

Protestant Reformation + Church of England Background info. (This is what we discussed in class).

Background Information

The Tudor king Henry VIII of England ruled during a turbulent time of religious upheaval. At the beginning of the Protestant Reformation Henry took a firm stand against the teachings of Martin Luther and won from the pope the title "Defender of the Faith." In 1533, after a marriage of 23 years, Henry divorced his wife Catherine of Aragon. Henry VII, the king's father, had won the throne after a bloody civil war. Henry VIII felt that he needed a son in order to secure the Tudor dynasty in England. During their near quarter-century marriage Catherine had but one living child, a daughter Mary Tudor. When Henry divorced his wife and married again he broke with the Catholic Church in Rome and proclaimed himself as head of the Church of England or Anglican Church. Henry refused to join the ranks of Protestant reformers and kept the basic beliefs and traditions of the Roman Catholic Church.

Henry's second wife, Anne Boleyn, gave him a daughter, Elizabeth. Still desiring a male heir, Henry married again. Jane Seymour, his third wife, died shortly after giving birth to a son, Edward. Henry married three other women before his death in 1547. His young son became King Edward VI. During his reign the Anglican Church adopted Protestant ideology. Upon Edward's death in 1553, the throne passed to Henry VIII's eldest daughter, Mary. Mary had been brought up as a Catholic and during her reign persecuted those who refused to accept the Catholic faith. Upon her death, Henry's second daughter Elizabeth I, restored Protestantism. Catholics felt threatened in England and became involved in plots to overthrow Elizabeth in favor of her cousin, Mary Stuart of Scotland. During Elizabeth's reign the English were expected to support the Anglican Church. Although Elizabeth proved to be more tolerant than Mary, religious dissenters had few liberties.

On Elizabeth's death the throne passed to the Protestant King of Scotland, James VI, who now ruled England as James I. King James had no patience with religious dissenters. During the Elizabethan era some Anglicans sought to go further in making changes in the church and to purge or "purify" it of all vestiges of Roman Catholicism. Another group felt that it would be difficult if not impossible to "purify" the church from within and sought to separate from communion in the Anglican Church. Facing persecution for their religious convictions, these Separatists left England and took up residence in the Netherlands. They considered this a pilgrimage and thus called themselves "Pilgrims." Fearing the loss of their English identity and hearing of the successful colonial settlement in Virginia, these Pilgrim Separatists returned to England with the intention of receiving permission from the Virginia Company to set up a colony north of Jamestown. They sailed for America in 1620. Ten years later Puritans received a charter from King Charles I, who had come to the throne on his father's death, and established the Massachusetts Bay Colony adjacent to the Separatist Plymouth Colony (Plymouth Plantation). The Puritan migration brought thousands to New England, many fleeing religious persecution of Puritans prior to the outbreak of a great Civil War in England, 1642-1646.