<sup>19</sup> Doran and Durston, *Princes, Pastors, and People*, 57.

<sup>20</sup> Alison Wall, *Power and Protest in England 1525-1640* (London: Arnold, 2000), 10.

marry his mistress, Anne Boleyn. This created tension between Henry and the Roman Catholic Church so, he decided that he did not need the Pope or his rules and broke away from Rome. The king had wanted to keep calling England a Catholic state and practice some of the Catholic beliefs, but he was not going to let anyone tell him what he could and could not do.<sup>21</sup> Henry had believed in the idea of divine right of kingship and that the Pope did not need to exist in the Church. In 1533, Henry wanted to make sure that no one else would be able to rule England other than the monarch and the government. Thus, he put into effect the *Act in Restraint of Appeals*, which states,

...He being also institute and furnished by the goodness and sufferance of Almighty God with plenary, whole, and entire power, preeminence, authority, prerogative, and jurisdiction to render and yield justice and final determination to all manner of folk [residents] or subjects within this his realm in all causes, matters, debates... (Henry VIII)

The act exclaimed that in the realm of England, it was God who gave him the power to rule over the people, and no one could claim that this was wrong. One year later, Parliament passed the Act of Supremacy, which gave the English monarchy the right to teach religious doctrine, reform the Church, and bestowed on it the name of “Supreme Head of the Church of England”.<sup>22</sup> What this doctrine illustrates is that Henry would have sole power to decide what the Church would teach, how it would be taught, and any other changes that he felt the Church needed. As Weir argues, “The royal prerogative was the will of God working through the will of the King, and the King could do no wrong”.<sup>23</sup> Because the King was seen as a messenger from God, whatever he decided was not wrong since it was from holiness above them all.

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<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Horoszko, “What They Do Not Know Will Not Hurt Them: The Involvement of the Northern Gentry in the Pilgrimage of Grace,” (November 2009), 4.

<sup>22</sup> Henry VIII, “The Act of Supremacy,” in *Documents of the English Reformation*, edited by Gerald Bray (Minneapolis: First Fortress Press, 1994), 113.

<sup>23</sup> Weir, *Henry VIII*, 21.

Henry enacted many other religious laws and texts that would secure his position as the one and only ruler of the Church of England. Around 1538, the production of the Great Bible was one of the first printed Bibles in English that was commissioned by the Crown. With its grandeur, the Great Bible was a device for Henry to convey his message of Royal Supremacy over the Church in England.<sup>24</sup> The reason for illustrating his power in the new Bible was to show and teach his people the religious law that they should have been following in their churches. Henry also claimed that a Christian Man would “observe such order as is by us and our laws prescribed, and to read and bear well away the true doctrine lately by us and our clergy set forth for their erudition.”<sup>25</sup> What this means is that Henry felt that every man needed to obey what he had laid out in front of them and not have any judgment about his decisions and actions. Henry was able to create the Reformation because the nation and the Parliament allowed him to do so.<sup>26</sup>

### *The Wives of Henry VIII*

During Henry’s reign in England, he had six wives, but two of the wives need to be examined during the years of 1529 through 1540 and their roles within the religious reformation in England and their influence in Henry’s life. Henry married Catherine of Aragon in 1509, although she was married first to his older brother, Arthur. Catherine was a devout Catholic, well read in the Scriptures, spent hours in devotions, and woke up at midnight and dawn for mass.<sup>27</sup> She even commissioned religious books by authors such as Alfonso de Villa Sancta and Erasmus that went against Martin Luther and became influential all throughout Europe.<sup>28</sup> For example, in the 1520s, Catherine played an important role in campaigning against Martin Luther, just as her

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<sup>24</sup> Tatiana C. String, “Henry VIII’s Illuminated ‘Great Bible,’” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 59 (1996): 315.

<sup>25</sup> Henry VIII, “A Necessary Doctrine and Erudition for any Christian Man; Set Forth by the King’s Majesty of England,” In *Formularies of Faith Put Forth by Authority During the Reign of Henry VIII*, ed. Charles Lloyd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1856), 2.

<sup>26</sup> Rosemary O’Day, *The Debate on the English Reformation* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1986), 111.

<sup>27</sup> Weir, *Henry VIII*, 12.

<sup>28</sup> Maria Dowling, “A Woman’s Place?: Learning and the Wives of Henry VIII,” *History Today* (June 1991): 39.

husband did.<sup>29</sup> In the beginning, Henry was a devoted husband and followed her in her religious manners and beliefs, but she was not able to produce a male heir to keep the Tudor dynasty alive. Since his wife could not produce a male child, Henry began to wonder whether his marriage was valid in the eyes of the Church and God. Around 1527, Henry had decided to divorce Catherine so that he would be able to find another wife who could produce his needed male heir. At this time, Henry was still a servant of the Roman Catholic Church, however, when Pope Clement VII would not honor this divorce, Henry had to find other ways to secure his divorce so he could marry his beloved mistress, Anne Boleyn. He went to bishops and scholars all over Europe to hear his stately case.<sup>30</sup> After a few years of battling with the papacy, Henry had Catherine banished from London and her title as Queen of England taken away. This had to happen in a quick manner because Anne was pregnant.

Thus, in 1533, Henry married Anne in secrecy. Anne had much sway over the King and her own religious beliefs were not of the Catholic Church but of the religion that was sweeping into England, Protestantism. Maria Dowling found that Anne tried to bring religious books to her husband's attention to promote the people and her beliefs in the Church of England.<sup>31</sup> Even when Anne was not spending time with Henry, she was encouraging "discussion of scripture at her table"<sup>32</sup> and "gave her ladies prayer books to hang from their girdles".<sup>33</sup> This seems to illustrate that Anne had great faith in this new religion and believed that she could change Henry's mind about the burning and torturing of heretics. Unlike Henry's first wife, Anne supported Luther's cause and his idea of religion being more focused on the scriptures.<sup>34</sup> However, Anne was too

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<sup>29</sup> Dowling, "A Woman's Place?", 40.

<sup>30</sup> David Loades, *Politics, Censorship and the English Reformation* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991), 61.

<sup>31</sup> Dowling, "A Woman's Place?", 40.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

persistent in her religious ways, a point used against her by Thomas Cromwell. She was soon found guilty of adultery and treason against the King of England.

### *Influential Religious Leaders*

Henry was not the only person making the decisions about the religious laws that he was creating for his people. Three key figures, Thomas Wolsey, Thomas More, and Thomas Cromwell, were important religious and political leaders who assisted Henry in prosecuting those who went against him. These men made themselves rich from the work they did in the government and gained a lot of power during their time in office.<sup>35</sup> However, though their influence with Henry may have produced religious laws to make Henry and themselves stronger, corruption and stubbornness brought their heads rolling to the ground.

Cardinal Thomas Wolsey was Henry's Lord Chancellor from 1515 to 1529. By this time, Wolsey had held many other high offices in the Church and the state. Henry knew that Wolsey was a brilliant man, who worked hard for what he believed in.<sup>36</sup> Although, it was known that Wolsey would try to entice the King with gifts and money, Henry never gave him complete power, but everything that was decided upon was "by authority of the monarch".<sup>37</sup> Henry had a lot of trust in Wolsey and relied on him to keep him informed of what was going on in his Council.<sup>38</sup> Wolsey's career kept rising, and he had tried to make sure that Henry was in alliance with any of the other countries within Europe, so that he could share his religious and political influence and magnify Henry's honor to illustrate that he was a key figure in Europe.<sup>39</sup> However, Wolsey's alliances were not in the right places when mistress Anne Boleyn came into Henry's

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<sup>35</sup> Wall, *Power and Protest*, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Weir, *Henry VIII*, 192.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>38</sup> J.A. Guy, "Wolsey, the Council, and the Council Courts." *The English Historical Review* 91, no. 360 (July 1976): 483.

<sup>39</sup> Arthur F. Kinney and David W. Swain, "Wolsey, Thomas." *Tudor England: An Encyclopedia*. (New York: Garland, 2001), 760.

life. She despised him and did everything in her power to get rid of his presence in the King's rooms. Wolsey was supposed to have secured the annulment to Catherine of Aragon with the Roman Catholic Church, but he was not able to receive the consent from the Pope. With this decision, Wolsey's fate was determined and he was sent to the Tower of London, where he was to be executed but fell ill and died in prison. Wolsey knew that he had fallen from the King's grace and claimed, "If I had served my God as diligently as I did my king, He would not have given me over in my grey hairs."<sup>40</sup>

Sir Thomas More rose to become Lord Chancellor to Henry VIII in 1529 after the death of Cardinal Wolsey. More had been Henry's "Latin secretary, diplomat, and orator" in the public office before gaining this appointment.<sup>41</sup> In More's, *Utopia*, he wrote about a fictional society and their social, religious, and political customs. During one point in his work, there is a dialogue between More and another person about the changes that need to happen in the country:

...therefore it seemed much more eligible that the king should improve his ancient kingdom all he could, and make it flourish as much as possible; that he should love his people, and be beloved of them; that he should live among them, govern them gently, and let other kingdoms alone, since that which had fallen to his share was big enough, if not too big for him.<sup>42</sup>

Although More was writing about a fictional culture and what the king of that place should do to improve his country, one could apply this to England at the time of the Reformation. This idea can be taken as though More felt that Henry needed to have a different approach to the way that he ran his country and connected with his people, even though this was written towards the beginning years of his reign. Thomas More was a proponent for the Catholic faith and "upheld

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<sup>40</sup> Weir, *Henry VIII*, 308.

<sup>41</sup> Arthur F. Kinney and David W. Swain, "More, Thomas." *Tudor England: An Encyclopedia*. (New York: Garland, 2001), 498.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas More, "Dialogue of Counsel," In *Utopia* (New York: Colonial Press, 1901), 24.

the authority of the Catholic Church, inspired by the Holy Spirit and its traditions”.<sup>43</sup> He even would attack the reformers, for example in 1532 he accused some reformers as being “a few ungracious folk”.<sup>44</sup> In addition, when Protestant works were being imported into the country, More was known to have become very infuriated.<sup>45</sup> It has been argued that More enjoyed his high position because the duties that he was given by the King would influence Europe and the unity of all people.<sup>46</sup> Though he helped Henry in every way to make sure that this new religion did not become permanent, he was not willing to take the oath that Henry was the supreme ruler of the English Church. As imperial ambassador from the Holy Roman Empire, Chapuys, wrote after More had resigned from his position in Henry’s court,

The Chancellor has resigned...if he retained his office he would be obliged to act against his conscience or incur the King’s displeasure, as he had already begun to do, for refusing to take his part against the clergy. His excuse is that his entertainment was too small, and he was not equal to the work.<sup>47</sup>

This illustrates that More did not leave his office because of the divorce debate, as many historians have believed, but because More did not want to be pressured into going against the clergy as Henry had wanted him to. With that decision, Thomas More was arrested and executed for treason against the Crown.

Historians have argued about who came up with the idea of the English religious reform and many have claimed it began with Thomas Cromwell, who was Henry’s chief minister from 1532 to 1540. Cromwell became Henry’s principal secretary in the Reformation Parliament and

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<sup>43</sup> Kinney and Swain, “More, Thomas”, 498.

<sup>44</sup> Alec Ryrie, “Counting sheep, counting shepherds: the problem of allegiance in the English Reformation” in *The Beginnings of English Protestantism*, eds. Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 91.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>46</sup> William Rockett, “Wolsey, More, and the Unity of Christendom.” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 140.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

gave his stamp of approval to business and laws that he liked.<sup>48</sup> Henry gained trust with Cromwell and gave him titles, such as the king's vice-regent and vicar-general in spiritual matters.<sup>49</sup> According to G.R. Elton, Cromwell was the one who had thought of "the concept of national sovereignty"<sup>50</sup> and "established royal supremacy over the church".<sup>51</sup> He was the one who allowed the printing of the Great Bible and placed this religious book in churches all throughout England in 1538. Cromwell also came to realize that during this religious turmoil, the English people were more susceptible to "the dangers of popular dissent" and realized that they needed to severely punish the people who followed the reformers.<sup>52</sup> He was the one who gave Henry the idea of the Act of Supremacy in 1534 and the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1535. Not only this, but since Cromwell was given power by the Crown to do what he felt was best for the country, he was able to create his own governmental systems within small towns.<sup>53</sup> This was important because Cromwell would be able to control the affairs of certain towns and keep peace within these walls.<sup>54</sup> This illustrates the political and religious influence and power that Cromwell had over Henry's officials and even the monarch himself. Cromwell also brought the downfall of Anne Boleyn and replaced her with Henry's third wife, Jane Seymour. His downfall, however, came about because his enemies were slowly building evidence against him to show Henry.<sup>55</sup> His rivals claimed that he was spreading the heretical religion around England by giving them licenses to preach, giving out their literature, and defending the heretics

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<sup>48</sup> Arthur F. Kinney and David W. Swain, "Cromwell, Thomas", *Tudor England: An Encyclopedia*. (New York: Garland, 2001), 173.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph D. Ban, "English Reformation: Product of King or Minister?", *Church History* 41, no. 2 (June 1972): 186.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>52</sup> Wall, *Power and Protest*, 131.

<sup>53</sup> Helen M. Speight, "'The Politics of Good Governance': Thomas Cromwell and the Government of the Southwest of England." *The Historical Journal* 37, no. 3 (September 1994): 624.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 624.

<sup>55</sup> Susan Brigden, "Disturbance and the Fall of Thomas Cromwell and the Reformers, 1539-1540." *The Historical Journal* 24, no. 2 (June 1981): 267.

themselves.<sup>56</sup> With this information Henry had Cromwell arrested and executed for treason against his beloved king.

The shaping of Henry VIII from his youth to the role of his religious leaders in his government have given historians information to explain the politics and religion of his reign. Some have argued that Henry's governmental leaders were the ones with the idea behind the Reformation, while others have believed that Henry made the ultimate decisions on his own terms. However, researchers are now beginning to look at something others had not thought to examine before: to study the social, political, and religious history of a county, and the impact on that society from national, political, and religious change.

### **The Towns and Villages of the Reformation**

When examining the English Reformation, a researcher must study specific regions of England to understand the differences in opinions during this period. English towns were usually in a packed area, streets were narrow and busy, and they were full of trading fairs.<sup>57</sup> Historians have been debating religious and political changes happening throughout England, but one must also be able to examine the local studies to see how the English Reformation affected the common people. A researcher could analyze thirty-eight different counties in Tudor England for this purpose, but this section will be exploring four specific towns and villages in different regions: Lincolnshire in the north, Morebath in the south, Worchester to the east, and Middlesex and London to the west.

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<sup>56</sup> Brigden, "Fall of Thomas Cromwell," 267.

<sup>57</sup> Wall, *Power and Protest*, 63.

*To the West: London*

With London at the center of where the English Reformation was taking place, historians have examined how the event affected Londoners, but how this city influenced the towns and villages surrounding it. Researchers can study London and notice Henry's policies to keep the people of London in order, while others were hostile to the situation that was going on within city walls.

Tudor London was "the biggest town, a major city, the capital, seat of national administration, parliament and the central law courts, and home of the leading merchants and traders."<sup>58</sup> In 1500, London's population was around 60,000 and rose to 200,000 by the 1600s.<sup>59</sup> Immigration added to this population growth during the 1500s, since many came to better themselves and the lives of their families.<sup>60</sup> This city is where the Tudor government and monarchy conducted business or discussed new rules and ideas about the English Church during the 1520s. Londoners wanted to live in a place of harmony, where all could live together without worries or fear. How did this large city avoid riots or rebellions while the Reformation was taking place right in the heart of a city that many people lived in? The people of London were stuck in the middle of this religious reform and they could not get away from what was happening around then.

Historians have also argued that any problems from towns during this time of change, whether large or small, affected the London area.<sup>61</sup> How could this be though since London was supposed to be the ruling city in England? What has been found is that many of the king's own appointments were held by men from different areas of England, mostly from the most populated

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<sup>58</sup> Wall, *Power and Protest*, 76.

<sup>59</sup> Arthur F. Kinney and David W. Swain, "London", *Tudor England: An Encyclopedia*. (New York: Garland, 2001), 441.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 441.

<sup>61</sup> Wall, *Power and Protest*, 76.

and prosperous regions, such as the midlands.<sup>62</sup> Henry wanted to show his people that his officials were a diverse group of people, but with these people, the problems of their own towns and villages were brought to London. For example, men would have allegiance to their county or region, and if anything such as a rebellion were to happen in their community, one would be hostile towards London.<sup>63</sup> London was where the English people believed these ideas of religious reformation had originated and blamed them for the violence that occurred. Even Londoners would go against other Londoners because of the clash of faith and the “cruel treatment of some preachers and citizens” that occurred.<sup>64</sup>

When Henry VIII decided that all English men needed to take the oath to swear their allegiance to him and his reign, they did so without question. However, one man, Thomas More, who happened to be one of Henry’s closet religious advisors, chose not to swear to the Oath<sup>65</sup> and was put on trial and executed for treason against the crown. Other priests believed that if they only somewhat agreed with the oath, they would be able to denounce parts of it later on without repercussion.<sup>66</sup> The executions cemented into the people’s minds that punishment would be harsh for those who went against the monarchy.<sup>67</sup> Though these people wanted to have their own positive or negative opinions about the religious laws, a conservative friar, John Forest stated, “laws must be obeyed, and civil ordinances I will follow outwardly.”<sup>68</sup> Although, the people’s opinions were not seen as relevant to Tudor politics, the idea of “public opinion” began

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<sup>62</sup> Andrew A. Chibi, “The Social and Regional Origins of the Henrician Episcopacy.” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 969.

<sup>63</sup> Robert Whiting, *Local Responses to the English Reformation*. (Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1998), 133.

<sup>64</sup> Brigden, “Fall of Thomas Cromwell,” 277.

<sup>65</sup> Susan Brigden, “Religion and Social Obligation in Early Sixteenth Century London.” *Past & Present*, no. 103 (May 1984): 103.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>67</sup> Wall, *Power and Protest*, 127.

<sup>68</sup> Whiting, *Local Responses*, 137.

within a small population of people during this religious reform.<sup>69</sup> This can illustrate that although many people swore the oath to Henry and were followers of the new religion, it did not mean that what they had believed before had completely been erased from their memories instead it was in their hearts, waiting to come out again.

Though some of the English people who lived in London and near that region were afraid of not accepting the “religious revolution”, others would outwardly criticize what was going on and would speak in favor of people who had been beheaded for treason.<sup>70</sup> In fact, it is because youth were flocking to this bustling city to begin a new life away from their families, and began to hear new ideas. The youth become known as being “politically unstable” and “easy to rally to a cause”.<sup>71</sup> Wolsey was just one of the high-ranking officials who feared the “young and riotous people” and told city rulers to “keep the young men asunder”.<sup>72</sup> The Reformation made these young people skip their work to attend Protestant sermons<sup>73</sup> and created organized youth groups so that they could discuss Protestant tracts.<sup>74</sup> Although these youth were excited for change in a country that they had felt was not respecting them or taking their ideas seriously, Henry VIII executed many to show that his power and his word should be the only thing that is taken seriously.

#### *To the North: Lincolnshire*

In a time of change for an entire country, several counties throughout England began to rebel against the policies and rules of the Tudor government. An area of England that would not conform to the new religion spreading through the country was the town of Lincolnshire. These

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<sup>69</sup> Robert Whiting, *The Blind Devotion of the People: Popular religion and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 107.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>71</sup> Susan Brigden, “Youth and the English Reformation,” *Past & Present*, no. 95 (May 1982), 47.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

people had a distant connection and had many issues with the Tudor government, thus rebellion was something that was bound to happen within this town.

The people of the Northern counties during the 1530s were having problems in certain areas of their lives.<sup>75</sup> Economically the region had been trying to recover from the Black Death but also it also had affected the prices of crops and the population had begun to decrease. These people tried to reach out to the Tudor government and wanted them to help get their society out of its backward ways, but the distance from London and the disrespect they received from the court was not something they were happy with. Historians also argued that although the North was seen as such a “backward” place, the power and nobility that existed in the North, made more competition for the Tudors.<sup>76</sup> However, the Tudor government expected all of their citizens to change their religious beliefs since Henry VIII thought of himself as the Supreme leader of the English Church. Yet, the people of the Northern counties, especially in the town of Lincolnshire, did not want this change being imposed upon them. A researcher will find that this region witnessed one of the first so-called “religious” rebellions of the Tudor reign.

In Lincolnshire, it appeared as though the gentry and the commoners fought together for a common cause, to reinstate the monasteries that were dissolved by Henry and to keep the Catholic faith within their Northern society. This rebellion was called the Pilgrimage of Grace, which happened in 1536. Henry saw this revolt as an event that started because of the ignorance of his people about the religious reform.<sup>77</sup> However, the common people believed they were being betrayed by the king and the government for changing a religious tradition that had been in place for hundreds of years. Historians have argued, “the individual’s loyalty to one’s own local

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<sup>75</sup> Horoszko, “Pilgrimage of Grace”, 5.

<sup>76</sup> R.W. Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace and the Politics of the 1530s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 33.

<sup>77</sup> G.W. Bernard, “The Making of Religious Policy, 1533-1546: Henry VIII and the Search for the Middle Way,” *The Historical Journal* 41, no. 2 (June 1998), 336.

community remained another powerful motive force.”<sup>78</sup> The Pilgrimage of Grace worried the people about their lives and if this change in religion would break apart their communities.<sup>79</sup>

Author M.E. James notes that, “...A picture emerges of a community which in 1536 was disgruntled in important respects, and could be expected to seize opportunities to vent its discontents.”<sup>80</sup> What this illustrates is that northern commoners were upset with what Henry had done to their society and that their anger would bring on something that no one expected.

As this rebellion continued, the truth of the matter came out and what one begins to understand is that the gentry had a different idea of the rebellion’s aims. Some of the gentry of this area were not upset with the religious change, but more with the economic laws that Henry had passed. For example, the Statute of Uses of 1536 “denied noblemen and gentlemen a traditional protection against fiscal feudalism”<sup>81</sup> and forced these men to pay dues on their land to the king.<sup>82</sup> This group disliked the tax increase and felt as though the Tudor government cheated them since they would have to pay more to keep their land. By the end of this revolt, the commoners had felt that the gentry was trying to make their cause even stronger, but the common people were not involved in planning of the attacks or even knew of any talks between the gentry and the Tudor government. What one will notice as the journey continues through Tudor England is that the societies of other regions were having different problems in various aspects of their lives.

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<sup>78</sup> Whiting, *Local Responses*, 133.

<sup>79</sup> Horoszko, “Pilgrimage of Grace,” 3.

<sup>80</sup> M.E. James, “Obedience and Dissent in Henrician England: The Lincolnshire Rebellion 1536,” *Past & Present*, no. 48 (August 1970), 5.

<sup>81</sup> M.L. Bush, “‘Up for the Commonweal’: The Significance of Tax Grievances in the English Rebellions of 1536,” *The English Historical Review* 106, no. 419 (April 1991), 302.

<sup>82</sup> T.M. Parker, *The English Reformation to 1558*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 106.

### *To the East: Worcester*

Although Lincolnshire had issues between its social classes during the Reformation, other counties were having problems deciding whether to conform to the new religion or defend the old religion. Worcester is an area where the people were not seeing eye to eye with the decisions made by the Tudor government. Conflict ensued within this town and the people were not unified as they had once been before.

Going down the east shores of England, one will arrive in Worcester. This city was important during the Tudor reign because its markets were used to trade animals and animal products, the roads through the town were lines of communication, and it was one of the most active cloth-manufacturers in England.<sup>83</sup> This town, along with London, had persistent complaints from the citizens about overcrowding.<sup>84</sup> Another significant aspect of Worcester was its cathedral, which served three different dioceses, Worcester, Bristol, and Gloucester.<sup>85</sup> The cathedral was a main part of Worcester because the Tudor government saw it as a place that acted as a powerful religious symbol and to helped support its reform all the while being a place of local pride for its people. As Diarmaid MacCulloch found, “A cathedral was a showcase in an age of theological and liturgical revolution. To gain local acceptance for changes, central government had to ensure that the devotional life of the mother church in the diocese accurately reflected official policy.”<sup>86</sup> What this illustrates is that Henry used cathedral cities like Worcester to show that the religious reform was something that could work in a strong city. However, as the Protestant Reformation went through the eastern regions of England, the people and religious

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<sup>83</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, “Worcester: a Cathedral City in the Reformation,” in *The Reformation in English Towns 1500-1640*, eds. Patrick Collinson and John Craig (Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1998), 97.

<sup>84</sup> Wall, *Power and Protest*, 65.

<sup>85</sup> MacCulloch, “Worcester: a Cathedral City,” 98.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

leaders of Worcester began to question if the religious laws from the Tudor government would ruin their beliefs.

During 1538, two shrines of Saint Wulfstan and Saint Oswald were taken down and their bones moved from their original resting place.<sup>87</sup> The Worcester Chronicle recorded “This year the cross before the guild hall door called the high cross and many other crosses were defaced.”<sup>88</sup> In addition, the Worcester Cathedral Priory was dissolved under the Dissolution of the Monasteries<sup>89</sup> in 1540, and the Chronicler wrote that “the monks, friars, canons, were put down...the body of the Christ was taken out of the church.”<sup>90</sup> This demonstrates that the people of this city saw what the government had done to their cathedral and that they seemed to be emotionally attached to the religious tradition that they had known. Others, such as Bishop Latimer, felt that since these shrines made the people idle, they were to be taken away to make the people more laborious.<sup>91</sup> This opinion, along with other bishops and priests from the area, claimed that this reform made the city a better place. On the contrary, these religious men may have been biased towards the reform because they had been handpicked by the government to promote the change.<sup>92</sup> Since the opinions of the elite are widely known from this event, a researcher must examine what the beliefs of the people were during this change.

As author Alison Wall found towns that “had a cathedral, a bishop and ecclesiastical establishment” were more prone to have religious conflicts with the bishops and local government.<sup>93</sup> With this religious change happening in Worcester, what did it mean for the people who lived here? What historians have argued is that some of the people changed their

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<sup>87</sup> MacCulloch, “Worcester: a Cathedral City,” 98

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>93</sup> Wall, *Power and Protest*, 69.

beliefs to the new religion supported by Henry but some fought to keep the Catholic religion in their churches and homes. Worcester was close to two main cities, London and Oxford, where the change was happening the quickest.<sup>94</sup> One example is the Steynor family who tried to keep their conservative Catholic ways in a place that had changed ideas about religion.<sup>95</sup> One key figure in bringing down the Catholic beliefs in the cathedral was Bishop Latimer. He was one of the individuals who had helped to destroy religious relics within the Worcester church and the burning of mass-books in the town.<sup>96</sup> In this respect, these English people were forced to change what they believed in in order to survive.

#### *To the South: Morebath*

Researchers have been able to examine historical sources from a county and look at reasons to why individuals chose a specific religious position during the Reformation, which can be seen in the Southwest region of England. Historians have studied the village of Morebath and have demonstrated that this problem of religious reform did not affect the people as it may have in other regions of England.

As the journey through England arrives in the southern region, one comes upon the area known as Devon, where the village of Morebath lies. Devon was ranked as one of the wealthiest counties of Tudor England.<sup>97</sup> This community's economy was based on the wool provided by sheep.<sup>98</sup> Though wool production provided a stable economy for these people, the village was small and isolated from other towns that surrounded it.<sup>99</sup> There were no known rich men that

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<sup>94</sup> MacCulloch, "Worcester: a Cathedral City," 99.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>97</sup> Whiting, *Blind Devotion*, 8.

<sup>98</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Voices of Morebath: Reformation and Rebellion in an English Village* (London: Yale University Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 2.

resided in this village and the classes were not widely separated by money as in other regions.<sup>100</sup> Author Eamon Duffy argues that although this community was small enough for everyone to know each other and where religion and society intermixed,<sup>101</sup> friction existed in the village, which could have caused certain tensions to rise within the people, parish priests, and local government of Morebath. For example, a gentleman who was enraged at a rebellion that broke out in the southwest said, “I for my part am so heated that if I should fight with those traitors, I would, for every two strokes to be stricken for treason.”<sup>102</sup> Problems of local policing were apparent in Morebath, which brought Cromwell and his officials to come in and change how political matters were being run.<sup>103</sup> Cromwell elected officeholders from London to take control of this town and set them on the right path.<sup>104</sup> Author Robert Whiting found that the gentry from the south were committed to the new religion because of the education and contact with London.<sup>105</sup> This can illustrate that the influence of Cromwell and his officials helped change this town. London was reforming at a fast pace and the influence from the big city was moving towards the southern regions, which can be seen on the people of Morebath. It is as though they had no choice but to follow the actions that were being taken in the towns surrounding them.

Nevertheless, researchers are able to learn about the tension in Devon and the small town of Morebath during the 1530s from an account by parish priest Sir Christopher Trychay.<sup>106</sup> Through his account, one is able to understand the relationship that the people had with their parish priests and other religious leaders, but can also examine why this village may have changed during the English Reformation. With the accounts that were taken by Sir Christopher

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<sup>100</sup> Duffy, *Voices of Morebath*, 8.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>102</sup> Whiting, *Local Responses*, 141.

<sup>103</sup> Speight, “Politics of Good Governance,” 624.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Whiting, *Blind Devotion*, 227.

<sup>106</sup> Duffy, *Voices of Morebath*, 14.

Tychay, one could examine these as an opportunity for the priest to illustrate his own religious agenda on the people who followed him.<sup>107</sup> For example, in 1538, the accounts illustrate that the village was obedient in disbanding saint worship within the church, but Sir Christopher notes how he felt about this with ideas about negotiating to keep some of the saints, such as having banners with two important saints upon each side of the cloth.<sup>108</sup> Thus, if people were trying to obey the new rules and ideas of the monarchy, but the government did not punish the others for still going against it, then the turmoil between neighbors was likely to exist in this small English village. What this illustrates is that although Morebath was breaking rules that had been made by the English Church, they were still allowed to practice some aspects of the old religion. Author Helen Speight argues that the local government that was ruling these southern regions were “shaped on tradition, local patronage and local politics, with minimal interference from central government.”<sup>109</sup> These men were under orders from Cromwell and knew that he had power in Henry’s court, but Speight illustrates that at times these men would disregard Cromwell’s authority. What this shows is that the partnership between the local and central government was not as strong, and the people of Morebath were allowed to live their lives in the old traditions without punishment.

The idea of using villages and towns to study the development of the English Reformation have given historians another way to approach this event through their research. These towns are an important aspect of this religious reform because it illustrates the contribution from these places on the Tudor government and religious houses. However, what is now being examined by researchers is the importance of individuals and how the influences in their lives assisted in spreading the reform.

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<sup>107</sup> Duffy, *Voices of Morebath*, 39.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>109</sup> Speight, “Politics of Good Governance,” 626.

## **The Influences**

When examining the English Reformation, one must look into what may have caused the people to retain certain beliefs about the old religion, Catholicism, or to accept the new religion, Protestantism. Historians have examined sources that have led them to conclusions about which groups could have influenced the English people's decisions about religious reform. This section will examine some of those groups, such as the ecclesiastical officials, parish priests, local government, gentry, and family, with an attempt to clarify why there was such debate all throughout England about what beliefs to follow.

### *Ecclesiastical Officials*

Ecclesiastical officials, such as the Pope or bishops, had authority over numerous churches and cathedrals throughout Europe, but when the English Reformation came about, their ability to control the beliefs of the people began to diminish. What has been found is that these officials were trying hard to keep their power over other countries, but the English monarch and people were not going to fall for the same methods used before.

The Catholic Church was a major force within England, but when Henry VIII came to power things changed dramatically. In Rome, the Pope, with the help of his bishops, had the power to decide religious rules, such as canon law or common law, for countries in Western Europe.<sup>110</sup> These ecclesiastical officials were involved in visiting the local parishes to make sure the clergy had the correct credentials, to review the conduct of the parishioners, and even to make sure the property looked presentable.<sup>111</sup> In the 1500s, European countries' governments were questioning the religious choices that the Catholic Church made, but England was one of the first to actually break away from Rome and the power of the Pope. However, the Roman

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<sup>110</sup> Arthur F. Kinney and David W. Swain, "Courts, Ecclesiastical," *Tudor England: An Encyclopedia*. (New York: Garland, 2001),164.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

Catholic Church responded strongly by making proclamations and sought to stop Henry and his government officials from breaking away from their rule. Numerous English bishops did not approve of Henry's attack on the Pope because the bishops had supported Henry and the Tudor dynasty for some time and did not like that he did not support their religious beliefs.<sup>112</sup> Two bishops, Stokesley and Bonner, tried to restrict the extent to which Protestant beliefs were being forced into local churches in London.<sup>113</sup> This demonstrates that the ecclesiastical officials were managing what was being told to the parishioners and maybe even the parish priests. The clergy even believed that the people who were rebelling against the Catholic Church were younger people who wanted to be disobedient and follow their own instincts instead of the religious laws of the Catholic Church.<sup>114</sup> However, the English people did not like the decisions that the Pope and bishops were making.

The English were often separated by local variations in their faith, but also by the politics involved within.<sup>115</sup> For example, the buying of indulgences was not something that the people felt was needed to repent their sins and that the money went to the bishops to better their own lives instead of the church itself. Even priests, whose status was below the bishops, were challenging what their own mentors had taught them and were starting to adopt the Protestant way of Scripture and theology to teach their parishioners.<sup>116</sup> Many English people who were below the ecclesiastical officials, such as servants, would follow whatever religion their master followed, such as Thomas Cromwell's servant, Jasper Fyloll. Fyloll wrote two religious tracts supporting the reform, but historians have argued that he was influenced and made to write these

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<sup>112</sup> Doran and Durston, *Princes, Pastors, and People*, 125.

<sup>113</sup> Haigh, "Historiography of the English Reformation," 1001.

<sup>114</sup> Brigden, "Youth and Reformation," 39.

<sup>115</sup> Arthur F. Kinney and David W. Swain, "Catholicism", *Tudor England: An Encyclopedia*. (New York: Garland, 2001), 114.

<sup>116</sup> Brigden, "Youth and Reformation," 55.

tracts as propaganda for the crown by Thomas Cromwell and others who wanted to see the new religion flourish.<sup>117</sup> Not only were the people forming a negative opinion about these ecclesiastical officials, but Henry was also becoming convinced that the papal authority was wrong about decisions they had made about his excommunication from Rome because of his marriage to Anne Boleyn.<sup>118</sup>

All over England, the people had mixed feelings about the break from Rome during the 1530s. The people who felt that Roman authority should cease to exist stopped giving money to the Church and as John Hooker wrote in 1534, “The Pope and his usurped authority was utterly exiled and banished out of this land.”<sup>119</sup> There were people who believed that “Rome shall be up again,”<sup>120</sup> and thought that the King would be overthrown for the decisions he had made for the Church of England and its people. Others, like William Tyndale, an educated farmer, felt that neither the king nor the papal authority could force the people to reform, but it had to be the people, individually, who would want to change their religious paths.<sup>121</sup> In a response to Thomas More, called *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, Tyndale wrote, “Let every soul submit himself unto the authority of the highest powers. There is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained by God.”<sup>122</sup> What this illustrates is that this religious reformation had come at the wrong time for the wrong reasons, and that it was the will of God to decide when change was going to happen. The English people were the ones to bring change into their country, and not be influenced by the ecclesiastical officials and the Roman Catholic Church’s policies.

### *Parish Priests*

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<sup>117</sup> Richard Rex, “Jasper Fyoll and the Enormities of the Clergy: Two Tracts Written during the Reformation Parliament.” *The Sixteenth Century* 31, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 1043.

<sup>118</sup> Loades, *Politics, Censorship, and Reformation*, 62.

<sup>119</sup> Whiting, *Local Responses*, 13.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> O’Day, *The Debate*, 10.

<sup>122</sup> William Tyndale, “The Obedience of a Christian Man.” In *Voices of the English Reformation*, ed. John N. King (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 57.

Below the ecclesiastical officials were the parish priests who were to follow the religious laws given to them from the Pope, but this idea changed when Henry VIII pressured this group to follow the new laws he was enacting on England. What one will begin to see is that the parish priests influenced the church-goers in what they believed was the correct religious stance to support and the people even swayed the opinions of their priests to assist in keeping the tradition of generations before them alive.

Although some of the English population may have followed the authority of the Catholic Church, others followed their parish priests within their towns and villages. Under Henry's rule, these priests either chose to or were forced to preach specific beliefs that their King had bestowed upon them. This belief that they were to confer on their parishioners was that King Henry VIII was the supreme ruler of England and that he was the only one between the people and God, which was made known in the Act of Supremacy. This then would make the Roman Catholic Church obsolete and the laws that were handed down by them were to be no longer accepted by the English people. Some priests supported the religious reform that Henry brought to the country, as one London priest stated, he supported Henry's decision to execute Thomas More and other heretics.<sup>123</sup> However, priests who had spread the new learning within their parishes would be banned from preaching and even replaced.<sup>124</sup>

However, not every parish priest felt the need to follow what Henry had decreed. During the Pilgrimage of Grace, parish priests wanted to support their local monasteries that were being dissolved by the Tudor government. These priests believed that the government was trying to destroy Catholicism and let Protestantism become the only religion in their country.<sup>125</sup> These

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<sup>123</sup> Whiting, *Local Responses*, 152.

<sup>124</sup> Claire Cross, "Religion in Doncaster from the Reformation to the Civil War." In *The Reformation in English Towns 1500-1640*, eds. Patrick Collinson and John Craig (Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1998), 52.

<sup>125</sup> Horoszko, "Pilgrimage of Grace," 13.

priests were trying to preserve the “institution of religious life”<sup>126</sup> because they knew the importance of people’s religious beliefs to their daily lives. In 1532, priests wrote, *The Reply of the Ordinaries*, to the King about his decision to take part in the religious decisions and law making of the English Church. The priests recorded,

...we beseech lowly upon our knees, so entirely as we can, to be the author of unity, charity and concord as above, for whose preservation we do and shall continually pray to Almighty God long to reign and prosper in most honourable estate to his pleasure.<sup>127</sup>

The priests argue that they did not want Henry to be involved with religious acts because they felt it was not his place, but theirs only. Even during their sermons to their parishioners, the parish priests would preach about what the people should believe and the decisions they should make in their lives. For example, Thomas Kendal, the vicar of Louth, stated in one of his sermons that his people should be concerned with maintaining their faith through the changes that were happening with the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England.<sup>128</sup> Some priests would not discuss or would even degrade the papacy to illustrate to the people that they no longer needed to listen to this “foreign” power. Preaching was seen as one of the important factors in how Protestantism reached many towns and villages.<sup>129</sup> On the other hand, some priests would continue to speak about the Pope as being intelligent and as a high authority, next to God.

Not only did these parish priests speak to their parishioners but they had personal contact with them as well. In the daily lives of the English people, these priests were there for them in every aspect: births, weddings, sickness, and deaths. People relied on the priests and the

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<sup>126</sup> C.S.L. Davies, “The Pilgrimage of Grace Reconsidered.” *Past & Present*, no. 41 (December 1968): 65.

<sup>127</sup> “The Reply of the Ordinaries”, 1532. In *Documents of the English Reformation*, ed. Gerald Bray (Minneapolis: First Fortress Press, 1994), 70.

<sup>128</sup> James, “Obedience and Dissent,” 16.

<sup>129</sup> Roger B. Manning, “The Spread of the Popular Reformation in England.” *Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies* 1 (January 1970): 40.

monasteries for support and religious information, just as the priests and monasteries relied on them for the same. As author Robert Whiting argued, farmers, tradesmen or craftsmen, would receive the church's revenue to keep the church updated and repaired if damaged.<sup>130</sup> The people helped support the church and with the priests exclaiming their opinions to them about the reform, everyone had to decide which side to take and who to support. Sermons became social commentary for the parish priests to give their thoughts on the issue at hand.<sup>131</sup> In the beginning months of 1540, a preacher by the name of Robert Barnes was preaching the Protestant word freely and gave books to people without any punishment.<sup>132</sup> Thus, people would support either what the priests were saying or be against the prescribed sermons. For example, a shoemaker in 1535 argued that "priests put Christ to death", and that "the blessing of a bishop was as good as the blessing of his old horse".<sup>133</sup> Another event that was recorded in the village of Morebath was of an assault of a vicar when he was trying to collect tithes.<sup>134</sup> Nevertheless, as author Christopher Haigh argues,

The higher clergy of the Catholic Church were too involved in politics and the lower clergy were too poor and uneducated to meet the rising lay demand for a more personal involvement in religion or to combat the dynamic force of a Bible-based evangelical Protestantism: Reformation was easy and it was fast.<sup>135</sup>

What this illustrates is that both the ecclesiastical officials and the parish priests were too involved in gaining power within the Church and since the reform came upon them at such a fast pace, they just tried to do what was best for themselves. The English people had a difficult time trying to decide what to believe, but what did not help was the influence by the local government.

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<sup>130</sup> Whiting, *Local Responses*, 37.

<sup>131</sup> Arthur F. Kinney and David W. Swain, "Sermons," *Tudor England: An Encyclopedia*. (New York: Garland, 2001), 635.

<sup>132</sup> Brigden, "Fall of Thomas Cromwell," 263.

<sup>133</sup> Whiting, *Local Responses*, 30.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>135</sup> Haigh, "Historiography of Reformation," 997.

## *Local Government*

Historians have studied the influences of religious leaders and groups, but what one needs to look at is the role of local government. A researcher will find that the need for control over the people during the religious reform came through local officials and their propaganda, although the English people had a hard time deciding which religious stance to follow because there was such distrust with the government. The local governmental officials tried hard to follow the new rules of Henry VIII, but many things stood in their way to succeed in this.

Local government was in high demand during the sixteenth century, because Henry needed men to be prepared to fight in the event that religious altercations happened in a village or town.<sup>136</sup> Government officials were not popular with their citizens all the time but they had an influence over them during the English Reformation. These officials were either friends of the monarchy who had risen to leadership positions or “old” aristocrats who had held positions of authority.<sup>137</sup> The population of England was growing during the 1530s and many people were moving from the city or town centers to the outskirts of the “suburbs”. Since towns could not control population growth, the local government began to worry about everything that would come with all the people: poverty, crowded areas, etc.<sup>138</sup> The government became afraid that with all the new and local people moving into a town that these people would begin to start trouble if things were not looking so good for the community, such as poor crops or bad weather.<sup>139</sup> The government officials would try to make the effort to help the people that were suffering, a strategy to keep these people on their side. In addition, officials had to make sure that these new residents would abide by the laws that were laid down by them. For example, David

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<sup>136</sup> Arthur F. Kinney and David W. Swain, “Government, Local,” *Tudor England: An Encyclopedia*. (New York: Garland, 2001), 298.

<sup>137</sup> Wall, *Power and Protest*, 28.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

Loades describes in his work *Politics, Censorship, and the English Reformation* that during Henry's reign, when there was rebellious talk between citizens or in a preacher's sermon, it was taken seriously by the Tudor government and would be considered treason since the law had become stricter once Henry had taken over the Church of England.<sup>140</sup> These officials used propaganda to illustrate to the towns and villages what they would be like if they had no law and order.<sup>141</sup> By censoring what the people saw and heard, local government officials would sway the minds of the townspeople or villagers. Books had to be approved by the King himself before being printed,<sup>142</sup> and this shows that the government and Henry used their power to control what people were reading.

Especially during the English Reformation, the townspeople did not know which side, Protestant or Catholic, to choose since their own local government officials were controlling what they knew about the events around them, locally and nationally. Additionally, people always had the idea in their mind that they were to obey those who were above them since birth.<sup>143</sup> People had believed for generations that the government would do what was best for the people's interest, but things were changing under Henry's reign. On the other hand, conflicts arose within the towns because the people were split between supporting the new religion and supporting the old religion. Author Alison Wall found that during the Pilgrimage of Grace, which arose in the town of Yorkshire, the mayor and aldermen allowed the rebels to occupy the city for a couple of months.<sup>144</sup> This illustrates that the town did not like what had been dictated to them. Instead, they rose up against the officials and demanded change, and the officials gave in.

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<sup>140</sup> Loades, *Politics, Censorship, and Reformation*, 98.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>143</sup> Ryrie, "Problem of Allegiance," 108.

<sup>144</sup> Wall, *Power and Protest*, 68.

This raises the question of whether the government officials were weak or that they did not care what happened.

Other ideas have been brought to the attention of historians about how towns were run during the Tudor period because certain citizens would have Protestant values that conflicted with the traditional views that had been there before.<sup>145</sup> For example, Alison Wall found that Protestant councilors would form groups to try and impose “godly solutions” to problems within the town and to gain control over the government.<sup>146</sup> These local elite depended on the crown to validate their authority as local officials, but rivalries did exist between the officials and citizens. Bringing peace to towns full of poverty and religious turmoil was hard on the new Tudor government, which could have lead to why they could not control the people’s opinions and other groups began to influence the minds of the English people.

### *Gentry*

While the local officials were trying to control the townspeople, the gentry were finding ways to show the government their thoughts on the religious reform spreading through the English towns. This group did not like what was being done by Henry and his officials because they felt it was harming themselves and everyone around them in their communities. Thus, these gentlemen brought their opinion to the common people and worked together to rebel against the government.

The gentry were a group of people, such as knights, esquires, and gentlemen, who resided at the top of the English class structure, though they were the second tier of the upper class with the nobility being above.<sup>147</sup> This group was becoming increasingly irritated with the laws and proclamations that were being issued by the government during the 1530s, such as the Statute of

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<sup>145</sup> Wall, *Power and Protest*, 68.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> Horoszko, “Pilgrimage of Grace,” 5.

Uses, which was implemented in 1536. What this proclamation meant to the gentry was that they had to pay more money for their land because the government needed money for the king's expenses.<sup>148</sup> In essence, the government was exploiting the gentry and their lifestyles. These men also did not like how the Tudor court and government viewed and treated them. In the northern counties, the gentry were seen as backward, conservative, and violent,<sup>149</sup> which was something that Henry would not want in his court, and all the gentry wanted was to survive.<sup>150</sup> Historians, such as Bush, have argued that "these gentlemen were worried about their lives and communities breaking apart and falling into disrepair because of the religious laws and taxes that Henry VIII and his Council were formulating".<sup>151</sup> Thus, when the Reformation began during the 1530s, the gentry were at the forefront of the change in England.

One way that they influenced the people around them was formulating rebellions, such as the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536. The gentry felt that by showing that they wanted the change as much as the commoners that they would be able to unite to stand against the Henrician government. For example, Robert Aske, who became a gentry leader in the rebellion, wrote an oath for the men to take, which stated that the men who joined the cause were "not to enter into our said Pilgrimage for no particular profit to yourself" but they joined for the "counsel of the commonwealth."<sup>152</sup> This oath illustrates that these upper class men wanted to help people who were below them, but also to fight for Catholicism. The status of the gentry in their specific town or village had sway over the people's opinions and impacted their local towns by bringing in support from other influential patrons or powerful nobles, which could have resulted in certain

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<sup>148</sup> Horoszko, "Pilgrimage of Grace," 9.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>150</sup> William Palmer, "Scenes from Provincial Life: History, Honor, and Meaning in the Tudor North." *Renaissance Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 442.

<sup>151</sup> Bush, "Up for the Commonweal," 318.

<sup>152</sup> Robert Aske, "The Oath of the Honourable Men," in *Tudor Rebellions*, eds. Anthony Fletcher and Diarmaid MacCulloch (London: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1997), 132.

attitudes about religion. As author Roger Manning found “Roman Catholicism survived best where there were social institutions to support it.”<sup>153</sup> Commoners, servants, and others were surrounded by the opinions of the upper class every day<sup>154</sup> and heard about the ideas that were coming from London and other European countries about the new religion. If a gentleman was successful in a specific region, the people may look to him for favors or a position in a government office,<sup>155</sup> but the gentlemen may have only done these things for people if they had the same beliefs in religion and politics. An examination of the gentry illustrated that although they may not have had all the power within the Tudor government, their ideas and influence over other parts of the English population helped to change the beliefs of the people from Catholicism to Protestantism or vice versa.

### *Family*

Family is one of the most important aspects of a person’s life, though in Tudor England, this idea was being questioned. Children were going against their parents’ traditional beliefs and parents were disowning their children for believing in the new religion. What researchers have established is that the family was in disruption during the English Reformation and that outside influences affected what the family began to believe in.

The English people had numerous outside influences to consider in their beliefs but what affected these people the most was their own families. For generations, Catholicism was the belief that most families had faith in and followed the rules that were laid down by this religion. Others beliefs, such as magic or the beginnings of Protestantism, existed alongside the traditional

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<sup>153</sup> Manning, “Spread of Reformation,” 47.

<sup>154</sup> S.J. Gunn, “Peers, Commons and Gentry in the Lincolnshire Revolt of 1536,” *Past & Present*, no. 123 (May 1989), 68.

<sup>155</sup> Wall, *Power and Protest*, 37.

religion, but were seen as heretical.<sup>156</sup> From the day that a child was born, they were to learn the Church's rules and obey them for the rest of their lives.<sup>157</sup> The reason that Catholicism was strong in the family setting was because it was considered a tradition to stay with the religion of generations past. If a younger person from a family had decided to not follow what their forefathers had believed and began to adhere to the acts of Protestantism, the thought was that this idea of Catholicism would die out. Why would these young people go against tradition? Some historians believe that English youth were the most prominent group to go against this tradition because they were young and wanted to spread their radical ideas.<sup>158</sup> Most young people were heading to cities, such as London, where there were opportunities and new people and beliefs to follow.<sup>159</sup> Even children would mock their own parents,

My father is an old doting foole and will fast upon the fryday; my mother goeth always mumblinge on her beades. But you shall se me of another sorte, I warraunt you. For I will neuer folowe no suche superstitious folyel nor walke in the papisticall pathes of my parents.<sup>160</sup>

There was no respect for the children's parents beliefs because they thought their viewpoints were strange and absurd compared to the new religion that was coming into the English towns. These young people were just rebelling against what their families believed because as we see in society today, that is what teenagers do. In response, the parents would disown their children if they had chosen to believe in the new learning. One mother said to her son, "If thou be at that point, I require thee to depart from my house and out of my sight, and never take me more for thy mother hereafter."<sup>161</sup> This idea of disowning one's own children was something that the parents had to decide upon because they may not want to be known or seen with a heretic in their

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<sup>156</sup> Doran and Durston, *Princes, Pastors, and People*, 82.

<sup>157</sup> Wall, *Power and Protest*, 113.

<sup>158</sup> Brigden, "Youth and Reformation," 58.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

home. Another facet that historians have examined was the youth of England during the Reformation was that their change in beliefs could have just been personal.<sup>162</sup> They may have discovered this new faith and felt that this was something that they could believe in and not the old tradition that had not changed in hundreds of years.

Not only did family life have an influence on what to believe during the Reformation but martial relationships, which Saint Paul stated that “the husband was the head of his wife, just as Christ was the head of his Church.”<sup>163</sup> The head of the household traditionally determined the entire family’s beliefs. This idea of obedience was something that English families considered a quality that everyone should strive to have in their household. The householder was “to provide religious instruction not only to his wife and children but also for his servants, apprentices and other dependents.”<sup>164</sup> However, this was not the case with every family because there were wives who felt that their virtue and honesty were better to understanding a specific religious idea. Some couples, such as John and Joan Greenway, both worked together to make their Catholic faith stronger and oppose the new learning.<sup>165</sup> Other women, such as Anne Askew, fell away from her husband’s beliefs and were “cruelly and violently” driven out of the husband’s home by the suggestion of the local clergy.<sup>166</sup> Historians have claimed that during a husband’s absence from the household a woman was allowed power in domestic matters and many other areas, especially religion.<sup>167</sup> Author Susan Wabuda argues, “the ultimate happiness of the marriage rested with the wife, and the source of her power lay not in sensuality but in common Christian fellowship.”<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Brigden, “Youth and Reformation,” 42.

<sup>163</sup> Susan Wabuda, “Sanctified by the believing spouse: women, men, and the martial yoke in the early Reformation,” in *The Beginnings of English Reformation*, eds. Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 112.

<sup>164</sup> Whiting, *Local Responses*, 157.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>166</sup> Wabuda, “Martial Yoke,” 123.

<sup>167</sup> Wall, *Power and Protest*, 83.

<sup>168</sup> Wabuda, “Martial Yoke,” 118.

This illustrates that although women were supposed to be quiet and meek, men were to follow their beliefs. Family and marriage illustrate to many historians that the relationships within this structure were important aspects in a person's life and that what one person may have believed in, another family member may have followed the same belief or changed their mind completely.

With all of these groups examined within this section, one is able to understand that the influences in the daily lives of the English people assisted in conforming their religious beliefs during the reform. Historians could even look at other influences, such as international leaders or literature and plays to see where the information for the reform was coming from and how these groups were representing it as well. No matter where one looks or what one reads, there may be an influence behind the English people and their decisions.

### **Conclusion**

This research has found that the response of the English people to the Reformation from 1529 to 1540 did, in fact, depend on the variation in geography, social group, gender, and age. However, one question still remains; to what extent did the responses and influences of these four regions to the Reformation affect Henry VIII's own reactions towards the reforms?

Throughout this research, it was noted that historians examined how Henry's own political and religious leaders influenced his policies and beliefs, and how these affected the common English people. However, to find the people's true reactions to these changes, one had to examine the records from parishes in local towns or read histories from the Tudor era to these first hand accounts. Author Christopher Haigh argues that these people "were persuaded to accept new policies by a carefully orchestrated campaign of preaching and printed propaganda, encouragement to conform was provided by sharpening of the treason laws, and local dignitaries

were instructed to report deviants.”<sup>169</sup> This illustrates that historians have examined how the English people were influenced by propaganda and other people during this reform, but the thoughts of the people themselves seems to be misrepresented within early historical research; no one took the time to quote the actual reactions of the common people.

In the twentieth century, historians began looking at history through different methods, such as sociology. They began to re-question the answers they had found in their earlier research, and had to now accommodate to these new methods. This was true for the question of who was behind the Reformation and the factors that caused Henry VIII’s policy changes. This is where the idea of regional studies came into, and where the information within this research has been found to answer the question laid out in the first few pages of this research paper. Though these studies have assisted others in finding information about high-ranking officials beliefs, this research suggests that historians should begin to examine the role of the common English people in the Reformation changes.

Historians have argued about whether the English people were content or discontent with the Church during Henry VIII’s rule, and it is this researcher’s belief that this is where they need to begin their work. By looking into how the people from different counties in England displayed their opinions on the Reformation, this will allow them to generate some answers as to how Henry’s own people were affected by his religious and political decisions. Problems may arise from this research, though, because it is hard to determine what percentage of people in the different regions recorded their beliefs. Taking primary sources and saying that their information is correct can lead to a misreading of facts, because people may have written one thing in order to hide their true feelings, or the primary evidence may not reflect all common men and women of the period. While new problems or questions will arise, with continued research on the

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<sup>169</sup> Haigh, “Historiography of Reformation,” 995.

English Reformation, the information that will be found can assist in formulating the correct answers about how religious reform affected the people and its leaders.

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