

AZoaia - AN ESSAY ON RELIGION

The Renaissance was a period of deep change, in this essay I will write about the change in approach toward religion.

The study of ancient manuscripts led scholars to question the ideas that the Church had for so long put forward – especially that the Roman Catholic Church was the holder of all wisdom essential for salvation.

The kings of the Tudor dynasty were almost absolute sovereigns, and this was possible because of the cleverness of the kings and their direct collaborators who were able to carry out projects which gain the support of people and increase the prestige of nation. In this period Parliament, but not only parliament, was under the control of the kings, indeed they were interested also in religious matters. Just remember the pamphlet that Henry VIII wrote denouncing Luther's doctrine, a work which gained him the title of "Defender of the Faith". But when he asked the Pope to declare his marriage with Catherine of Aragon, disappointed because she had not given him a male heir, and the Pope delayed, he lost patience and broke with Rome and declare himself "Supreme Head on Earth of the Church of England" with the Act of Supremacy. With the English Reform all the privileges belonging to the Pope passed to the direct control of the English Sovereign. Although Henry had broken with the Church of Rome, he had no desire to make any change in Catholic doctrine and liturgy, but he couldn't prevent Protestants from raising questions concerning the organization of the new Church of England. He had to make concessions, among them the authorization the use of English Bible in Church.

After Edward VI, who imposed Protestantism, Mary Tudor, called Mary I, assumed the Crown. She was a Catholic and believed that her supreme task was to restore Catholicism to England. She repealed all the reforms on religious matter which had been passed under the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI.

Mary I had to repress many rebellions which rose up in the country, condemning to death about three hundred Protestants. For her religious intolerance she has been given the name of "Bloody Mary".

While the nation had been shaken by Mary's excesses Elizabeth ascended the throne. As she was protestant she wanted to restore Protestantism but had no idea to persecute anyone. A new Act of

Supremacy had been passed by Parliament in 1559 and it had the same purpose of the Act of Supremacy passed in 1534: to establish the English monarch as the official head of the Church of England. She was quite tolerant toward the catholic and those who followed other religious faiths.

With Elizabeth's death in 1603 James I became king but he was not popular with the English for several reasons... He was a strong believer in the Divine Right of Kings and in his position as head of the Church. So the country found itself shaken by religious conflicts. In 1605 the Catholics organized the famous Gunpowder Plot. A group of conspirators led by Guy Fawkes had placed a large quantity of explosives in the cellars of House of Parliament, but they were discovered and were executed.

Another example of the religious conflicts present in the country was the departure of the Pilgrim Father for America. They were Puritans who left Britain on board the "Mayflower" to escape persecution and find a place where they could live according to their religious faith.

During James I's reign a new translation of the Bible appeared in 1611 with the title "The Authorized Version". His son, Charles I, was, like his father, a strong supporter of the doctrine of the "Divine Right" of Kings to rule. His theory provoked continuous protests in the country.

He couldn't avoid direct confrontation with the Puritan party, which had given rise to a social and political movement holding a considerable majority in Parliament, and whose members mainly belonged to the middle classes. Puritans was the name given to the more extreme Protestants within the Church of England who thought the English Reformation had not done enough to reform the doctrines and structure of the Church by eliminating every trace of Catholic influence. The Puritans went on to attempt purification of the self and the society as well.

After Charles II, who wanted to restore Catholicism to England and guaranteed religious toleration, his brother James, Duke of York, ascended the throne as James II. He was the first Catholic monarch since Mary Tudor and restored or better tried to restore Catholicism to the Country. He removed some Anglicans from office replacing them with Catholics and created the Court of Ecclesiastical Commission to punish those who opposed him. His reign began with rebellions.