CHARLES I: ANATOMY OF A REGICIDE

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In Partial Fulfillment
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Master of Arts in History

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INTRODUCTION

No prince is ever benefited by making himself hated.1

*Discourses on Livy*, Niccolo Machiavelli

One Tuesday, January 30, 1649, Charles I of England found himself situated on a scaffold outside the Banquet Hall in Whitehall, London, awaiting the blow of the executioner’s axe before a throng of his subjects. He insisted on wearing warm clothing prior to the dropping of the axe because “the season is so sharp as probably may make me shake, which some observers may imagine proceeds from fear.”2 No less a statement would be expected from someone who sought to live as a divine royal but was relegated to being a failed absolutist. Although the historical record offers insight into the mind of Charles at this event, it is necessary to sort through various scraps of witness testimony and biased reports to gain any grasp of public opinion. However, doing so would likely reveal a wide array of opinion about the first ever execution of not just any English king, but *their* king. Charles’ rule had certainly been tumultuous.

Beginning with his ascension in 1625, he managed to gradually alienate and


anger those around him with his intransigent character, an assertion bolstered by Derek Wilson who notes that some of Charles’ guardians “regarded the young prince as stubborn and self-willed.” In the end, Charles, like all kings, was the recipient of an inheritance not of his making. However, unlike past English monarchs facing similar difficulties, his response to that inheritance guaranteed his ultimate downfall.

I contend that the English Civil War and subsequent regicide of Charles I were first and foremost the product of three conditions. The first of these was Henry VIII’s break from Rome. Although Henry hoped for a strong consolidation of royal power, the introduction of the ecclesiastical element into the political during the Reformation period created a religious quandary for Charles that he struggled to overcome. While post-Reformation rulers before Charles struggled with this newly introduced ecclesiastical element, the situation reached its critical zenith during his reign, resulting in a fragmentation of Parliament and the creation of rival factions acting in concert not only against themselves but eventually Charles. Second, Charles’ flawed personality manifested itself in the form of duplicity and intransigence. Such characteristics can and did lead to distrust between him and others. Michael Young goes as far as to say that the distrust evident during the early parliaments rested on the

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3 Derek Wilson, The King and the Gentleman (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 69.
shoulders of Charles. Finally, Charles failed to conform himself to the understood character of divine kingship during the period of his reign. This situation led to the perception that he was not only a king who could not be trusted but also one who risked the sacred ideal of liberty.

The Civil War remains a fascinating subject. In his book, Rebellion or Revolution? England from Civil War to Restoration, G.E. Alymer writes, “Contemporaries who lived through the events of 1640-60 found them amazing. Not surprisingly, so have historians ever since.” The English Civil War has been and continues to be studied at length, engaging generations of scholars seeking to infuse new perspectives. The War left no area of England and her territories untouched, and their consequences have been credited in some circles for laying the foundation of the “right to revolt” in modern democratic theory. The War also saw a shift in political relationships, giving Parliament greater power in determining national direction to the detriment of kingly authority.

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Such developments would seem quite out of place for a country that has preferred order. Prior to the onset of the strife, England was a country that respected authority in the form of king and parliament and “accepted the need for ordered government, functioning according to known rules.” The War, however, brought about a sudden social dislocation whereby many previously accepted norms and practices were in doubt. For much of England’s history, most internal skirmishes and unrest were confined to factious battles between various nobles and royalty, most notably seen during the Wars of the Roses, or the occasional rising of the peasantry against landowners. Apart from the latter, the impetus for these encounters was frequently limited to struggles amongst noble and landed families for political and economic control. The civil wars, however, forged a common ground that personally touched subjects at the royal, noble, and commoner levels, many of whom were torn by loyalty to either Crown or Parliament. Family members and friends choosing sides often found themselves in uncomfortable positions to one another. In a letter to his dear friend Royalist Commander Ralph Hopton, Parliamentarian Major-General William Waller wrote, “We are both upon the stage and must act such parts as are assigned us in this tragedy. Let us do it in a way of honour and without

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7 John Miller, *The English Civil Wars: Roundheads, Cavaliers and the Execution of the King* (London: Constable & Robinson, 2009), 17.
personal animosities.” In some instances, these fractures never healed and families were forever impacted by the consequences of the wars. Such was the case for Edmund and Ralph, father and son of the wealthy Verney family, who found themselves on opposing sides of the war. Anguished wife and mother Margaret, caught in the center of this conflict, wrote to Ralph, “I see you to much appryhende this unhapye diffirence betwixt your father and selfe: I am very confident a littill tune will make all will agane and his affecyon to you ase deare and harty as ever.” Further perusing of the family correspondence reveals the strong sense of guilt and sadness running through the family lines during the wars, a mere sampling of that experienced not only by families but virtually all strata of English society.

Given the complexities and far-reaching effects of the English Civil War, it is no wonder historians have fought relentlessly to uncover its causes, thus creating a number of historiographies. Perhaps the earliest of these is the Whig interpretation, a view begun by the French historian Paul de Rapin in his work *L’Histoire d’Angleterre* (the history of England) from 1724 but more recently promulgated by S. R Gardiner’s *The History of the Great Civil War 1642-1649*. This

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perspective flourished in the early part of the twentieth century and cited conflict between Parliament and King as a driving force of the War. The oppositional position of these two entities was driven by equally divergent ideologies with deep roots in English society. The former, largely cut from Puritan fabric, aligned itself with the Whig vision of a continual move toward liberty and enlightenment and placed a priority on the rights of the subject over the king’s prerogative, a position that virtually guaranteed conflict between king and subject (particularly when the pursuit of royal absolutism was on the agenda). A fuel for the Parliamentary cause was founded within the idea of an “ancient constitution, which was, in fact, a figment of the English imagination in order to give a legitimate basis for the assertion of liberties. Likewise, the king and his royal allies also sought precedent, but theirs was found in the form of divine kingship, the theory that secular rulers were appointed by God and therefore not subject to earthly demands.

Although the Whig interpretation remained in fashion into the early part of the twentieth century, it could not escape the larger events of the world, and the battlefields of World War I provided a stark reminder that perhaps society was not progressing toward a more enlightened state as was hoped. In 1931, this shift in outlook was reflected in Herbert Butterfield’s book *The Whig Interpretation of History*. While Butterfield argued that Whig historians tended to glorify
English rulers in an effort to demonstrate England’s steady progress toward
liberty and enlightenment, he declares its most dangerous contribution to
historical study to be its demand that “the past [be studied] with reference to the
present,”¹⁰ an assertion that contradicts the pursuit of historical objectivity.
Butterfield’s book did not receive much academic notice until the prominent
historian E. H. Carr snidely claimed, “It was a remarkable book in many ways –
not least because, though it denounced the Whig Interpretation over some 130
pages, it did not...name a single Whig except Fox, who was no historian, or a
single historian except Acton, who was no Whig.”¹¹ In spite of comments by
Carr and others, the book found new life following Butterfield’s highly
successful work, Christianity and History, and became required reading in most
university history classrooms.¹²

¹⁰ Herbert Butterfield, The Whig Interpretation of History, (New York: W.W. Norton and
Company, 1965), 11, under “The Whig Interpretation of History”

Edward Hallett Carr-Universal History Library,” http://library.universalhistory.net/wp-

¹² William Cronon, “Two Cheers for the Whig Interpretation of History,” American
Historical Association 50, no. 6 (September 2012) under “Perspectives Online,”
The Marxist interpretation succeeded the Whig interpretation and viewed the English Civil War as a product of conflict within the classes. Christopher Hill, a proponent of this view, says,

The Civil War was a class war, in which the despotism of Charles I was defended by the reactionary forces of the established Church and conservative landlords. Parliament beat the King because it could appeal to the enthusiastic support of the trading and industrial classes in town and countryside, to the yeomen and progressive gentry…\textsuperscript{13}

This interpretation began life as the offspring of the new Marxist social theory and “had an obvious impact on interpretations of the civil wars.\textsuperscript{14} It ushered in a spate of social explanations for the wars, viewing them as the rising up of a social class, \textit{viz.} a revolution, in pursuit of changing the balance of power.

English historians Lawrence Stone and Hugh Trevor-Roper were in the foreground of this historiography. In 1948, Stone authored an article in which he quantitatively argued that the Civil War was the result of the gentry class rising against the aristocracy in an effort to shift economic power. A number of historians, to include Trevor Hugh-Roper himself, faulted Stone for reaching erroneous conclusions in his quantitative method, namely, that there was


growing economic disparity between the Royalist and Parliamentary gentry.\textsuperscript{15}

Alan Simpson also concluded that there is no convincing evidence of economic crisis among the gentry or peerage leading up to the civil war era.\textsuperscript{16}

In the 1980s, this view fell out of favor among historians as there was “much skepticism about the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a period of revolutionary change,”\textsuperscript{17} and was largely replaced by the revisionist view. While the earlier interpretations approached the wars from a conflict perspective, the revisionists found much to be said about the idea of consensus. Revisionists do not dismiss conflict altogether, however; Richard Hofstadter notes that “a political society cannot hang together, at all, unless there is some kind of consensus running through it, and yet that no society has such a total consensus as to be devoid of significant conflict.”\textsuperscript{18} David Cressy also contends that while England experienced its share of conflict, “these conflicts were continually being

\textsuperscript{15} Refer to Stone’s 1967 work, The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641, for his now controversial assertion of economic crisis among the nobility of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

\textsuperscript{16} Hughes, \textit{The Causes}, 121.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.

resolved or mitigated by an overriding insistence on peace.”

Other hallmarks of revisionism are a tendency to shy away from linking “political conflict or particular allegiances to social change... [and the rejection] of inevitable and progressive development found in both Whig and Marxist accounts.”

Another inherent trend has been a shift from England as the primary focal point, the so-called “sin of Anglo-centricity,” to that of a more comprehensive perspective which takes the activities of the entire British Isles into account. In his essay, *English ‘Nationalism’, Celtic Particularism, and the English Civil War*, Mark Stoyle argues that the involvement of the various ethnicities of the Kingdom nations contributed greatly to the complexion and causes of the wars. Conrad Russell concurs with this in his book *The Causes of the English Civil War* where he insists that crises of religion, economy, and politics must be studied in their British totality and not on the basis of English exceptionalism.

While revisionism has broadened the analytical field, challenges to its assertions (so called “post-revisionism”) have begun to crop up, most notably by

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20 Hughes, 7.

Ann Hughes who says, “significant current work does not accept that revisionists have found an acceptable new analysis of the roots of the civil war.”

She faults consensus-minded revisionist historiography for falsely asserting that “there were no profound cleavages over religious and political principles before the later 1630s” and its focus on the “detailed narrative of high-politics” at the exclusion of the lesser-class role.

In his quest for understanding the genesis of the civil wars, Conrad Russell once wrote, “I first approached this subject through that hall of distorting mirrors, the search for the causes of the English Civil War.” Although he was being a bit tongue-in-cheek with this remark, he hit upon a very important truth, namely, that limiting one’s focus in search of the causes of the wars runs the risk of excluding others that may be more revealing in their own right.

Unfortunately, historians are unwillingly dragged into selecting by necessity, a situation from which I am also bound.

To that end, the Whig interpretation suffers due to its view that society is in a continual march toward liberty and enlightenment; the subsequent

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22 Hughes, 7.

23 Ibid., 8.

24 Ibid., 9.

experiences of England under the Protectorate do not show the markings of such progress as the Whigs would expect, and, as Butterfield pointed out, judging the past by the present poses an obstacle to objectivity. The revisionist paradigm, with its denunciation of any long-term struggles in England prior to the onset of the wars, also falls short of adequately explaining the War and ignores a great deal of conflict between various factions and the king. The only manner in which to properly understand the English Civil War is within the context of conflict, not the proletariat versus bourgeoisie type envisioned by Marx, but rather one of constitutionalism versus absolutism that had religious strife in the backdrop.

Chapter 1 will examine the English monarchy and its relation to the fledgling English church just prior to the waves of the Reformation crashing against English shores. Beginning with the ascension of Henry VIII and concluding with the death of James, efforts are made to show how these royals interacted with the changing church landscape to achieve their own political and personal purposes. Chapter 2 chronicles Charles assumption of the throne and makes an in depth examination of Charles’ relationship with the salient religious issues of his reign, Arminanism and Puritanism. Finally, chapter 3 will examine Charles’ responses to the Forced Loan and Five Knights case, and how those responses impacted Parliament and garnered mistrust among his subjects. The
chapter concludes with a discussion of Charles misunderstanding of the character of early modern kingship in England and the role his personality played in ensuring his execution.
CHAPTER ONE: CHURCH AND STATE (1509-1625)

Henry VIII

Henry VIII was a character of multifarious dimensions. His contemporaries described him as a “big, impressive man [who] had a natural authority and assurance.”

Henry was also known for his physical prowess and involved himself in everything from the hunt to tennis and the tilting field. There was no doubt he was also a man of action. One Spanish ambassador characterized him as a young warrior and another as one whose love is “universal with all who see him…[who] does not seem a person of this world, but one descended from Heaven (non par persona, di questo mondo, ma venudo dal cielo).”

Henry’s forceful and at times bellicose personality fueled both his personal and political odysseys; and, while he could occasionally be inclined to consider other viewpoints, he was also notoriously obdurate, Luther once ranting that he was “marvelously confident and cock-sure that owing to his


28 Ibid.
Consequently, Henry did not view the nascent but rapidly growing Reformation as an opportunity to reform a spiritually deficient English church that was in need of papal separation but rather as a platform for his political and personal agendas; D.G. Newcombe was entirely correct when he said Henry had no desire for a Protestant Church in England, and the Henrician separation from Rome was “entirely due to the particular needs and tempestuous leadership of Henry VIII.”

Although Henry’s severance of Roman ties was a nuanced action, there are two salient reasons that are relevant for understanding Henry’s impression of the ecclesiastical role in English politics and what, in fact, the English church meant to him and his rule. The first of these concerns his struggle to annul his marriage to Queen Katherine, an event known as the “Great Matter.”

In 1502, Arthur, Henry VIII’s brother and heir to the English throne, died, leaving both a widow and a first wife for Henry. Canon law prohibited the marriage; but in 1503 Pope Pius III granted the necessary dispensation, and Henry and Katherine of Aragon were wed in 1509. While Henry VII did not approve of his son’s marriage to Katherine, noting that it was a violation of canon law, but more likely deciding that a more advantageous marriage could be

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29 Martin Luther, *Martinus Lutherus contra Henricum Regem Angliae* (1522).

had, Henry ignored this advice and pressed forward. Although the latter may have been the most pragmatic concern at the time, the former proved to be the most influential in posterity. Henry would later do an about-face as he sought a papal dispensation from Clement VII in his effort to annul his marriage to Katherine, asserting the marriage to be a violation of canon law, and echoing his father from 1503.

Henry’s new love interest was Anne Boleyn, the daughter of Thomas Boleyn, a diplomat under Henry VII. Anne was familiar with Henry’s court, the consequence of a romantic interlude with Henry Percy, heir to the Earl of Northumberland and part of Cardinal Wolsey’s household, and she became a frequent court presence beginning in 1522. Although Henry undoubtedly took notice of Anne during her early appearances, his declaration of love for her most likely dates sometime after the summer of 1526 as evidenced in the first love letters between the two of them that began in late 1527. These letters bear witness to a Henry whom most would not recognize, a king pouring out his feelings for a woman who seems to be out of his legal reach; however, the visceral Henry still manages to invade even this arena of sentimentality and emotion, when he writes,

And to cause you yet oftener to remember me, I send you, by the bearer of this, a buck killed late last night by my own hand, hoping that when you eat of it you may think of the hunter.  

Although Henry’s pursuit of Anne steeled his opposition to Rome, he had already devised a large-scale course of action with regard to England’s relationship to the Holy See, a strategy that would fit his conception of the absolutist king quite readily. Reformation historian David Loades notes that Henry had two distinct goals in mind in his effort to restructure England’s position with the Roman Church: the first of these was to gain the title of Rex Christianissimus (“Most Christian King”) and the second was to rid himself of the stigma of being a vassal to the Holy See. Henry achieved the first goal by virtue of his defense of Rome against Protestant reformers, most notably Martin Luther. Begun in 1519, Henry’s book, The Defense of the Seven Sacraments (Assertio Septem Sacramentorum), was a refutation of Luther’s reformist ideas and an apologetic for the sacraments and practices of the Roman Church. This particular work sparked a vehement response from Luther in a later piece entitled, Martin Luther against Henry King of England (Martinus Lutherus contra Henricum Regem Angliae).

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Here, Luther engaged in an all-out assault on both Henry and the Church, launching personal attacks against both the pope and Henry, referring to the latter as a “Sophist trickster” and “suffering from a lesion of the brain.”

However, while Luther may have been mortified and incensed by the machinations of a potential ally against the pope, Leo X wholeheartedly agreed with Henry, bestowing the title “Defender of the Faith” (Fidei Defensor) upon him in 1521 and thus fulfilling his first desire.

Henry’s means of achieving his second goal was more academic than political in nature and fueled by his desire for the yet unattainable Anne. Pope Clement remained steadfast in his refusal to annul Henry’s marriage to Katherine and as Henry’s affections for Anne increased his consternation with Pope Clement and Rome likewise grew. Henry responded by simultaneously limiting Rome’s control of the English clergy and increasing the monarchy’s control in ecclesiastical matters heretofore under the purview of Rome. Much of this was accomplished through a series of legislative acts, most notably the Acts in Restraint of Annates (1532), which sought to drastically reduce papal revenue and the Act in Restraint of Appeals, which actually bypassed Rome and made the King of England the final legal authority in ecclesiastical matters (1533). These were followed in 1534 by the Act of Supremacy, legislation that gave Henry legal

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34 Luther, contra Henricum Regem Angliae (1522).
sovereignty over both civil and ecclesiastical matters and the *Act for First Fruits and Tenth*, which routed previously funneled payments to Rome to the English Crown instead.

In 1533, Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, granted Henry his divorce and he married the ill-fated Anne in that same year. By this time, Henry had absorbed much of Rome’s powers through the *Act of Supremacy* and was subsequently ex-communicated from the Roman Church by Pope Paul III on December, 17, 1538. If Henry’s self-imposed headship was doubted by some, mostly from behind closed doors, it was made viscerally clear in May of that year when “three Carthusian priors, a learned monk of Syon, and the vicar of Isleworth were butchered at Tyburn for denying the king was the head of the church.”

However, once the personal and political dramas are laid aside (a number of them tragic), what was the face of this new Henrician church? Henry did make some sweeping changes. His dissolution of the monasteries, a joint venture between Henry and his Chancellor, Thomas Cromwell, created fiscal windfalls for the crown but was met with resistance from those still in line with Rome. In his article, *The Origins of the Dissolution of the Monasteries*, R.W. Hoyle contends that by the sixteenth century, English monasteries had become quasi-

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obsolete but still performed some social and local community function.\textsuperscript{36}

Consequently, Henry walked a fine line with his plans, and his grounds for the dissolutions were based on a three-pronged test that queried the following: (1) did the house serve a utilitarian purpose, (2) was proper order, discipline and practice present and (3) was the house large enough to be sustained. This criterion gave credence to Henry’s assertion that his actions were in the furtherance of legitimate church reform. In preparation for the dissolution, Henry and his administration generated the \textit{Valor ecclesiasticus}, a document that listed the approximate values of monastic properties, property estimated to comprise between one-fifth and one-third of England’s total land mass. In 1536, Parliament passed the \textit{Dissolution of the Monasteries} act and embarked on a program that initially targeted small-scale houses but by 1539 expanded its focus and rapacity through the \textit{Act for the Dissolution of the Greater Monasteries}.

Arguments can be made with regard to how successful the Crown was in its media campaign and its true motives for the dissolutions, but as early as 1534 the confiscation of ecclesiastical lands was viewed as a financial necessity.\textsuperscript{37}

Bearing this in mind, it would seem that Henry’s rationale was borne more out of


\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
economic and personal gain than true ecclesiastical reform. Further evidence of this can be found in Cromwell’s letter to him in reference to the examination of the abbot of the Benedictine monastery at Glastonbury and an inventory of the abbey contents:

We have in the money 300/ and above; but certainty of plate and other stuff there as we know not, for we have not had the opportunity for the same, but shortly we intend (God willing) to proceed to the same; whereof we shall ascertain your lordship so shortly as we may. This is also to advertise your lordship that we have found a fair chalice of gold, and divers other parcels of plat.\textsuperscript{38}

The increase in royal properties via the confiscation of monastery property became such a complicated and tangled (not to mention lucrative) business that an administrative body, the Court of Augmentations, was established to oversee fiscal operations in 1536. By 1542, no less than six administrative bodies had been created to account for all the monetary flow from ecclesiastical and secular fiscal concerns. Although precise numbers are difficult to ascertain, estimates state that over 800 monasteries were appropriated by 1539 and, through the generation of more than £36,000 per annum, the Crown had enjoyed total revenue exceeding £1,000,000 by 1554.

The response to Henry’s agenda on the ground was less than enthusiastic. Although not all the English laity was enthralled with the Roman Church and its

frequent worldly-minded clergy, the Church had provided a sense of spiritual and social stability. For the many of the laity and of course the clergy, Henry’s imposition of English Bibles in the churches, elimination of traditional church festivals, iconoclasm, and theft of property was unacceptable and led to violent uprisings. Revolts involving clergy, commoners and gentry sprung up in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire as well as numerous other places, often spearheaded by the priests and monks. One abbot in Holm Cultram “vowed he would hang tenants who failed to turn out for rebel musters.”  Henry took a hard line with the rebels and the Injunctions of 1536 and 1538 continued to be resisted to a measurable degree by clergymen and commoner and Catholic nobles. Perhaps the most prominent of these was Henry Percy, Sixth Lord of Northumberland, who took a central role in the northern uprising of 1536.

Henry fared in an equally dismal manner among the reformist community. His passing of the Statute of Six Articles put him in direct opposition to Protestant reformers and their followers. Referred to as “the whip with six strings” or “the bloody whip with six strings” by contemporary Protestants, the statute stated that (1) adherence in the belief of transubstantiation was necessary; (2) communion in both kinds was unnecessary, i.e. the partaking of either the bread or wine is sufficient; (3) that priests ought not to marry; (4) the vows of

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39 Haigh, English Reformations, 149.
chastity ought to be observed in both sexes; (5) private masses were allowable and (6) auricular confession was necessary. Punishments ranged from being burned as a heretic for violating the transubstantiation requirement to confiscation of property on a first violation to being executed as a felon for a subsequent violation of the remaining articles.

The issue of clerical marriage as set out in the statute was troublesome for some clergy but especially problematic for Cranmer who had to send his wife to Germany to avoid discovery. Opinions as to the reason Henry chose to be steadfast in his insistence on a celibate clergy vary. In his essay, Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation, Eric Josef Carlson counters what he considers to be the “standard view” of Henry’s position on clerical marriage, namely that “he [acted] out of his own personal conservatism...[and]... retained and defended mandatory celibacy in the first stage of the English Reformation.” Carlson’s scholarship suggests that Henry’s conservative take on clerical celibacy was shared by a majority of English clerics, many of whom voiced their concern over the practice on the basis of Scripture. However, while Henry supported the prohibition itself, he had reservations about the severity of punishment provided

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by the law. At one point, Henry “began to feel that he had gone too far” but “the influence of Cromwell… [was] sufficient to prevent the harshest features of the law from being enforced in all their odious severity.”

In spite of the harsh sanctions, some clerics were unwavering in their convictions and even provocative. One such instance of this involved a clerical marriage in Mendlesham, an act that angered the local laity. Upon being questioned about his actions, the vicar responded, “men do refrain to do that their hearts would, as to our ordinary [Bishop], he dare do nothing,” highlighting yet another example of Henry’s legal and ecclesiastical hypocrisies.

Portents of Henry’s hypocritical and mercurial characteristics were present early on as far back as 1499. In that year, Thomas More presented the eight-year-old Henry with a gift. The gift-giving served as the genesis of a lifelong friendship that saw More’s rise to one of the highest non-monarchical positions within Henry’s government. However, like many of Henry’s relationships, More fell out of favor with Henry when he no longer served his designs, and Henry, “putting on a different face for every need,” assumed the worst kind in More’s case and sent him to the executioner’s block in 1535.

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42 BL, *Cotton MS Cleopatra E. IV*, fol. 151., as quoted in Carlson, Clerical Marriage, 2.

More’s experience with Henry VIII was similar to that experienced by the English church and English politics. Henry recognized the instability brought about by the nascent Reformation and took advantage of the situation, flexing his absolutist muscles for personal gain. However, the flavor of his ambition resulted in a poorly constructed transition plan and left England in a religiously ambiguous state as state-sanctioned religion was ill defined and placed many, including both commoners and politicians, in precarious states of allegiance.

Those who chose loyalty to the pure Protestant or Catholic strains often found themselves subject to Henry’s mercurial personality. In some respects, Henry’s regime served as a religious filter for the worldly and heavenly, causing those with true conviction, such as Sir Thomas More, to pay the highest price.

Although Henry took a keen interest in the religious affairs of England, those affairs were always a handmaiden to his own. His *King’s Book* from 1543 was a virtual stamp of approval on the practices of the Roman church, and, in many ways, the Church of England was perhaps Protestant in name only. Henry left a national church that was rife in ambiguity and the issues sprouting from this foundation would insert themselves squarely into the political realm in short time.

On January 28, 1547, thirty-nine days before Good Friday, the body of the Savior of the Henrician church, Henry VIII, was placed in a tomb in St. Georges
Chapel in Windsor Castle. Although Henry would not rise as his Savior did, had he done so he would have seen a much more “protestant” turn in the English church under his son Edward VI than he would have preferred to countenance. Unfortunately for those with true church reform on their minds, this would prove to be an incomplete turn, cut short by among other things, the death of the sovereign.

Edward VI

Edward assumed the throne on February 20, 1547 at the age of nine, and, due to his age, the Regency Council and the king’s uncle and head of the Council, Lord Edward Seymour, 1st Duke of Somerset, oversaw royal affairs. Although those in their minority were often mere puppets for their advisors, Edward was a bright child and conscious of spiritual affairs. In 1543 at the age of six, he chastised a domestic for using a Bible as a stepstool, finding the man’s inconsiderate actions an act of irreverence. Although cognizant of ecclesiastical issues from early on, Edward could not have predicted how this attitude would play out personally and in his reign.

Historians often refer to Henry and Edward’s ecclesiastical shifts as the “first” and “second” English Reformations, as the former was more a product of Henry the man and the latter was aimed more squarely at theological and
Ecclesiastical matters themselves. The transformation of the English church during Edward’s reign can be identified by two dominant themes: a strong and hasty shift toward ecclesiastical policies that were more protestant in nature than Henry’s, and the strong public reaction to those policies. From the very beginning of Edward’s reign, the government moved forward with a radical program of reform. The scope of the Edwardian reform program and the incredible speed in which it was implemented created a great deal of resistance among the king’s subjects and was likely a contributing factor in the program’s failure to fully engage them.

The obvious question that comes to mind regarding the Edwardian reform is whether this was a policy that originated with Edward or his advisors. The short answer is a mixture of both. Although Edward was in his minority for the entirety of his short reign, he was already primed with protestant convictions aided by a strong and committed group of ecclesiastical and royal advisors: Somerset, the Archbishop of Canterbury Cranmer, and the high-energy Scottish reformist preacher, John Knox.

The roles and personalities of these three individuals are virtually inextricable from the story of the Edwardian Reformation, although the motives of each differed in their pursuit of a more “protestant” England. In particular, Somerset, clearly the worldliest of the trio, had his eyes set upon more earthly
treasures. From the beginning of Edward’s reign, Somerset directed the machinery of the developing English church and its corresponding government but quickly encountered resistance from those who saw through his façade of good-willed reform. Rather than seeking any kind of reconciliation with Rome, Somerset, reminiscent of Henry, set out to make the church even more dependent on the Crown. In 1547, he mounted a military incursion into Scotland to secure the marriage of Edward to Mary Queen of Scots in 1547 in an effort to bring Scotland under England’s new religious umbrella and bolster her power and influence in the process.

However, Somerset soon found himself short of funds to continue his actions and initiated the *Chantries Act*, a piece of legislation that allowed for the royal confiscation of 4,000 chantries as well as a number of other ecclesiastical properties in England. Although the English were suffering from other social and economic ills at the time, and these certainly had an impact, the bulk of the consternation of those affected focused on the royal ecclesiastical policies of Edward and Somerset. The predictable result was a vocal opposition from benefactors and local priests, the latter taking an active interest in the souls of which they had been entrusted and making strong efforts at pastoral care,

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45 Haigh, *Reformations*, 175.
particularly in the north. Righteous indignation frequently gave way to a refusal to relinquish properties or pay rents to the Crown and strained relationships within the affected groups. Additionally, Somerset struggled heavily in areas of strong Catholic concentration such as Cornwall, Lancashire and Devon. Devon was the site of a rebellion in 1549 known as the Prayer Book Uprising, a response against the prohibition of the priestly vestments and the mass and the imposition of the new Book of Prayer, directives resulting from the passage of the *Act of Uniformity* of that year. Additional uprisings in the west and assaults on Scotland caused a great deal of anxiety and antipathy toward Somerset from within the Council, and in 1549 Somerset was removed from his position by the Council and forfeited both land and personal property as a consequence.

Somerset’s replacement, John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, was less colorful than his predecessor, but this fact did nothing to slow the reforming machine, fueled by the “king’s own adolescent evangelical enthusiasm and the strong-willed and determined Cramner,” who by 1548 had taken the lead on ecclesiastical matters from the Roman Catholic and now-imprisoned Bishop of Winchester, Stephen Gardiner. Between 1549 and 1552, ecclesiastical policies

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46 Ibid., 171.

moved with great haste and in many ways restructured past order. The acceptance of transubstantiation was obliterated by 1551, and this provided an opportunity for Cramner to remove obdurate clerics and replace them with those more in line with the new policies. Other radical changes also were implemented with alacrity in the form of the Cramner-designed Common Book of Prayer in 1552, and most of the ceremonies condemned by Protestants and those commanded by Gardiner, such as baptism and confirmation, were removed and burial services rewritten.\footnote{Haigh, \textit{Reformations}, 179.} By 1553, the reformed liturgy was now joined by a reformed theology. With the \textit{Articles of Religion}, the new theology not only addressed papist foibles but Protestant extremism as well. Points of contention among the Protestants themselves were mitigated through theological compromise, “but the overall effect [was] a restrained Calvinism.”\footnote{Ibid., 180.}

At the conclusion of Edward’s life on July, 6, 1553, the relationship between the English public and the English Church was extraordinarily tenuous and fraught with anxiety. While Edward had been an advocate and pursuer of Calvinist practice, Somerset’s actions created breaches in public trust and were counter-intuitive to Edward’s reform efforts. The net effect of Edward’s short-lived reform and Somerset’s policies was an English church that had rapidly...
overturned past tradition yet failed to inculcate congregants with the new policies. Radically reduced numbers of clerics and lowered church attendance and giving, consequences of the government’s suppression of chantries and guilds and continuation of the Henrician policy of church property confiscation, were to blame. Additionally, while public reaction to the new liturgy and theology is difficult to assess, much can be inferred from the significant number of public protests arising from economic hardships brought on by royal ecclesiastical policies.

Edward’s reign served as a refinement of Henry’s haphazard Reformation as it established both doctrinal and theological standards by which to operate and was substantiated by personal religious convictions rather than by the personalities of its architects. However, the goals of Edward’s sincere convictions were to some extent hijacked by the political direction taken by Somerset. Edwardian policies and practices also avoided an extreme reaction to Catholicism and, while the regime did not capitulate to Catholics’ demands, the response was moderate socially inoffensive. Unfortunately, Edward’s untimely death served to halt wholesale reform in its tracks and did little if nothing to resolve the dilemmas created during the Henrician reign. Edward’s reign continued to reveal the vulnerability and manipulability of the English Church at
the hands of its royal ministers, making it susceptible to a complete reversal that would soon be realized under his Catholic half-sister.

Shortly before Edward’s death in 1553, the king and his Council, headed by Northumberland, made plans to thwart any effort to proclaim his Catholic sister, Mary Tudor, daughter of Henry and Katherine, the Queen of England. Both Edward and his Council knew that such a move would be disastrous to their program of reform and they set their sights on Lady Jane Grey, daughter-in-law to Northumberland and a staunch Protestant. Edward made his desire known through a will declaring Jane his successor, but the questionable legitimacy of this pronouncement made the proposition weak from the start. Although Lady Jane was proclaimed queen on July 6, 1553, her irresolute claim and Mary’s strong Catholic support resulted in Jane’s arrest on July 19, 1553, and her execution on February 12 of the following year. On October 1, 1553, Mary was crowned Queen of England.

**Mary I**

Mary had always been the most feared woman of the Edwardian regime. Prior to his death, Edward wrote in his diary,

The lady Mary, my sister, came to me to Westminster, where after greetings she was called with my council into a chamber where it was declared how long I had suffered her mass, in hope of her reconciliation, and how now, there being no hope as I saw by her
letters, unless I saw some speedy amendment I could not bear it. She answered that her soul was God’s and her faith she would not change, nor hide her opinion with dissembled doings. It was said I did not constrain her faith but willed her only as a subject to obey. And that her example might lead to too much inconvenience.50

This entry provides insight as to Mary’s steadfast and absolute faith in the face of the religious reality of the time and demonstrates Edward’s laissez-faire attitude toward her religious transgression, an attitude that is less condemning of her Catholic faith than the religious and political manifestations that flowed from it. Edward may have taken a slightly harder tact had he known just how steadfast Mary truly was. Much as Edward had taken swift and deliberate ecclesiastical action upon the death of his father, Mary acted with similar speed upon her ascension. However, radical movements are rarely the action of the sole individual; and, if Edward had his Somerset, Mary had her man in the form of the cardinal and later Archbishop of Canterbury, Reginald Pole. Together, these two minds were the driving force behind the Catholic restoration in England.

Pole was a complex personality in a complex time. Contemporaries described him as “an unstoppable word-spinner on paper...charming and eloquent... [but] austere and even secretive in public.”51 Pole’s effectiveness in  


the Marian regime’s program of religious reaction has been disputed among historians with some, such as Christopher Haigh, who hail his efforts, but others, including Rex Pogson, who cites Pole’s lack of imagination as a factor in the failure of the Marian efforts. The Spanish Ambassador in London referred to Pole as religiously temperate, noting that he did “not believe the lukewarm go to Paradise, even if they are called moderates.” Pole served under Henry VIII and even appealed to the Sorbonne in an effort to gain its support for Henry’s divorce from Katherine. His relationship with Henry rapidly deteriorated and Pole fled from England to Italy during Henry’s break from Rome in 1532. While in Italy, Pole was appointed a cardinal by the pope and continued to draw the ire of Henry, at one point demanding that Henry repent for the Roman schism. He also chided the king for removing his daughter Mary from the succession, telling him that interfering with the succession would lead to sedition. Pole returned to England following Mary’s ascension, a motivated Romanist with counter-Reformation in his blood, a condition Mary recognized and embraced.

\footnote{52} Ibid., 30. For more on Pole’s lack of imagination and its impact on Marian reform efforts, see Pogson’s work, “Cardinal Pole-papal legate to England in Mary Tudor’s reign” (PhD diss., Cambridge University, 1972).

\footnote{53} Ibid.

\footnote{54} Anna Whitelock, Mary Tudor: Princess, Bastard, Queen (New York: Random House, 2009), 94.
The two enjoyed a symbiotic relationship but Mary generally acquiesced to Pole on matters of religion.\textsuperscript{55} At the height of the Protestant persecutions, Mary instructed the Council to routinely confer with Pole “to understand of him which way might be best to bring good effect these matters that have begun concerning religion.”\textsuperscript{56} These “matters” concerned themselves with one of the Marian regime’s most infamous aspects, the burning of heretics. Prior to the program of persecution, however, Mary and Pole understood the necessity to codify political and religious standards that would enable them to act legally on non-Catholic practices. Consequently, proclamations in 1553 and 1555 placed a prohibition on the printing, dissemination, and possession of any materials that the Crown determined to be corrupt or hurtful, or, more to the point, anything that caused inquiry into religious matters counter to Mary and Pole’s opinion. With statutes in hand, the two were armed with legislative justification for the persecution and martyring of heretics.

The Marian persecutions tend to be the recognized hallmark of Mary’s reign. Whether or not Mary had leaned on the Machiavellian aphorism of the means justifying the ends, the consequences of the persecutions were unsettling to English society. Historians differ on the degree to which religious persecution

\textsuperscript{55} Duffy, \textit{Fire of Faith}, 94.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 94-5.
should define Mary’s reign, but few argue that strong contemporary Protestant opinions abounded. The Scottish reformer John Knox declared her a “horrible monster Jezebel” and how, during her reign, “Englishmen had been compelled to bow their necks under the yoke of Satan, and his proud ministers, pestilent papists and proud Spaniards.”57 The person responsible for solidifying Mary’s infamy is undoubtedly the English historian John Foxe. Foxe’s Actes and Monuments was and remains a damning piece on Christian persecutions, but his writings on Mary ensured that her vicious reputation would live on in perpetuity. Once she “obtained the sword of authority,” he wrote, “she was not sparing in its exercise,” an exercise that she performed with “savage resentment.”58 Upon her death, he said, “We shall never find any reign of any Prince in this land or any other which ever shows in it (for the proportion of time) so many great arguments of God’s wrath and displeasure.”59 Extant records show that 284 Protestants were burned alive for their religious intransigence and thirty more died in prison.60 As sources of comparison, thirty-

57 Whitlock, Mary Tudor, 335.


59 Whitlock, Mary Tudor, 335.

60 Duffy, Fire of Faith, 129.
nine Catholics were put to death during the reign of Henry VIII, and none suffered under Edward VI.61

The Marian persecutions are important for understanding the regime’s social and religious impact on the English nation not only because of their brutality and psychological impact on the community but also because of the swiftness with which they were implemented following the sudden shift in religious policies. This hastiness served to further unbalance the social and religious spheres and perpetuate the instability of the previous three decades in a wholly different manner. However, two other related conditions also contributed to this chaotic milieu: Mary’s marriage to the Catholic Prince Philip of Spain and the fear of an English-Spanish successor to the throne.

Catholic Spain had always been a source of angst for the English people, with one member of the Spanish household noting that “the English hate us Spaniards worse than they hate the devil.”62 Strong efforts to dissuade Mary from the Spanish union were made by both Lord Chancellor Gardiner and the Parliament but to no avail. The queen’s marriage to Philip not only offended many of her councilors, it also struck fear into the hearts of Protestant politicians.


Many in the English community, already disturbed by the international marriage, were equally anxious about the possibility of a non-English king on the throne and relegation to Hapsburg servitude. In fairness, Philip was also afflicted by a fear of the English. J. A. Froude notes that Philip brought his own men and cook for fear of being poisoned. However, as much as he may have feared for his personal safety, his fervent Catholic attitude vanquished any fear of physical calamity; and he teamed with Mary to bring England quickly in line with Rome. Philip petitioned the pope to empower Pole to negotiate the settlement of Church property that had previously been dissolved and redistributed to the nobles and gentry. This effort became a top priority for Philip, a position endorsed by the pope who agreed, “It would be far better off...for all reasons human and divine, to abandon all the Church property [in England], rather than risk the shipwreck of this understanding.” Pole was distressed about Mary’s desire to confiscate former ecclesiastical property for the benefit of the Crown, and Parliament was similarly afflicted. The trio was also

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66 Ibid., 135.
faced with the additional problem of the current state of clerical life inherited from the Henrician and Edwardian reigns. Those Catholics who were not exiled during these periods had adopted some of the liberal attitudes and lifestyles of the period, which included clerical marriage and associated non-Catholic practices.

Frequent rebellion was the consequence of the Marian restoration. In 1553, Sir Thomas Wyatt (with assistance from the French) plotted the overthrow of the Marian regime with the intent to replace her with her half-sister Elizabeth. Wyatt mounted forces that marched from Kent, the Midlands, the Southwest, and the Marches into London. Unfortunately, and not unusual in conspiracies, word leaked out and the Crown became aware of the plans (the presence of French ships off the coast was another indicator). Ultimately, rebels’ will wore thin, and Wyatt was captured near London and sent to the Tower to await his execution on April 11, 1554. The fear of further conspiracy abounded after this attempted coup, and Elizabeth was lodged in the Tower for eleven months as an alleged collaborator with Wyatt. Both Lady Jane Grey and her husband, Guildford Dudley, whose existence posed too great a threat to Mary,\textsuperscript{67} were executed. In 1556, a second major attempt at a coup occurred under the leadership of Henry Dudley, brother of the late Duke of Northumberland. The

\textsuperscript{67} Whitelock, \textit{Mary Tudor}, 237.
intent, again, was to replace Mary with Elizabeth to eliminate the possibility of a Spanish king (Philip) in England. This plot also failed, and although some of the conspirators were executed, Dudley fled to France to return later in the service of Queen Elizabeth.

Mary attempted to manipulate the English narrative in her favor through her control of the press. A proclamation in 1555 prohibited the writing, issuing, or selling of heretical or seditious books; but Mary took one step further in 1557 when she established The Royal Charter of the Company of Stationers, a corporation with legal status within the City of London to control printing within England, essentially the origin of the copyright. Mary’s creation of this charter “[was] dominated by the idea of suppressing prohibited books, and Mary’s motive in granting it, whatever the source of the initiative involved, was to obtain an effective agency for censorship.”

Duffy notes that the number of printers remained consistent during the Marian regime but the number of publishers decreased due to policies that “discouraged speculative publishing ventures funded by non-stationers.” In comparing book production in 1548 between the Marian and Edwardian regimes, the latter dwarfed the former at 232

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to 132 books, respectively.\textsuperscript{70} Although the Crown utilized this charter to its benefit, effectively not allowing any books to reach the street without its imprimatur, this charter remained in effect until 1641 when the Star Chamber, the licensing authority, was abolished. Ironically, the booksellers themselves were upset by this development since anybody could now publish books and pamphlets, a threat to the trades’ hitherto fiscal monopoly on printing.

Mary died on November 18th, 1558, leaving her sister, Elizabeth, as the second female sovereign of England. At the conclusion of Mary’s reign, England was a society of religious and political contradiction and confusion. The rapidity with which Mary attempted to reverse the goals of the Henrician and Edwardian regimes left an already embattled England in a heightened state of identity crisis. English society was in pursuit of security and definition, and Mary had failed to make good on this desire. The Spanish ambassador De Feria noted at the end of Mary’s reign: “things are in such a hurly burly and confusion that fathers do not know their own children.”\textsuperscript{71} Increasing these anxieties was her marriage to Philip, a move that not only cast a dark shadow over the sphere of the nobility who feared a loss of power, but also presented the threat of Catholicism, and, more immediately, the loss of Calais and increased taxation on the English

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.

people as a result of a war against the French at Philip’s urging. The reign also provoked a food shortage that drove prices upward and an influenza epidemic that stifled the military effectiveness in the deplorable war against France.

While it is difficult to ignore the hard line taken by Mary and her ministers as they sought to either purge or convert non-Catholics by carrot and stick, it is equally difficult to ignore the idea that these goals were the result of true religious conviction and Mary’s desire to do what she believed best for England. In contrast to her father, determining and implementing God’s will for England was far more important to the queen than was personal gain. However, her reign was also born of fear and never moved far from this origin during her rule. The royal attitude at the death of Edward, as evidenced by the attempt to place Jane Grey on the throne and deny Mary the succession, was one of fear—an atmosphere of which Mary was acutely aware. Consequently, she understood the need for a hasty and definitive conversion. David Starkey succinctly summarizes her reign, noting that,

Out of the strong came forth, not sweetness, but the bitter harvest of repeated rebellion, political uncertainty, state bankruptcy and the final humiliation of the loss of Calais. Her only achievement was the Catholic restoration and even that, it began to appear, had been bought at too high a price.72

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Although I concur with Starkey’s conclusion, the degree to which Mary achieved a full Catholic restoration is debatable and problematic as some aspects enjoyed greater success than others. For the most part, the regime was able to resurrect the form of Catholic worship and enforce proper etiquette and doctrine. However, England was still populated by dedicated Protestants who were willing to exert their will, a condition that would continue to play a strong role in the English affairs of the two successive reigns, ultimately reaching a startling apex during that of Charles.

Elizabeth I

Prior to her ascension, Elizabeth had suffered imprisonment, familial dysfunction, and use as a political pawn. These experiences not only toughened her personality but also made her acutely aware of the religious duplicity that existed in England. She was also a keen observer and fully understood the parallel relationship between the religious issue and success on the throne. Ruling a population that was still reeling from the Marian persecutions meant she needed to avoid radical remedies to heretical ideas and actions. Failing to address anti-Protestant concerns and practices would threaten her effectiveness as a leader but she was also compelled to placate the Catholic camps to a degree as well. To this end, Elizabeth was forced to take a middle-of-the-road approach
as she tried to please what in truth were three contenders: Catholics and the more moderate Protestants and radicals. Her assumption of this position can be found in the religious legislation of her reign, most notably the *Act of Supremacy* and the *Act of Uniformity*, both of which passed through Parliament in 1558. These acts, along with other articles that served to mold and nuance ecclesiastical policies, are collectively known as the Elizabethan Religious Settlement.

The *Act of Supremacy* was important for three reasons. First, it demonstrated Elizabeth’s ability to seek and find compromise to the political quandaries she faced both as a ruler, and, in particular, one of the female persuasion. Rather than offend those who were concerned about a female at the head of the Church, she assumed the title of “Supreme Governor” rather than “Supreme Head.” Additionally, it created vacancies in Parliament as many posts previously held by Catholics were abandoned because those members refused to take the oath. Consequently, Elizabeth filled these vacancies with some of those exiled under the persecutions, a number of whom adhered to strong Calvinist ideas. Finally, Elizabeth was forced to deal with the trappings of Catholicism, and here, again, she failed to commit one way or the other, creating something of a hybrid church, described by MacCullouch as “peculiarly...
conservative…[lacking] appreciation for frequent preaching…[with] some church imagery.”  

The *Act of Uniformity* presented a much more troublesome issue for Elizabeth. This act sought to force Sunday church attendance and introduced a new *Book of Prayer*, a guide to church doctrine that varied slightly from the 1552 version but also contained insertions from the 1549 edition. Elizabeth again attempted to placate both sides through the use of language, particularly concerning the highly contested issue of transubstantiation where the minister was instructed to tell the communicant, “the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life,” prior to saying the words, “take this and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him with thy heart by faith with thanksgiving.” This procedure allowed for the satisfaction of Catholic and Lutheran as well as the non-Lutheran Protestants since it contained the possibilities of both the real presence of Christ in the elements for the former and the memorial aspect of the service for the latter.  

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74 Doran, *Elizabeth*, 15.

75 Ibid.
With the theological minefield laid out by this directive, Catholic pushback in Parliament was to be expected. Ultimately, the bill was passed by three votes with Sir Simonds d’Ewes finding “little reason [why] these Popish Bishops had, thus stifly and obstinately… resist[ed] the passing of this Bill.”76 The resistance of large numbers of parish clergy to the Act of Uniformity, however, indicates a lack of enthusiasm. In 1566, a survey was taken by the commissioners in Lincolnshire, and this showed that by 1566 only fifty-four percent had removed their rood-lofts, sixty-nine percent their altars, and seventy percent their images. Additionally, only fifty percent had destroyed their vestments and mass equipment. Many of the parishes examined by the commissioners had only recently begun complying with the directives with six having destroyed books and equipment the day prior to the commission’s visitation.77 Many of the clergy believed that ancient Catholicism would return to England, and this would explain the lack of compliance to Elizabeth’s policies.

While Elizabeth’s attempts at creating a mildly Protestant English church met with some resistance from the Catholic camp, a great deal more came from within her own Protestant ranks. Upon her ascension in 1558, many previously


77 MacCullouch, Reformation, 246.
exiled Protestants returned to England in hopes of spreading an even more radical religion than anything seen under Henry or Edward, a religion with a strong continental Calvinist bend to it. Additionally, some Protestant groups who participated in covert services during Mary’s reign had devised unique styles of worship that proved to be incongruent with Elizabeth’s ecclesiastical leadership. Elizabeth was also forced to fill lower level church vacancies with clerics who espoused a more radical religious outlook than she liked due to the desertion of some Catholic clergy. Nevertheless, she was careful to keep radicals out of the highest church positions. In spite of her efforts, Elizabeth was initially forced to contend with Presbyterianism and its radical Puritan adherents. The criticisms of Thomas Cartwright, Cambridge professor, the Elizabethan church and his advocate for a significantly more Calvinist model resulted in his imprisonment and the marginalization of the Presbyterian movement during Elizabeth’s reign.

Elizabeth’s battle with the Catholics took a different form than that with radical Protestants. As previously stated, Elizabeth did not want to risk both domestic and foreign security and alliance by severely punishing Catholics in the manner employed by her sister against the Protestants, but her attempts at

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78 Ibid., 5.

79 Doran, Elizabeth, 35.
appeasing the Catholics did not succeed to any degree. Although the
Elizabethan church still possessed some liturgical trappings of Catholicism and
there was no emphasis on preaching, her attempts at mediating the Protestant-
Catholic chasm largely failed. Many Catholics found her ecclesiastical policies
unacceptable and employed a number of strategies to not only sustain their
religion but to practice it privately and accelerate it from afar. Commenting on
the Catholic response, Peter Holmes asserts that Catholics were forced onto two
possible roads, resistance and non-resistance. At the crux of this dilemma lay
the issue of divine kingship, the ancient theological concept that, while not
equating the ruler with Christ, made the ruler His proxy. Consequently, any
resistance or disobedience to the ruler was comparable to sinning against Christ.
The punishment for such a breach was damning to the violator and served as a
strong tool for enforcing civil obedience.

Catholicism continued to be practiced in England, and many historians
now agree that a majority of men and women in both England and Wales were
Catholic in their beliefs. Much of Elizabethan Catholicism during this period
was characterized by adaptation to geography, and from the public to the

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81 Dornan, Elizabeth, 48.
private. Accessibility for royal agents played a role in the degree to which the illegal religion was able to be practiced, and rural areas generally experienced a higher incidence than areas closer to the cities. Priests who headed households were able to lead other members in the liturgy of Catholicism and remained largely undetected by royal authorities. Marriages, baptisms, and other ceremonial events provided additional opportunities for private gatherings and practices may have involved portions of the community if the risk was low.\(^8^3\)

Fundamental to the Catholic response was also a mindset that concerned itself with the contrasting natures of Catholicism and Protestantism. For many Catholics, their religion was one of constancy and timelessness and based on the Apostles’ Creed and other ancient beliefs and practices, whereas Protestantism was an innovation that experienced division within itself and was the antithesis of steadfastness.\(^8^4\) Because of this, Catholic voices confidently if quietly predicted a triumphant Catholicism.

Another development elevating the Catholic voice was the prolific publishing of books and pamphlets by exiled English Catholics in Louvain.

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\(^8^3\) Ibid.

Between 1558 and 1568, a substantial amount of Catholic literature was issued by the exiles, and while the thrust was the promotion of the constancy and correctness of Catholicism, these works generally respected Elizabeth and emphasized and advocated political support for her. Similar to Elizabeth’s experience, the Catholics found themselves walking a fine line. In 1568, one exiled Catholic, Thomas Harding, emphasized this matter of balance, noting that,

If the prince commanded heresy or idolatry, the way to obey both God and the prince is to keep thee from yielding to heresy or committing of idolatry, and for God’s sake to sustain the punishment whatsoever the prince putteth upon the breakers of his commandment.85

Although non-resistance was one of the hallmarks of the Catholic response during Elizabeth’s reign, this approach began to shift toward the end of her reign. The new resistance was expressed in recusancy, the refusal to attend Protestant services or even participate in any religious activities or rites with Protestants, and was justified through a process known as casuistry, the self-exploration of the individual mind to arrive at a decision that aligned itself with

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85 Thomas Harding, A Detection of Sundrie Foule Errours, Lies, Sclauders, Corruptions, and Other False Dealinges, Touching Doctrine, and Other Matters, Vittered and Practized by M. Iewel, in a Booke Lately by Him Set Fouth Entituled, A Defence of the Apologie (Louanii, 1568), 85, http://books.google.com/books/about/A_Detection_of_Sundrie_Foule_Errours_Lie.html?id=qCUhMwEACAAJ (accessed January 11, 2014), as quoted in Holmes, Resistance, 16. See Thomas Dornan’s A Disproof of Nowel’s Reproof (1564) and Thomas Stapleton’s A Counterblast to M. Horneswayne Blaste Against M. Feckenham (1567) for further evidence of the exiles’ position on Elizabeth’s politics. Also see John Martial’s A treatise of the cross (1564) for an example of political criticism but continued loyalty to the ruler.
the truth of Scripture. This latter process was commonly taught at the English seminaries on the continent, but required the direction of a priest. Similar examinations of conscience would occur later in the seventeenth century but resulted in vastly different opinions and responses to authority (this will be discussed in further detail in chapter 3).

Prior to Elizabeth’s death, the issue of succession hung in the air, and unbeknownst to those outside the inner royal circle, royal intrigue was set in motion as the newly appointed adviser to Elizabeth, Robert Cecil secretly met with James VI of Scotland and instructed him “to secure the heart of the Highest, to whose sex and qualitye nothinge is soe improper as ether needles expostulations, or over much curiositie in her owne actions.” James and Elizabeth forged a relationship of convenience, and, for England’s sake, one of succession, that ultimately led to James’ assumption of the throne upon Elizabeth’s death on March 24, 1603. The possibility of a Catholic renaissance was now in doubt as the Catholic community in England had dwindled by 1603 and a majority had drifted into Protestant conformity. This shift occurred not

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86 Holmes, Resistance, 100.

from any failure on the Catholic front but rather from wide-scale exposure to
Protestantism and the religious persuasion of Elizabeth.88

Elizabeth had managed to keep radical Protestants out of high
governmental office, but they still populated the academic houses and local
parishes. She also braved the occasional attempt at overthrow, most notably
those piloted by Mary, Queen of Scots and Robert Devereaux, the Earl of Essex.
Aside from these two failed attempts, the great majority of her English subjects
were reasonably content with her rule. Religious conflict was certainly in
abeyance compared to Mary’s reign, evidence that Elizabeth had managed the
religious issue reasonably well. In the end, however, while England was
officially itself a Protestant land, this identity was perhaps in name only and the
kingdom was comprised of a populace with multiple religious convictions
headed by a new king of unknown religious convictions. On July 25, 1603, the
Jacobean rule began, setting England on its road to what would prove to be the
final piece in Charles’ ill-fated puzzle.

James I

King James I of England (and VI of Scotland) was the son of Mary, Queen
of Scots and Henry, Lord Darnley. He was raised in Scotland and ascended to

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that throne in 1567 as an infant under the guidance of a regent, exhausting three more of these until he assumed full control over Scotland in 1583. Physically, he was “tall, of noble presence, [and] his physical condition robust.”[^90] He received a strong education in his childhood and is considered by many historians to be among the most highly-educated monarchs to have ever ruled England.[^90] James wrote poetry in Latin and was keenly interested in the subject of theology as well as political theory and philosophy. His academic inquisitiveness was evident during a comical moment while he visited Cambridge University in 1614. The school masters had learned of James’ pending arrival and set out to arrange a philosophy debate between the king and a member of the faculty. One question posed to the duo was whether or not dogs could make syllogisms. James denied such a thing was possible. The King’s opponent, Mr. Preston, answered in the affirmative, reasoning that,

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\text{the hare is gone either this way or that way;} \text{ smells out the minor with is nose, she is not gone that way;} \text{ and follows the conclusion, ergo this way, with open mouth. [The King agreed] that dogs might have sagacity, but not sapience, in things especially of prey, and that did concerne their belly; might be nasultali but not logici; had much in}
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their mouths, little in their myndes, unless it had relation to their mouths; that their lips were larger than their understandings.91

James, realizing Preston had made a convincing argument, backtracked slightly on his point, and, while still disagreeing with Preston, declared that a dog must have, more in him than was imagined. I had myself (said he) a dog that, stragling far from all his fellows, had light upon a very fresh scent, but considering he was all alone, and had none to second and assist him in it, observes the place and goes away to his fellows, and by such yelling arguments as they best understand, prevailed, with a party of them to goe along with him, and, bringing him to the place, pursued it to an open view.92

Feeling confident in his response, and highlighting the elevated royal station, James added that “his Majesties dogs were always to be excepted, who hunted not by common law, but by prerogative.” The moderator, detecting impatience in the King’s tone and demeanor (in spite of the King’s joke), realized that some royal patronizing and a bit of humor would go far in avoiding royal condemnation, told James, “the reverend and great divines could not make syllogismes, the lawyers could not, not the physicians, now every dog could, especially His Majesties.”93


92 Ibid.

93 Ibid.
While James’ intellectual abilities have been recognized by historians, historical opinion has been less flattering with regard to other aspects of his life, most notably his sex life. Much has been made of his so-called “court favorites,” particularly his relationship with George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham, a courtier who drew the ire of both aristocrat and commoner. Recent scholarship, however, has been more forgiving, viewing the historical accounts of his contemporaries as being politically motivated and using James’ sexuality “as an index to his supposed weakness of character.”

Other criticisms of James revolve around his “disastrous economic and fiscal policies” and “inflation of honors,” the latter tied to his elevation of personal favorites. Although these appraisals serve to define his rule, none had as remarkable an impact upon his historical fingerprint as his ideas of theology and kingship, two elements that go far in explaining his motives and intentions for the Church of England.

Although England contained a variety of religious affiliations (most of the covert

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nature), the importation of Arminanism from the Low Countries caused James to mount a battle against three mainstream religious players who included not only the historical enemy of the Tudors’, the Catholics, but also newly imported strains of the Protestant faith, Arminianism and Puritanism.

James’ relationship with English Catholics was a great deal less demanding than what he faced with the Arminian strains, and can generally be defined as one of tolerance, due in part to the reality that the Catholic population in England had declined to near insignificance by the time James assumed the throne. Tolerance had its bounds, however, and was “a privilege granted to the silent” but not to those who expressed opposition to his policies. Following in the footsteps of Elizabeth, James was willing to suffer loyal moderates, but extremists who challenged his authority and policies had no place in his realm. Although Catholicism was practiced, it was practiced covertly and became the household religion of the devout gentry’ families and a handful of aristocrats.

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96 Haigh, Reformations, 266.


99 Ibid.
However, to assume that English Catholics were completely passive with regard to James’ religious policies would be incorrect as there were instances of Catholic plotting against James in the beginning of his reign. Early incidents included the Bye and Main Plots, both of which took place in 1603, the year of James’ ascension. The former plot involved the conspiracy to hold James in the Tower of London until he capitulated to Catholic demands for higher tolerance, and the latter intended to replace him with Arabella Stuart, the great-great-granddaughter of Henry VIII. Both plots failed and resulted in the executions of the principal parties. The most infamous, however, was the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, a plan that sought to assassinate James and members of Parliament, and place his Catholic daughter, Elizabeth, on the throne. The main conspirator, Robert Catesby, was a Catholic Englishman who was disillusioned with James’ Protestant policies. With the assistance from others of his ilk, Catesby arranged to have numerous barrels of gunpowder delivered to the undercroft of the House of Lords. On Friday, November 1, 1605, James was shown an anonymous letter whose author expressed concern for the King and Parliament. Based on the language of the letter—most notably “they shall receive a terrible blow this Parliament,”¹⁰⁰ James correctly surmised that explosives were present near

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Parliament. Following a search of the grounds, Guy Fawkes was found near the
gunpowder in the undercroft and hastily arrested. Catesby and others fled upon
hearing this news, and he and several other fugitives perished in an accidental
fire (caused by their attempt to dry additional gunpowder in their possession) at
Holbeche House in Staffordshire.

James responded to these Catholic plots by creating legislation that further
restricted Catholic practice, most notably the Jacobean Oath of Allegiance. The
Oath read in part,

> that the Pope neither of himself, nor by any authorities of the
> Church or See of Rome, or by any means with any other hath any
> power or authority to depose the King, or to dispose any of his
> Majesty’s kingdoms, or dominions, or to authorize any foreign
> prince to invade or annoy him, or his countries, or to discharge any
> of his Subjects of their allegiance and obedience to his Majesty, or to
> give any license or leave to any of them to bear arms, raise tumult,
> or to offer any violence, or hurt to his Majesty’s royal person, state,
> or government, or to any of his Majesty’s subjects within his
> Majesty’s dominions.\(^{101}\)

The oath was “posited within a framework of over seventy articles which were
aimed to impose the most severe strictures on Catholics of every class,”\(^{102}\) and

\(^{101}\) The Oath of Allegiance, An Act for the better discovering and repressing of Popish
recusants; 3 & 4 James I c. 4, 1606,
http://faculty.history.wisc.edu/sommerville/361/oath%20allegiance.htm (accessed January 20,
2014).

\(^{102}\) Clarence J. Ryan, “The Jacobean Oath of Allegiance and English Lay Catholics,” The
Catholic Historical Review, vol.28, no. 2 (July 1942), 161,
while it served as a reiteration of Henry VIII’s first Act of Supremacy, affirming James’ role as the supreme head of the English Church, it also proscribed acts of civil unrest, a greater concern for James than the issue of religious divisiveness itself.

A portion of the Catholic community refused to take the oath, largely on the grounds that doing so effectively neutered papal authority; however, most Catholics did not take this as far as the Spanish Jesuit Francisco Suarez (at least in a public forum), who once warned that “whoever attacked the Chair of St. Peter and sought to undermine the authority of the apostle’s legitimate successors, was himself a precursor of the Antichrist.”

Although James had taken a stand on Catholicism through his enforcement of the oath, he also had a vested interest in not alienating certain Catholics. Henry, Earl of Northampton, head of the Howards, a powerful Catholic family, urged James to broker a marriage between his son, Charles, and the daughter of the Catholic Spanish king, Philip. James attempted to do so, but the negotiations failed, due in large part to Parliament’s disdain for Spain and concerns of a Catholic revival. The issue would reappear following Charles’

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succession and marriage to a Catholic princess of French, rather than Spanish, origin.

England and the continent were still reeling from the reformist effects of the sixteenth century; but for James, and Elizabeth before him, the real angst was coming from Protestant rather than Catholic circles. James had gained significant experience working with radical Protestant clergy during his singular reign in Scotland, but the Church of England posed a different challenge for him. Although the Elizabethan Church had adopted a fairly firm foundation on Calvinist ideas, the introduction of Arminianism from the Dutch region and James’ response to it would have lingering effects for his progeny and the political and religious course of England in later years.

Although a thorough examination of Arminianism is too exhaustive for the scope of this thesis, a brief history of its existence in the Netherlands and its introduction in England will provide a clear understanding of its role during James’ rule.

The story of Calvinism and its theological off-shoot in the Netherlands began in the early sixteenth century following a circuitous route from France to Geneva. The fear from the Hapsburgian repression of Protestantism in the first half of the century pushed Calvinism into the shadows of larger society causing its presentation primarily at private gatherings and the homes of its cautious
adherents. Unrest in the 1570s and 1580s resulted in a division in the Low Countries, creating a Catholic south and Protestant north and providing a Calvinist opportunity in the latter. Although the total Calvinist population in the Netherlands was small by the year 1600 (MacCullouch contends that only 10 percent of the Dutch public claimed membership in the Reformed Church)\(^{104}\), Calvinism assumed center stage as Calvinist ministers found themselves at odds with secular Dutch authorities who found their rigid church norms too much to countenance.\(^{105}\) Additionally, radical Protestant groups that formed during the Hapsburg persecution, the Spiritualists in particular, slowly emerged into a more public light at the end of the sixteenth century and contributed to creating a region whose religious life was “relatively plural...unregulated...[and] relatively freewheeling.”\(^{106}\)

Amidst this plurality and free thought, however, was an unwaveringly extreme group that espoused doctrines such as double-predestination and the view that Christ died only for the elect and not all of humanity, doctrines Calvin

\(^{104}\) MacCullough, *The Reformation*, 360. MacCulloch notes that other estimates have put this figure as high as half the population; refer to Simon Schama’s *The Embarassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden age* (New York: Vintage, 1987), 59, for further.

\(^{105}\) Ibid., 361.

himself never uttered. In 1588, Jacobus Arminius (the Latinized version of his
given name, Jakobus Hermanszoon) was ordained in the Dutch Reformed
Church. Arminius had been steeped in the hard-line Calvinist doctrine of his
teacher and mentor, Theodore Beza, but became increasingly disillusioned with
its exclusive claim on salvation as he tried to minister to those who felt a nagging
insecurity about their eternal fates. Arminius proposed a reformed version of an
extreme Calvinism that had no place for free will in the salvation transaction.
Arminius died in 1609, but his ideas and supporters persisted and continued to
challenge extreme Calvinism.

Following Arminius’ death, the controversy spawned two opposing
religious-political groups, the pro-Arminian Remonstrants and the ultra-
Calvinist contra-Remonstrants. In 1610, James found himself drawn into the
middle of this struggle when he was asked to weigh in on the proposed
appointment of a new Professor of Divinity at the University of Leiden, Conrad
Vorstius. Vorstius had strong Arminian leanings, and while James opposed
Arminian theology, this affair had less to do with religious ideology and more to
do with political clout and self-preservation. For James, the successful
appointment of Vorstius was an attack on his orthodoxy and, more importantly,
his role as the uncontested fidei defensor of Europe.

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107 MacCullouch, Reformation, 364.
Vorstius, a former Catholic teacher at Graf von Bentheim’s Hohe Schule, had been nominated by members of the Remonstrant party, due in large part to his Arminian leanings. Although Vorstius espoused “the principles of libertas prophetandi so dear to the Remonstrants,” the latter also believed he would appeal to the contra-Remonstrant party as well. However, as Frederick Shriver points out, the opposite proved true. The contra-Remonstrant party immediately attacked Vorstius, an assault that was bolstered when its members cited some of his prior writings where he advocated Socinanism. During the debate, the contra-Remonstrants initially sought to secure an ally by bringing the Church of England into the fray, but James took the reins from the Archbishop and entered the controversy himself.

At first glance, James involvement with the appointment of Vorstius seems odd. However, below the surface there are clear reasons for his concern with the issue for his “name and orthodoxy had been directly linked to that of Vorstius,” and had been, by extension of the controversy, attacked. The origin of this was found in a tract written by the skillful Jesuit writer Martin Becanus. In Examen Plagae Regiae, Becanus drew parallels between Vorstius’ and James’

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109 Ibid.

110 Ibid., 453.
theological similarities, at one point even accusing both of not only heresy but, even worse during the period, atheism. Clearly, James’ failure to oppose the appointment was tantamount to an endorsement of Vorstius’ beliefs, and consequently, his own as well. And while James may not have shared the strong Calvinist beliefs of the contra-Remonstrants, the alternate choice was graver.

Given such options, James embarked on a personal assault against Vorstius. In a flurry of letters to both the States General and the Dutch ambassador Ralph Winwood, James showed his displeasure at the idea of Vorstius’ appointment to the divinity chair, referring to Vorstius as “wretched” and telling the authorities to “roote out with speede those Heresies and Schismes” or the “curse of God” with the incident through a series of letters to the States General, culminating in his writing of a pamphlet entitled, A Declaration Concerning the Proceedings with the States Generall, of the United Provinces of the Low Countreys, In the cause of D. Conrades Vorsties. The power of an English king and the contra-Remonstrant party proved too much for Vorstius as he was denied the desired post. Later, his books and writings were burned in England, and he found his final resting place in Gouda in 1622.

111 Ibid., 454.

The Vorstius affair demonstrates two things. First, James’ theological concerns were important to his rule insofar as they impacted his sovereignty. Although James was endeared with the Remonstrants view that the state supersedes the church, in the end he had to defend the more important orthodoxy. He also viewed the Remonstrant position as one that expressed too much religious toleration. Like many of his Tudor predecessors, he made a distinction between private and public heterodoxies, the latter a potential threat to the state and his authority.113 Second, James linked Arminianism to a host of other heterodoxies present in Vorstius’ writings through this experience. Following the incident, James was unable to read Arminius’ works without a “bitter after-taste” in his mouth, a tainting that would be perceived even stronger during the reign of Charles I.

James’ adherence to such orthodoxy also brought him into conflict with another troublesome religious faction, the English Puritans. The label “Puritan” itself has caused much discussion among historians. Even back in 1655, Thomas Fuller suggested that the ambiguity of the term should necessitate its removal from common usage.114 Some, such as Michael L. Finlayson, prefer to recognize a

113 Ibid., 457.

Puritan “direction of thought” whereas others, such as Marshall Knappen, suggest that the term “Puritan” be applied to those of the period who demonstrated a “blending of individualism with the needs of social order, zeal, other-worldliness, and clericalism.” More recent scholarship, however, has begun to focus on theological differences between factions in the Church of England and on whether or not certain Calvinist tenets, such as predestination and the doctrine of grace, can be used as a yardstick to better identify “Puritans.” While these various labeling schemes are effective to some degree when trying to determine the historical role played by the Puritans, James was far less concerned with the nature of Puritanism than he was with its impact upon his politics and rule. The ostensible religious issue was in fact a political one. The Puritans, in their pursuit of a church that challenged James’ allegiance to divine kingship and absolutism created a crisis within the state and pushed James into action.

In 1603, as James traveled to his new throne in England, he was approached by a group of English Puritans who delivered a document

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delineating desired changes in the Church of England. This document, the *Millenary Petition*, called for the abolishment of certain Anglican practices, such as the signing of the cross during baptism, use of the ring in marriage, lay baptism, as well as the use of surplice and cap and bowing at the name of Jesus. The petition also called for the abolition of the appointment of multiple paid ecclesiastical positions (called pluralism), and a stricter observance of the Sabbath. In addition to all this, the Puritans desired the removal of the episcopal hierarchy (James pushed for its imposition in the Scottish church as well) and a revision of the disciplinary process.

James eventually met with the Puritans during what is known as the Hampton Court Conference. James was quite adept at avoiding the main arguments while making minor compromises to give the appearance of both his interest in appeasing the Puritans and reducing potential friction from that population. James made some minor concessions such as promising to remove the terms “absolution” and “confirmation” from the Church language and agreeing to increased preaching; however, aside from this, as one historian observes, “there were few real changes as a result of the Hampton Court Conference: church liturgy and polity remained virtually intact.”

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One main development that arose from the Conference was the commissioning of the new King James Bible (KJV). Prior to the creation of the KJV, Puritan’s utilized the Geneva Bible, a small and relatively inexpensive book. James recognized that this version of the Bible had notes in its margins that challenged his idea of divine kingship, particularly at Exodus 1:17 where the commentators note that the Hebrew midwives were correct in disobeying the Egyptian king’s order to kill all the male babies.\textsuperscript{118} Some historians also believe James recognized the political and social currency he could gain from creating his own version, particularly during this period when scholarship was beginning to be appreciated and an intellectual king was revered.\textsuperscript{119} The other issue at hand for the Puritans was their desire to have Church bishops replaced with presbyteries elected by congregations; James, however, steadfastly refused to do so, his reasoning entirely congruent with his idea of divine kingship. He correctly recognized that to allow this to occur would be to reduce his control over the Church, something that would have not only religious but, more importantly, political implications.


The Puritans engaged James not only externally with demands like the *Petition* but also from within Parliament, albeit in a somewhat indirect manner. Puritans were present in both Houses of Parliament, but over time the “Puritan influence” weighed more heavily in the Commons than in the Lords. The reason had more to do with a shared political ideology that did not always find common ground in religion. Although not all members of the House of Commons accepted Puritanism in all its aspects, “they were willing to come to the defence of a movement that had become identified in the popular mind with militant Protestantism struggling against Anglo-Catholic tendencies.”

The vehicle for this has been identified by the historian Kenneth Shipps as “ecclesiastical patronage,” a “system of mutual support between politically and socially prominent laymen and puritan preachers and people at the local level.” James was acutely aware of this element in the Commons and reacted hastily to their interference. Shipps recounts an incident during the last Parliament of 1624 when two of James’ ecclesiastics, Abraham Harsnet and Richard Montague, issued a prohibition against Sunday morning services except in the cathedral. John Yates, a prominent Puritan preacher in Norfolk and friend

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of the Puritan knight of the shire, objected and brought his complaint to Parliament and attempted to censure the ecclesiastics. The resulting flurry saw the censure of the Puritans themselves and an impassioned speech by James, where he said in part,

Be careful to sweep out Puritans. I like none of them nor their humors, for I think this is all one to lay down my crown to the Pope as to the popular party of the Puritans. I would not have you scared with speculation they have given in against the Bishop of Norwich...in spite of all the Puritans...I commend my Lord Norwich for suppressing of popular lectures within his diocese.122

Over the course of three Parliaments, Parliamentarian John Pym and other political Puritans claimed that Catholicism and Arminanism were rife within Parliament and the royal court, the consequence of which was a threat to personal liberty. At the center of their accusations were not only Montague and other ecclesiastics and royals, but James’ son, Charles, and the king himself, who they asserted, was pressing his royal prerogative. Infuriated, James imprisoned some members of the Commons and ordered all instigators to appear before him. One signatory of the petition, the aforementioned Yates, complained that James’ “words were terrible; that puritanes dissolved parliament [their actions caused

James to end the session] and perturbed his affaires, and he would make his kingdom too hote for them.”

Although James faced doctrinal and liturgical challenges while engaging the Puritans, the real focus of his battle was ideological. While the Puritans were in the minority, their importance outweighed their numbers as they possessed much of the wealth and ostensibly espoused the most politically progressive ideas in the country. Although it would be comforting to believe that ideas alone are sufficient to change political landscapes, such a notion is somewhat idealistic. The wealth and political connection of the Puritans played no small part in creating a Parliament that became occupied by Puritans and increasingly infused with legislation reflecting their principles. Without a political foothold, Puritan ideals may have not found their way into the English political fabric as they did. However, the Puritans never strayed entirely from their priority. In tracing the evolution of Puritan thought from the period of James I into that of Charles, John Coffey finds a change in belief, noting that prior to the Revolution, the Puritans believed the magistrates had a duty to punish heresy, idolatry, and apostasy and generally followed the Old Testament model of the ruler’s duty to


seek out and destroy false religions. At the onset of the Revolution, however, there was a greater push for “toleration” and “liberty of conscience” as evidenced in numerous tracts published by the Separatists and Independents. However, these terms must be understood in their contemporary context, so, in essence, what the Puritans really “longed for was a godly rather than a liberal society (author’s italics).”

James’ interactions and responses to the Catholics and Puritans help define his core beliefs of kingship. In a “carrot and stick” approach, he responded to both the Catholic and Protestant camps with a certain degree of tolerance, even tacitly approving of private practices. However, he responded vigorously to any religious activity that threatened his authority and will. As stated above, his struggles with the Catholics was less challenging than with the Protestants, in particular the Puritans; and his response to the Gunpowder Plot sent a strong message to the English Catholics about the consequences of public dissent from their population, consequences of both a criminal and administrative nature. Although the Catholic threat still existed, the bulk of

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126 Ibid., 963.

concern was of the domestic variety in the form of Puritanism. The Puritan issue was made even more severe as their numbers in the Commons were great and they tended to be from the landed gentry or professional classes. This, in addition to the “ecclesiastical patronage” noted by Shipps, ensured that the Puritans’ influence would not be easily rooted out and eliminated. The Puritan case also points out that while James was concerned about religious practice, that concern was always subservient to that of his rule.

Charles I

When James’ son Charles assumed the throne on March 27, 1625, England continued in its fragmented condition. Although the Catholic threat had been somewhat abated (but would later return in full force during Charles’ reign), the Puritan faction had become James’ chief antagonist, due in large part to his religious and political intransigence as evidenced by his failure, from the Puritan’s perspective, to make the ecclesiastical changes they required and relinquish his concept of kingship. Charles, however, would face an even more complex ecclesiastical landscape, and would be forced to contend with the conflicting soteriologies of a revived English Arminianism and Puritanism within the Church of England as well. Unlike his father, Charles would be unable to keep these ecclesiastical foes at bay. His marriage to the Roman Catholic
Henrietta Marie also cast a dark shadow on his relations with those who mattered most, and contributed to the growing mistrust. Even more damning was his proroguing of Parliament for eleven years, the so-called years of Personal Rule. At least in the Puritan’s minds, this action was proof of his tyrannical intentions and seen as a step toward the dismissal of English constitutionalism. Exacerbating these strains was his elevation of William Laud to the archbishopric of Canterbury, a man who was abhorred by a number of ministers and members of Parliament, many of whom believed Laud was directing the Church of England more toward Rome than towards the Netherlands. As Charles’ reign proceeded, the developments produced a situation in which the subjects of the realm, and more importantly and impacting, members of Parliament, were forced to admit that although Charles’ ministers were complicit in the royal wrongs of the era, the king himself was in fact the real culprit.
CHAPTER TWO: RELIGIOUS TENSIONS UNDER CHARLES I

The Catholic Question

The English people had always been suspicious of Charles, wary of the prince even prior to his abuse of the royal prerogative. Some of this undoubtedly arose from a situation from which Charles was unable to escape. His father, in an effort to establish a self-serving relationship with Spain, sought early on to pair him with the Infanta Maria Anna. Although Charles made a salutatory gesture to the English public by later denouncing Spain, his eventual marriage to the Catholic Henrietta created religious troubles that plagued his reign. Henrietta’s influence over Charles caused him to heed some of her political and ecclesiastical advice and brought the Catholic question back into the forefront of English politics.

The thought of a Catholic king ruling seventeenth century England had both political and ecclesiastical ramifications. Charles and Henrietta’s union not only “encouraged suspicious interpretations of the king’s own religious policies”¹²８ but also drew the ire of the public at large and created a great deal of resentment between king and Parliament.¹²⁹ Charles did not alleviate


Parliamentary fears of the impending Catholic England when he entered into an unfulfilled secret marriage agreement with Louis XIII of France and agreed to relax the persecution of Catholics as part of the pre-marriage preparation.\textsuperscript{130} Additionally, some members in Parliament saw Charles’ increasing political dependence upon Henrietta through his frequent heeding of her advice in English affairs. Although many of the details may be undiscoverable, Henrietta did gradually take an active role in obstructing Parliamentary attempts at curbing Charles’ prerogative, and by the 1630s she assisted in driving a wedge between king and Parliament.\textsuperscript{131} The greater fear, however, had less to do with the king’s prerogative and more to do with the Catholic alliances that Henrietta brought along with her. Charles’ union with Roman Catholic France via his marriage caused hard lines to be drawn, particularly in the Commons. MP Sir Robert Phelps said “Charles had been expected to ‘link himself in such an alliance as might agree with us in religion’,” and, when comparing the previous Spanish attempt to dominate England to the current French one, he observed:

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“What the Spanish articles were we know. Whether those in France be any better is doubted.”

Henrietta’s impact upon the court and Parliament was two-fold. First, she prompted the widespread perception that she intended for Charles to make the Church of England more Catholic in nature. In 1636, a group of agents, to include George Conn and Gregorio Panzani, were dispatched to meet with Henrietta ostensibly to address issues among the English Catholic clergy. Panzini, however, was keen for a Roman reunification with the Church of England and had made his intentions clear to his superiors in the Roman Church. Charles relationship with Panzini and Conn, particularly the latter, was somewhat irenic and was “no backstage affair conducted only in the privacy of his own or the queen’s apartments.” Although the level of his sincerity is not entirely known, Charles was not opposed to such a reunification, particularly if it meant bringing Rome into a closer union with the English church and ending the schismatic nature of the latter. Here, Charles’ personal style stood in


134 Ibid., 27.

contrast to that of his father,¹³⁶ who would have been quite cognizant of the political and ecclesiastical dangers of being seen in the company of and in conversation with papal representatives. English Catholics were ecstatic over what they perceived to be a crack in the state-sanctioned Protestant veneer; however, most Protestants, particularly those in Parliament, were alarmed. Things became even graver when the papal agents and other Catholic factions from Rome petitioned Charles for a change in the oath of allegiance. Although such a change never occurred, due in large part to the inability to reach mutual concessions, the fact that Charles would countenance such a venture was further evidence of his Catholic leanings.

If further evidence of Charles’ sympathies with Rome was needed, it was to be found in a book published in 1634. Authored by Franciscus a Sancta Clara and dedicated to Charles, Deus, Natura, Gratia, sive Tractatus de Predestinatione (On God, Nature, Grace, or a Treatise of Predestination and Election) attempted to reconcile the differences between the Thirty Nine Articles and the Roman Creed. The book was censured by a rigid Rome that refused to compromise with Charles, devastating Sir Francis Windebank, the secretary of state appointed to work with Panzini on the reconciliation.¹³⁷ Charles also expressed

¹³⁶ Questier, Newsletters, 25.

disappointment at this obstacle to union but found Rome’s inflexibility toward his own brand of religion an affront and the idea of reconciliation was dashed.\textsuperscript{138} 

One consideration must be granted in order to fully understand the reason Charles was not opposed to an affiliation with Rome. Unlike some of his ministers and members of Parliament, he did not view the Roman Catholic Church as an evil one. Although his marriage likely influenced his views on Catholicism, Charles considered the Roman Church to be a component of the universal church.\textsuperscript{139} In 1636, when in the presence of Conn and his mother, Maria de’ Medici, Charles admitted that he was a Catholic. Maria responded, “One must be an Apostolic Roman Catholic,” causing Charles to reply, “You ladies will not understand me, but he [Conn] will.”\textsuperscript{140} Charles’ response to his mother’s statement well represents how he allowed his personal feelings to get in the way of political acumen and put him at a loss to understand why others did not see things as he did. Unfortunately for him, this particular brand of naivety had grave consequences of its own. 

The second fold concerns itself with the existence of “popish” conspiracies, a common occurrence in England both during and after the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[\textsuperscript{138}] Ibid.
\item[\textsuperscript{139}] Ibid., 16.
\item[\textsuperscript{140}] Conn to Barberini, October 15, 1636, Barb. 8639 fol. 142, as quoted in Meyer, “Charles I. and Rome,” 16.
\end{footnotes}
Reformation. Rulers such as Elizabeth and James were able to fashion these events to their own advantage, using them to frighten both the public and Parliament and to bolster their own form of Protestantism and royal security. Charles, however, was a different king in a different time. Unlike his predecessors, Charles was on the receiving end of this “fright,” a situation exacerbated not only by the aforementioned marriage to Henrietta and his religious and political naivety, but also a more tangible fact in his reign. In 1603, there were approximately 30,000-40,000 recusants in England; however, by 1641 that number had risen to approximately 60,000. The number of priests also rose from approximately 250 in 1603 to over 700 in the 1630s. According to Caroline Hibbard, this growth of professing English Catholics heightened anti-Catholic anxieties among Protestants, some of whom believed the Catholics were “sowing dissension between one part of the English church and another, or between the king and Parliament, or between England and Scotland.” The end result would be a division of the king’s subjects and the weakening of royal authority.”


chaos, dissolving liberties and subjecting England to the Antichrist.\textsuperscript{143} This, of course, fed into the worst fears of English people, especially those now committed to Protestantism.

The aforementioned factors laid the foundation for a popish conspiracy that would be used against the king and queen themselves. The seeds were planted as early as June 24, 1625, during a heated meeting of the Commons in which Charles’ supporters attempted to mollify Parliamentary concern over his relaxation of the recusancy laws and apparent Catholic sympathies. Sir Humphrey May assured his fellow members that “the king’s heart was ‘as right towards religion as we would desire it’.”\textsuperscript{144} These proceedings eventually led to the Commons issuing a petition that reaffirmed England’s position on Catholicism, a petition Charles prevaricated on signing but eventually acquiesced to.\textsuperscript{145} However, his later actions would belie the sincerity of that promise. As Catholic tensions continued to rise at court, Charles faced another conundrum as he was forced to call for a parliament to pay for the ongoing Bishops’ Wars in Scotland. On May 13, 1640, the Short Parliament began.


\textsuperscript{145} Young, “Erosion of Trust,” 222.
Central to the activities of this parliament was John Pym. Although some historians have debated Pym’s importance in the 1640s, his near pathological focus on the dangers of popery and Charles and Henrietta’s complicity in the matter have historical significance.

Pym was a strong-willed Puritan who saw popish plots everywhere. Although he was influential when first elected to the Commons in 1621, he made his first major imprint on English politics during the Short Parliament in 1640. Charles hoped for an uncontested granting of funds for the Scottish war during this parliament, but what he received was what he most feared, a litany of grievances by various members of the Houses. Pym led the charge, but Charles kept pressing the Commons to lay aside its grievances until he received the desired funding. Undaunted, Pym launched into a speech in which he delineated what he pronounced to be Charles’ many errors. A portion of his speech addressed the king’s Catholic sympathies and his failure to enforce laws limiting Catholic practices:

The first, was the great encouragement given to popery, of which he produced these particular evidences. A suspension of all laws against papists, whereby they enjoy a free and almost public exercise of that religion. Those good statutes which were made for restraint of idolatry and superstition, are now a ground of security to them in the practise of both; being used to no other end but to

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146 Stone, Anatomy, 215.
get money into the king’s purse; which as it is clearly against the
intentions of the law, so it is full of mischief to the kingdom.147

Pym also accused Charles of placing Catholics “into places of power and trust in
the Commonwealth, whereby they get many dependents and adherents, not only
of their own, but even of such as make profession to be Protestants.”148

Ultimately, Charles and Parliament could not reach an agreement and Charles
dissolved the meeting, still lacking his needed war funding. However, the genie
had already been let out of the bottle, and Parliament, particularly Pym, would
not remain idle for long.

In November of that same year, Charles called a second parliament, the Long
Parliament (1640-1660), in another attempt to secure financing for his war in
Scotland. However, much to Charles’ chagrin, the Commons seized the moment
and instead of appeasing him, impeached Archbishop Laud (a subject for later
discussion) and the Earl of Strafford for high treason. Pym, once again in the
fray, accused Strafford of urging Charles to circumvent the constitutional rights
of his subjects with intention to use the Irish army to invade England from
without. Although Strafford denied the charge, Pym was able to obtain notes
from a previous Privy Council meeting in which Strafford told the king, “Sir, you

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148 Ibid.
have done your duty, and your subjects have failed in theirs; and therefore you are absolved from the rules of government, and may supply yourself by extraordinary ways; you have an army in Ireland, with which you may reduce the kingdom.”

Strafford’s fate was sealed; he was beheaded on April 23, 1641.

The Irish troubles for which Strafford met his fate became a central point for Parliamentary angst in 1641 as there was strong evidence that Strafford acted in collusion with Charles in the planning of the potential invasion. John Morrill also detects a strong shift in Parliamentary language during this period with Pym moving from accusations of arbitrary government prior to the Long Parliament to intimations by 1642 of plots to “destroy liberty, privileges and the rule of law” and “evil counselors, who like ‘diseases of the brain’ are most dangerous.” Pym’s language and that of the larger Commons also shifted focus from the general deficiencies of the royal court to the person of Charles. Pym and his supporters still attacked the king vicariously through his counselors

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150 See William Lamont’s, *Baxter: A Holy Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), for further insight into the political role played by the Irish Rebellion. Here, Lamont examines the English Puritan preacher Richard Baxter’s decision to resist kingly authority, arguing that Baxter’s decision to resist Charles was made not on the basis of royal tyranny but rather royal abdication as Charles had failed to protect his massacred subjects in Ireland.

151 *Journals of the House of the Lords*, IV, 512, as quoted in Morrill, *English Revolution*, 64.

152 Ibid., 540-3.
and ministers, but their vocalization of issues with the king himself began to emerge as well, particularly his character and attack on liberties and rights, a topic to be covered further in chapter 3.

In many ways, Charles had painted himself into an unpopular Catholic corner. His marriage to Henrietta Marie placed him in a precarious position, and his reliance on her for political and ecclesiastical advice lent even more currency to opinions of his crypto-Catholicism. Exacerbating the situation was the emergence of Pym and his penchant for spying popish plots in the king’s every move and associating the “religion of the Antichrist” with Charles’ every unpopular action. Additionally, Charles did himself no favors by failing to understand the implications posed by his apparent Catholic sympathies to take stronger steps to counter such perceptions.

Arminian and Puritan Woes

The Catholic issue was not the only ecclesiastical challenge Charles faced during his reign. While his personal and royal life was plagued by charges of popish inclinations and conspiracies, the English Church was divided by Arminian and Puritan forces. It would be a mistake to consider these divisions in isolation from their political ramifications. Ecclesiastical policies during Charles’ reign were highly volatile and inextricable from his rule, and their
development and his mismanagement of them played a part in his downfall. John Miller goes as far as to declare that the changes Charles made within the Church of England were an important part in bringing about the Civil War.\textsuperscript{153} The scope of this paper does not allow for an in-depth examination of this issue. However, it is possible to reduce this discussion to that of the three most salient actors and their interconnections: the Archbishop William Laud, Pym, and, of course, Charles himself, as they struggled to define the king’s prerogative.

Historians have frequently relegated William Laud, the Archbishop of Canterbury, to the position of ecclesiastical villain during Charles’ reign.\textsuperscript{154} Sir Harbottle Grimstone, a member of the Commons and contemporary of Laud, described him as “the stye of all the pestilential filth that hath infected the State and governments of this church and commonwealth.”\textsuperscript{155} Laud was a man of ambition who progressed from bishoprics in Wells and Bath to later become the Bishop of London under James. He began his ecclesiastical career under James where he was occasionally called upon to defend the Church of England against the intrusions of Rome. His intellect and the humorless manner in which he went

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{153}] John Miller, \textit{The English Civil Wars: Roundheads, Cavaliers, and the Execution of the King} (London: Constable & Robinson, 2009), 32.
\item[\textsuperscript{155}] Daniel Neal, \textit{The History of the Puritans; or, Protestant Nonconformists; from the Reformation in 1517 to the Revolution in 1688}, etc.(London: William Baynes and Son, 1822), 330, \url{books.google.com/books?id=giRBAAAAcAAJ} (accessed April 20, 2014).
\end{itemize}
about church business appealed to Charles. Laud and Charles also shared similar attitudes about church authority and Charles valued his administrative abilities. Above all, however, Laud was an opponent of both Calvinism and the Puritanism.

In his 2003 article, “Predestination and Political Conflict in Laud’s London,” David R. Como, in an effort to gauge Laud’s overall stance on Calvinism, examines the degree of the Archbishop’s enforcement of the 1629 royal prohibition on discussions of predestination while he was Bishop of London. As opposed to earlier analyses of this issue, many of which focused on the theological aspects, Como instead examines the political implications and motives for Laud’s actions. Como covers considerable ground to include the political danger posed by Arminianism. However, in the end he concludes that Laud “did in fact engage in a systematic (if careful and delicate) policy to shut down Calvinist discourse in the capital.” Laud’s efforts at stifling Calvinism and Puritanism did not limit itself to the kingdom, and at one point reached as far as The Hague.

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156 MacCulloch, Reformation, 500.
157 Wilson, The King and the Gentleman, 220.
159 Ibid., 265.
During James’ reign, a number of English Puritans had left England and taken refuge in the Netherlands. These voluntary exiles were particularly problematic for Charles and Laud, as they not only participated in the Low Country brand of Protestantism but also set up their own churches and print shops.¹⁶⁰ Although Laud had been able to make some inroads in the English churches outside The Hague, he faced a Dutch government that passed resolutions which in effect protected the Puritan exiles from Laud and his ecclesiastical policies, a “situation nearly making Laudian religion illegal in the Netherlands.”¹⁶¹ The situation at The Hague, however, was even more difficult for Laud for one main reason: the Puritan Reverend Samuel Balmford. Laud referred to the man as “peevish…obstinate…’dyed in grayne’,”¹⁶² and Balmford completely frustrated Laud’s efforts to impose his ecclesiastical policies to any damming degree in The Hague. In one injudicious moment, Balmford made the error of returning to England for a family visit, whereupon he was arrested and held to answer for his failure to comply with Laud’s directives. Balmford

¹⁶⁰ Laud and Charles also made concerted efforts to control the press. See Cyndia Susan Clegg’s, Press Censorship in Caroline England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), for a thorough study of the issue. Also see Anthony B. Thompson’s, “Licensing the Press: The Career of G.R. Weckerlin during the Personal Rule of Charles I,” The Historical Journal Vol. 41, No. 2 (September 1998), where he argues that Charles was tightening his restraint on the press as early as a decade before the Long Parliament.


¹⁶² Ibid.
claimed he was also subject to the directives established by the Dutch government and Laud eventually permitted him, with some admonishments, to return to his post in The Hague. In the ensuing years, Balmford was able to use both the Dutch government and the power of Puritan unity at The Hague to keep Laud and his associates at bay.\(^{163}\)

In addition to being a man of ambition, Laud was also a man of order and uniformity, and it was these characteristics he sought to import into the Church of England. Order, however, would come at a price. One such example is found in his restoration of altars (to their pre-Reformation positions) in parochial churches.

In his essay, “The Restoration of the Altars in the 1630s,” Kenneth Fincham explores which authority, royal or ecclesiastical, was responsible for altar changes during the early part of Charles’ reign. Fincham determines that although Laud was responsible for promoting and implementing the change, he conferred with Charles, who took a laissez-faire attitude, allowing local priests a degree of discretion. Fincham asserts that Laud conferred with Charles to ensure a degree of royal protection against the expected backlash from the Puritan faction. A comical yet informative situation took place in a church in Cliffe in 1635. Sir Nathaniel Brent, Laud’s vicar-general, arrived in the town and ordered

\(^{163}\) Ibid., 320.
that the altar be put in a north-south position and railed to “keep off dogs and to free it from pollutions.” For the following two years, the altar remained unmoved until it was noticed by the archdeacon William Nevill, as the church prepared to host an archdeaconry court. Nevill, horrified, moved the altar “with his own hands” into the required position. A week later, however, a church warden, John Parmley, saw the altar location, and, believing it was popish, moved it back to its original position. Parmley was called before the archdeaconry court and the church fined for his actions.

In addition to the restoration of the altars, Laud also sought to return the use of vestments and ornaments as well as visual appeal to the Church of England in an effort to “reassert the dignity of hallowed ground.” He had organs installed in some cathedrals as well as religious paintings and new furniture. Although his desire for church decorum created anxiety in the Puritan world, it is hard to fault Laud for his motive: the desire to elevate the

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165 Ibid.


167 Ibid.
Laud respected the sanctity of the church and wanted to ensure that if others did not, they did so at their own peril. In February of 1633, one such person, Henry Sherfield, the Recorder of Salisbury, could no longer tolerate the stained-glass window in the parish church at St. Edmund, Salisbury, and saw fit to climb up a ladder and break out the window (unfortunately for him, then falling off the ladder and injuring himself). Laud, learning of this misdemeanor, fined him £1000 and demanded a public apology.

Laud’s reinforcement of church liturgy and uniformity was only one side of his ecclesiastical coin. All good plans have contingencies, and this fact did not escape the Archbishop. His persecution of those who opposed his policies was surefooted and usually aimed at Puritans. He took such public expressions seriously, and was hasty in meting out punishment to deter sentiments counter to his policies. Perhaps the most famous instance of this was the 1637 prosecution of the pamphleteers Henry Burton, John Bastwick, and William Prynne, three men who expressed their disdain of Laud’s policies on episcopacy in writing. Laud considered theirs the work of a “Pen that is made of a sick and

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169 Ibid.
loathsome Quill.”  All three received harsh sentences that included not only fines and imprisonment but cropping of their ears.

The Puritans main battle cry against Laud was to accuse him of the sin of Arminanism. Laud certainly never declared himself a Catholic (though Pym would argue that he was), and he most assuredly was not a Puritan. But was he truly an Arminian or perhaps mislabeled? A man who preferred order, uniformity and liturgical beauty for what, in his mind, were the right reasons?

As previously mentioned, historians have investigated the relationship between ceremony and doctrine. Nicholas Tyacke asserts that the placement of the altar during this period is representative of the centrality of the sacraments to English Arminanism. Other historians, such as Kevin Sharpe, not only refute any connection between the doctrine and ceremony in this instance but also call the very concept of “English Arminanism” into question. In short, while Arminian theory was real, its manifestation in the English Church was nebulous and perhaps a convenient phantom in Parliamentary minds. As early as 1625,


172 Ibid.
the ambiguity of the term in the English context was already established. In his work, *Testis Veritatis* (1625), Francis Rous referred to Arminanism as “a kind of twilight and a double-faced thing that looks to two religions at once...[and] like a flying fish.” Pym and his allies recognized the truth of Rous’ declaration by connecting “popery” with Arminianism however were in error by not realizing that while the former term focuses on Catholic tradition, something shared by many in England, it had little to do with reformed views of Arminius. This confusion with Catholicism, whether intentional or otherwise, was certainly a powerful political tool and had a profound effect on the problem of the royal prerogative during the latter part of Charles’ reign. It was one that Pym engaged with much zeal.

Pym’s rhetoric about popish innovations within the court eventually found its target in Laud. On February 26, 1640, charges of high treason against Laud were brought to the House of Lords. In his speech to the Lords, Pym read the charges that, among others, accused Laud of subverting the laws of government and attempting to introduce an arbitrary and tyrannical government

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against law. It also asserted that he “hath traitorously assumed to himself a papal and tyrannical power, both in Ecclesiastical and Temporal Matters, over his Majesty’s Subjects in the Realm of England” and attempting to “alter and subvert God’s true Religion…[and] set up Popish Superstition and Idolatry.”

More to the point, it also accused Laud of seeking to unify the Church of England with the Church of Rome. In his response to the charges, Laud denied engaging in popish innovations. In his defense, he named various people and the part he played in either converting them from Catholicism to the Protestant faith or coaxing those leaning in the Catholic direction to that end (Buckingham among them). In spite of his pleas, Laud was placed into custody. Eventually, a Bill of Attainder was presented against him in 1643 and he found himself confined in the Tower. His final trial began on March 12, 1644, and found guilty, he was executed at Tower Hill, London, on January 10, 1645.

Charles was occasionally mentioned in the allegations against Laud but was portrayed as Laud’s unwary victim. “Charles as victim” has been the majority view among historians, but some now see Charles as having more

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involvement in directing ecclesiastical matters.\textsuperscript{176} In any case, it is clear that by early 1640 the ills of the realm were still being pointed at Charles’ “evil councilors” rather than the sovereign himself. This direction of blame would begin to change a short time later.

On December 1, 1641, Charles received a document from Parliament known as the Grand Remonstrance. In contrast to the Protestation, a document issued earlier in the year and denouncing the Catholic evil while reaffirming the reformed nature of the English church, the Grand Remonstrance had been largely drawn up by Pym and his supporters. Although its ostensible purpose was to enumerate all the wrongs Charles had committed with regard to liberty and religion and to highlight the Catholic threat and its religious and political malignancy, in fact it had two other equally intended purposes: to legitimize the Puritan attack on Charles\textsuperscript{177} and undermine confidence in his ability to rule justly. The Remonstrance was meant to present the English people with the hard and unpleasant facts of Charles’ reign and to demonstrate how he had not only mismanaged political policies, but even worse, those of the Church of England.

Reaction to the document also served as a litmus test to both determine and


declare religious and political lines within Parliament. Pym and his allies comprised one side, mostly constitutionalists and co-religionists who believed Charles was tyrannical and complicit with his Laudian clergy in corrupting the English church with popish innovations; on the other side sat men who believed reform had reached its limits.178

One of the main subject matters of the Remonstrance and concern of Pym and his associates is not in doubt. It is no coincidence that the preamble of the document finds the “root of all this mischief…to be a malignant and pernicious design of subverting the fundamental laws of kingdom and government upon which the religion and justice of this kingdom are firmly established.”179 The document goes on to describe the involved parties of the “malignancy” to be “Jesuated Papists,” bishops and corrupted clergy, and courtiers and councilors who were involving themselves in foreign interests to the detriment of Charles. The power of these allegations was bolstered against the background of Laud’s imprisonment and helped to create an atmosphere of urgency, to rid England of all her “popish” political and ecclesiastical ministers, and put the kingdom back on its proper Protestant course.

178 Ibid., 77-78.

Even though the Remonstrance barely passed (it was carried in the Commons by eleven votes), the move sent a strong message to Charles, and it was evident that the Commons was prepared to confront him head-on. And although Charles was yet to be singled out, the language of the Remonstrance made strong inferences with regard to who the Commons believe was accountable for many of the political and religious errors. Oliver Knight agrees that Charles was not openly attacked in the Remonstrance but also detects an unfavorable impression based upon “insinuation, innuendo and association.”\(^{180}\) The Remonstrance does not focus on the general rights and duties of kings or declare that England’s constitution or form of government is in error, but rather focuses on what had occurred and was occurring under the reign of Charles alone.\(^{181}\)

By 1642, tensions between Charles and Parliament steadily increased. The Irish Rebellion continued to be a point of concern for Parliament as it still believed Charles had plans to invade England with the army he had established in Ireland. Pym tried to pass the Militia Bill in an effort to wrest control of the army from Charles, but the measure was frustrated by the Lords.\(^{182}\) Charles, on

\(^{180}\) Oliver, “Remonstrance,” 83.

\(^{181}\) Miller, English Civil Wars, 6.

the other hand, believed Parliament was planning to call upon the Scots to defeat him, causing him to make a momentous blunder. On January 3, 1642, he entered the Commons to arrest Pym and four others, but the five had learned of his plan and fled prior to his arrival. While the fact that Charles intended to arrest five members of Parliament was outlandish, equally shocking was his entry into the Commons; both were considered a major breach of parliamentary privilege.¹⁸³

Charles’ manner of dealing with the religious issues of his reign resulted in his alienation from not only many of his subjects, but more importantly, key factions of Parliament. His marriage to Henrietta Maria played into the Commons, and particularly Pym’s, popish conspiracy mindset. Also, his failure to recognize the importance of subduing the threat of Arminanism and curbing Laud’s efforts in this area allowed for a growing fear that he was an innovator at best or Catholic at worst. This was a grave error on Charles’ part and one whose solution he was unable to grasp.

Divine-right kingship in post-Reformation England

In 1612, Charles received a gift from his father, the Basilikon Doron (“royal gift”). Authored by James in 1599, it was his personalized guide to efficient monarchy, originally intended for his eldest son Henry but given to Charles upon the death of the former. This book was James’ instructions to his son on proper royal and personal behavior, in short, how to effectively rule and behave as a royal divine. The book was divided into three parts and urged Charles to be a faithful and God-fearing Christian, to avoid being a tyrant and ensure his subjects experienced justice and equality, and finally, to conduct himself properly in his daily regime. One cannot overlook the irony in James’ intentions since he himself rarely followed his own fatherly advice. In addition to the moral and political direction for Charles provided by the work, it also underscored the divine right of kingship:

Reward the iust, be stedfast, true, and plaine,
Reppresse the proud, maintaining aye the right,
Walke always so, as euer in his sight,
Who guardes the godly, plaguing the prophane,
And so ye shall in Princely vertues shine,
Resembling right your mightie King Diuine\textsuperscript{184}

Like most ancient nations, the Constantinian legacy of divine right worked its way into England and all royals bound themselves to its principles in some fashion. The character of divine right, however, has never been consistent. Historians also disagree on the function of the concept for monarchs and rulers and whether or not it is possible for a divine royal to have limited powers. Sitting in opposition on this issue are J. P. Sommerville and Conrad Russell. Sommerville asserts that “the contention that the king drew his authority from God alone was the central plank upon which absolutist theory rested.”\textsuperscript{185} Russell, on the other hand, disagrees, asserting that divine kingship and limited powers are completely compatible.\textsuperscript{186} Glenn Burgess goes one step further, arguing that divine right and royal absolutism are two separate concepts and not intrinsically entwined at all.\textsuperscript{187} Burgess also makes a distinction between ‘in abstracto’ and ‘in concreto’ with regard to kingly power, claiming that most kings

\textsuperscript{184} Basilikon Doron or His Majesties Instructions To His Dearest Sonne, Henry the Prince, 1599, www.stoics.com/basilikon_doron.html (accessed March 15, 2014).


\textsuperscript{186} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{187} Burgess, “The Divine Right,” 844.
were not confused about what their powers were in the abstract and how this power should be manifested in practice.\textsuperscript{188} James I, he says, was quite aware of the distinction, promising to “rule my actions according to my Lawes.”\textsuperscript{189} The confusion of these concepts during the early modern period in England materialized at various points. Burgess cites the missteps of Roger Manwaring and Robert Sibthorpe, the royal chaplain and commissary of the Diocese of Peterborough, two men who connected divine right with Charles right to tax at will. Parliament was furious with this blatant advocacy for an unrestricted royal prerogative and suspended and fined both subjects. Although Charles later issued both a royal pardon, the point was clear that the taxation issue was not one of divinity but rather one of law.\textsuperscript{190}

In his article, “Breaking the Vessels: The Desacralization of Monarchy in Early Modern England,” Robert Zaller focuses not on the relationship of divine kingship to absolutism but rather the progression of the former. Zaller detects a shift in the foundation for divine right beginning with Henry VIII. As opposed to earlier periods when the consecration ceremony was viewed as the point at which magical powers were bestowed upon the king, the Tudor monarchy de-

\textsuperscript{188} Ibid., 847.

\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., 849.

\textsuperscript{190} Ibid., 853.
emphasized the efficacy of ceremony and instead focused on God’s anointing of
the king.\textsuperscript{191} There was also the Tudor use of allegory in their iconology to not
only emphasize this anointing but also to tie that anointing to the destiny of the
English nation,\textsuperscript{192} a concept that brought a degree of intimacy, mutuality, and
divine mission between king and subject. Another notable shift occurred during
the reign of James I. Past declarations of divine kingship were pragmatic and
viewed as a legitimate basis for promoting the needs of king and state. This
Jacobean period, however, differed; rather than promoting secular concerns, it
attempted to advance the Word of God, thereby linking king and church.\textsuperscript{193}
Thus, James ensured this relational concept was emphasized through sermons
preached in the English churches.\textsuperscript{194} The linkage, however, would later prove
problematic for Charles. Godly Protestants accepted the king’s anointing but did
not believe the king was excused from recognizing and having regard for

\textsuperscript{191} Robert Zaller, “Breaking the Vessels: The Desacralization of Monarchy in Early

\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., 761. The Tudor dynasty used visual allegory to reinforce its image as the
divinely appointed royal family. Evidence of this can be found in pictures such as Lucas de
Heere’s, \textit{The Family of Henry VIII: an Allegory of the Tudor Succession}. This portrait, a gift from
Elizabeth I to Sir Francis Walsingham, uses visual depiction to emphasize the legitimate
succession of the Tudor family, and, in particular, Elizabeth as the culmination of that process.

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid., 762.

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., 760.
constitutional principles and accepted political protocols. In short, the king should be no absolutist with unbridled discretion over his subjects and the realm. It is here where Zaller lays Charles’ fate, noting he was “not merely a failed Constantine but an active Herod, not the Christian emperor sent by God but his abominable antitype, the tyrannical servant of Antichrist.”

The study of divine right theory is not restricted to the modern era. Beginning as early as the twelfth century, English scholars, such as John of Salisbury, questioned the divine scope of monarchial power. His work, Poliraticus, has arguably been claimed as the first example of political theory in the Middle Ages. While Salisbury addresses a number of subjects connected to governance, the most prevalent topic taken up by both historians and political philosophers is his commentary on tyrannicide. Lately, scholars have argued against the assertion that the content of Poliraticus amounts to a full-fledged

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195 Ibid.

196 Ibid., 763-764.

197 See Salisbury’s, Poliraticus, for his views on the power of kings and the distinction between a true king and a tyrant.

theory of tyrannicide, however, it is difficult to ignore his pointed remarks regarding the subject’s right to not only resist but also kill a ruler who acts as a tyrant. Such a proposition, however, is not unqualified for Salisbury. As Cary Nederman observes,

> Since justice is ultimately a divinely endowed or inspired gift to a political community, to offend against justice itself (the crime of the tyrant) is to attack God’s will as well as to assault the body politic … So John does not regard tyrannicide as a matter of choice for the individual; it is instead an obligation which is incumbent upon every member of the community.

The thematic concept evident in *Policraticus* is that of an organic body. Within this context, Salisbury views the intrusion of the unjust as a disease that infects the body thus necessitating that other parts intervene to remove the threat. For Salisbury, a ruler was always under the authority of God and was expected to act according to His precepts in his governance. Any violation of this sacred obligation was an affront to both God and his subjects and demanded justice of the most extreme kind.

While the presence of such a radical assertion in the Middle Ages may be surprising, England continued on a somewhat circuitous quest for subject’s

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200 Ibid., 369.

201 Ibid., 374.
rights and liberties well into the early modern period. Although this may run
the risk of appearing Whiggish, events such as the development of the common
law, Magna Carta, and the Model Parliament of 1295 tend to show a progression
toward empowerment of the subject, and, conversely, a challenge to divine right.
In chapter 2, the change in the concept of divine kingship during the Tudor
monarchy was mentioned. Although this was not a demonstration of the
complete dilution of the divine influence, the shift exchanged divine
embodiment to that of anointing and relationship. To some degree, this served
to weaken the divine right argument for the English monarchy. In short, the
king became less reliant on the invocation of divine right for his absolutist
intentions than during the medieval period. Glenn Burgess agrees with this
assessment, saying, “early modern theories were rather more modest in their
claims than medieval ones, in that they avoided notions of sacral kingship.”202
Focusing on James I concept of divine right theory, Burgess says James held
strongly to the notion of the subject’s allegiance to the monarch and considered
resistance to the ruler an iniquity.203 In addition to these expressions, divine right
theory also assisted in combating theories of “papal jurisdiction over secular


203 Ibid.
In summation, Burgess concludes that the function of divine kingship theory in early modern England was to encourage obedience of the king’s subjects, but this did not remove the king from the necessity to rule through the common law.

Zaller’s assertion that Charles was in fact a “Herod” and the “tyrannical servant of Antichrist” may hold some currency, but I posit that Charles’ failures were in part attributable to his misunderstanding of the character of divine kingship during his period of reign. Based on Burgess’ definition of divine kingship in early modern England, it is clear in the context of Charles’ reign that he was unsuccessful in fulfilling either of the functions Burgess cites. Extra-Parliamentary action colored a majority of Charles’ reign, particularly during his Personal Rule, and this also led to suspicions about his true intentions.

In order to illustrate this further, I will examine Charles’ involvement in the Forced Loan and Five Knights case. Although both events are interrelated, each underscores a different aspect of Charles’ attempt at subverting the rights and liberties of his subjects by failing to follow both common law and the principles set out in English constitutionalism. Charles complicity in and

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204 Ibid.

205 Ibid., 860.
responses to these events also greatly contributed to the erosion of trust between him and both Parliament and his subjects.

The Forced Loan

The political issues on hand at the commencement of Charles’ rule varied little from those experienced by his predecessors. Matters of religion and the prosecution of wars with their inevitable financial burden on the ruler’s subjects continued to be center stage for the king, and political finesse remained the effective tool of the trade. Charles first notable foray into the political morass was necessitated when Christian of Denmark lost the Battle of Lutter on September 11, 1626 to the Hapsburg Emperor, Ferdinand II, during the Thirty Years War. The triumph of Catholic forces sent a chill through much of Protestant Europe, a situation made even more personal and pressing to Charles since Christian was, in fact, his uncle. Charles assured the Danish ambassador that he “would render his uncle assistance, even at the risk of his own crown and hazarding his life.”

Rendering assistance meant one thing: money. However, Charles did not savor the ramifications of this need, namely, the calling of Parliament. In 1614, the Earl of Exeter said, “Parliaments are called for two ends:

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the one for the ease of the people’s grief, the other for relief of the king,” 207 Charles was seeking the latter.

The raising of funds for wars had never been a popular action in England (or elsewhere for that matter), and kings often had to go to great lengths to obtain parliamentary acquiescence on the issue. The calling of a parliament to secure funding was often a bittersweet and two-sided affair for English kings. Parliaments posed a constitutional danger to devout absolutists since Parliament could also bring its own issues to the table, issues that such kings would rather avoid. Charles was no different in this respect, but considered his uncle’s position to be a dire one. However, a previous Parliament Charles dissolved in 1626 to avoid the impeachment of an advisor and favorite, the Duke of Buckingham, had left a bad taste in his mouth, and Charles felt keen to avoid such encounters in the future. From without, the calling of a Parliament seemed to be universally advantageous for all involved for three reasons: first, subsidies were a secure form of income and important for raising loans on the money market; second, parliamentary consensus on the issue was a show of national unity and an asset for diplomatic negotiations; and lastly, the recent reconciliation between Buckingham and the Earl of Pembroke assured a more

peaceful meeting.208 Charles, however, had other plans. Leaning on his
prerogative and perhaps a portent of his Personal Rule, Charles sought, and
eventually gained, a loan without the use of Parliament. Relying on the
medieval precedent of the king’s right to summon funds from his subjects based
on their personal obligation and because “the commons and lords persuaded and
put the King into…war,”209 Charles tasked his Privy Councilors with developing
strategies for raising and collecting necessary funds. Although Charles allowed
the Council to deliberate about the best means to collect the needed funds, his
occasional intervention ensured the Council was acting according to his wishes,
and he was quite intransigent about any deviation from that course. Richard
Cust says that Charles’ attitude “made life very difficult for those [members of
the Privy Council] who wished him to rule with Parliament and helped ensure
that most of the time they kept their heads down.”210

The Forced Loan did not start out as its name implies. The initial
approach was one of benevolence, and Charles sought to make such appeal
through his clergy. On September 21, 1626, he sent a letter to the Archbishop of
Canterbury instructing all English clergy to deliver sermons in support of the

208 Ibid., 210.
209 Ibid., 218.
210 Ibid., 214.
Many of the sermons made allusions to divine right theory in an attempt to justify Charles right to collect money outside of Parliamentary consent. Charles decision to invoke the authority of divine kingship in his appeal for funding seems to be prima facie evidence of his belief in its legitimacy. However, historians such as Paul Christianson argue that Charles was simply invoking his right to gather money during a time of emergency, a view shared by a majority of his Privy Council. Whatever the basis for the decision, it did nothing to diminish fears about his absolutist intentions. Quite a few common lawyers and gentry in the Commons regarded the loan as an illegal tax and one that “subverted the law and governance of England” and was a slight to the ancient constitution. Consequently, Charles was viewed as a monarch who had little or no regard for the rights and liberties of his subjects.

Toward the end of 1626, it became clear that the benevolent approach was proving ineffective, perhaps an implication that “the disloyalty apparent in Parliament went much deeper and affected the whole nation.” The commoners’ refusal to pay was one thing but similar behavior within his own circles was intolerable for Charles, who had a great deal of personal credit at


212 Jansson, Proceedings, 466.

It seems that a number of judges had also failed to pay their dues.

Charles promised to “sweep all their benches” but later took a more tolerant stance upon further counsel. Frustrated, he decided to up the ante and probe the Council for ways to gain a higher level of compliance. The idea of pressing the obdurate into military service was likely suggested by Charles, but its implementation proved to be difficult as enforcers at the local levels, recognizing the charged issue for what it was, were reluctant to carry out the directive. Not only was the issue charged, it was likely illegal. The Solicitor General, Sir Richard Shelton, told the Commons, “What a noise this will make in the country. Let us take care that we enter not into this point.”

Increased urgency was also felt in the churches. In their sermons, some of Charles’ most ardent supporters of divine right, such as Manwaring and Isaac Bargrave, went as far as to claim that all the property of the king’s subjects belonged to him and refusal to pay the loan was commensurate with rebellion.

Laud also weighed in on the situation and attempted to get the anonymous

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214 Ibid.


216 Ibid.


writer of a pamphlet critical of the loan charged with treason. Charles knew he was in tenuous circumstances, but he was probably unaware that his pressing of the loan would create a remarkable legal entanglement and become a demarcation point between Crown and Parliament.

The Five Knights Case

On November 3, 1627, a warrant was issued for the arrest of five knights, Sir Thomas Darnel, Sir John Corbet, Sir Walter Erle, Sir John Hevengham, and Sir Edmund Hampden. All five had failed to contribute to the forced loan and were subsequently imprisoned. In response, the prisoners sought a writ of habeas corpus demanding the reason for confinement. Laud and others, to include Lord Keeper Coventry, decided that the response would be “by his majesty’s special commandment.” The King’s Bench was only deciding the “rule of court,” i.e., whether or not to grant bail and the reason for detention, and not making a decision regarding the substantive charge against the knights. In this instance, the king’s prerogative was sufficient cause to deny bail and hold them in

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219 Ibid.


custody. The fact that the Bench wasn’t determining the “cause of the cause” was important since Charles wanted to estrange the legality of the forced loan from judicial scrutiny.²²² Professor Guy finds this invocation of the royal prerogative to have been established, citing a case as recent as 1592 when the Elizabethan judges ruled that subjects arrested by the monarch or Council for high treason could not be released on bail by the Bench in contravention to the sovereign’s wishes without due trial. However, Guy also recognizes that the substantive meaning of this ruling was to prevent the release of dangerous subjects prior to final judgment.²²³

The compelling reason for the latter case was one of public and royal safety. This rationale hardly differs from our contemporary legal system which seeks to balance safety and liberty. However, the Knights Case hardly qualifies under this criterion. While it is possible the knights may have stirred up disorder if released, this would be pure speculation and hardly anything rising to the level of high treason. Charles reasons for putting the prerogative forward was not due to safety concerns but rather for his own credibility and his desire to push his agenda in spite of its flimsy legality. Of primary concern here for the defendants, and to a larger degree a number of members in the Commons, was

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid., 293-4.
Charles’ unbridled use of the prerogative to potentially hold subjects in detention indefinitely. Hampden’s attorney, John Selden, certainly saw through the veneer and recognized the scope of the situation, noting that Charles’ response to the writ of *habeas corpus* amounted to the imprisoning of subjects without “presentment or indictment.” Ultimately, Charles released the knights a short time later, but the tide against him had already been set in motion by this time.

Although the precedent for holding prisoners at the king’s will had been set on earlier occasions, the situation in 1627-8 differed in two ways from that in the middle and later sixteenth century. In addition to the Elizabethan case referred to by Professor Guy, two other cases from 1526 and 1540 highlight the disparity between the two periods. The first of these involved Sir Humphrey Browne, a serjeant of Henry VIII. Browne drew the ire of Henry when it was discovered he had advised a tenant how to evade the Statute of Uses. The second involved William Hurne, who was arrested pursuant to a warrant issued by Cardinal Wolsey and others for violating one of the king’s laws. Both issues were brought before the Bench and the men were held without bail, a rather

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routine business that never went beyond the Inn of Courts. The Five Knights case, on the other hand, possessed a certain conspiratorial dimension to it, the machination of a king and Attorney General who were bent on stifling the liberties of English subjects.

No discussion of the Five Knights case would be complete without mention of an important anomaly that began in the court bookkeeping office. Although it was the location of a minor clerical error, its ramifications were tremendous and casted an even darker shadow over Charles’ reign and brought him closer to direct conflict with Parliament.

As with prior cases, the Bench’s rulings in the Five Knights case were entered into two locations, the rule book and the controlment roll. Entries into the rule book were limited to matters of court rules; entries into the controlment roll contained information that could be used to try substantive matters. The main prosecutor for the Crown, Attorney General Robert Heath, came to realize that Hevengham’s writ of *habeas corpus* had not made itself into the controlment roll. This was significant since only information entered into the roll could be used as legal knowledge. In short, the Crown had no way of proving that Hevengham’s writ had been answered and that he had been remanded and denied bail by the Bench. Realizing the gravity of the error, Heath instructed the clerk of the court, John Keeling, to enter the ruling on Hevengham into the
controlment roll. Keeling initially refused to do this based on the judge’s remarks that they “would not assent to any special entry.” However, he eventually acquiesced under great pressure from Heath. Later, Hampden’s attorney, John Selden, examined the controlment roll in preparation for bringing the *habeas corpus* issue into parliamentary and realized what had occurred. As can be imagined, the discovery of the entry created a storm. On November 28, 1627, Selden made the error known and a committee was drawn up to review the cases. The judges determined that the ruling in the Five Knights case was a “rule of court” and not a binding precedent. This brought relief in the Commons, particularly to Selden, who felt a judgment to the counter would have been “to the utter subversion of the chiefest liberty and right, belonging to every free man of this country.” However, while the rule of law was important to Parliament, the real issue was not distrust of the law but rather distrust of the king.

By the time Charles assumed the throne, the issue of the royal prerogative and increase in Puritan parliamentarians continued unabated. Between 1625 and 1640, at least one-fourth of the parliamentary boroughs had a Puritan minister. This resulted in a greater Puritan influence in parliamentary elections than could

226 Ibid., 297.

227 *Commons Debates, 1628, II*, 342-356, as quoted in Guy, “Petition of Right,” 299.

228 Young, “Erosion of Trust,” 228.

229 Ibid., 203.
be accomplished by the peer of the realm. Charles and Laud saw fit to remove many of these ministers for their puritan practices and the result was a great deal of rioting and unrest, something that “tipped the scales in favor of puritans in the Parliamentary elections of 1640.”  

By early 1628, the Commons became determined to reel Charles in through written demands. On April 3, 1628, the Commons drafted four resolutions. The first of these prohibited imprisonment for “causes unknown to the law.” The second stated that habeas corpus was “one of right, not grace,” in other words, a right grounded in law rather than royal discretion. The third prohibited the detention of prisoners if no cause of legal detention was sent to the court. Finally, the last resolution prohibited non-parliamentary taxation. Charles perceived their intent to limit his prerogative and “tried to deter them by promising in very general terms to respect all the liberties for which they were contending.” Taking Charles at his word, Secretary Coke assured the Commons that Charles “assures us our liberties are just.” However, the House

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231 Guy, “Petition of Right,” 298.


233 Young, “Erosion,” 229.
would not be deterred. In response, Charles asked the House whether or not it intended to trust his word. The answer given by the House was in the form of the Petition of Right.

Prior to 1628, much of the misgovernment of Charles’ reign was blamed on his ministers and councilors. However, on June 7 of that year, Parliament disregarded prior cautions and focused its attention more directly on Charles through its passing of the Petition of Right. The Petition was an attempt to force Charles into respecting the liberties of his subjects as Parliament recognized “his rigid inability to compromise” and “transparent dishonesty” ensured non-cooperation.234 In addition to the habeas corpus issues already mentioned, the Petition also sought to address the billeting of troops and the imposition of martial law. Charles accepted the Petition but initially gave an unsatisfactory answer, stating,

The King willeth that right be done according to the laws and customs of the realm; and that the statutes be put in due execution, that the subject may have no just cause of complaint for any wrong or oppression, contrary to their just rights and liberties, to the preservation whereov he holds himself in conscience as well obliged of his just prerogative.235

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Parliament, discontent with this answer, demanded “that a clear and satisfactory answer be given by his Majesty in full.” Five days later, Charles relented, saying, “soit droit fait comme est desire” (“let it be done as it is desired”). Although there were rumors of church bells ringing and the lighting of bonfires in celebration to his response, Charles was in no celebratory mood. Prior to the end of the meeting, Parliament authorized the printing of the Petition for late dispersal. To its surprise, the Petition was printed but the copies included both of Charles’ responses as well as additional material that emphasized Charles acquiescence on the upholding of liberties but kept his prerogative intact, to include his right to duties of tonnage and poundage. Upon detection, the Commons summoned the king’s printer, Bonham Norton, and queried him on the event. Norton said that then Attorney General and the Lord Privy Seal met with him bearing numerous pieces of paper, one that stated, “We will and command you that these copies be printed.” In addition to this act of forgery, Charles issued a warrant to suppress additional copies of the Petition relaying the true facts.

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236 Young, “Erosion of Trust,” 232.


Parliament’s decision to push forward with the Petition of Right was the proverbial “line in the sand.” As opposed to the Forced Loan case where Charles used the benevolence “as a basic test of Englishmen’s fidelity to their king,” the tables were now turned as Parliament used the Petition of Right to test Charles’ word and loyalty to the pursuit of liberty. His complicity in the suppression of the Petition’s dispersal and alteration of its content, and outright dishonesty, provided them with a clear and unequivocal answer.

Charles actions during the Forced Loan and Five Knights case demonstrate the high degree of anxiety and fear of the loss of liberty created by his actions. His behavior also indicates his inability to recognize the importance of following not only the common law but also the political protocols followed by past monarchs since the Reformation. Charles heightened Parliament’s resolve when he showed he could not be trusted. This lack of trust parlayed itself into the Petition, a document that stood as a litmus test from which Parliament could measure his continued course of dishonesty and threat to liberty.

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Disposition of an Ignoble King

The intention of this analysis is not to delve into the details of the War itself as I contend that many of the elements that played a role in Charles demise were already in place prior to the War itself. However, a complete avoidance of this subject is inescapable as I also assert that the fulfillment of these elements and the introduction of one other, justification of his death, did not fully form until after the hostilities on the ground. What follows is a cursory look at the immediate events leading up to the War as well as a brief discussion of its conclusion. My purpose is to establish the circumstances that existed at the time of Charles’ capture and imprisonment, and how his intransigent demeanor contributed to his execution.

In spite of the Commons’ efforts, the Petition of Right did not achieve its goal of bringing Charles to his constitutional senses. Other events, particularly the execution of his favorite, Strafford, became wedges that pushed the mutual mistrust between him and Parliament even farther than the damage done by the Forced Loan and Five Knights case. Additionally, the Commons pursuit of anti-episcopacy caused a fear of threat to hierarchy and authority, and the Commons’ push for adherence to the Protestation led to a sanctioning of rioting and destruction of Church of England property and churches. Mistreatment was

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240 Miller, “English Civil Wars,” 63.
not limited to property either as enemies of Parliament, “Catholics, Laudians and courtiers (cavaliers)”\textsuperscript{241} were also targets of violence. While the country was in severe unrest, Charles made for Scotland to check on developments there. Suspicions of his rumored plan to return and invade England with the Scottish forces aroused greater anxiety. This rumor carried an element of truth however, and strengthened Parliament’s resolve to restrict his power even further.\textsuperscript{242} Parliament also determined it necessary to assemble and oversee a militia not only for national security purposes but also to confront Charles if necessary.\textsuperscript{243} This was clear evidence that Parliament was now assuming what had previously been the king’s responsibilities.\textsuperscript{244}

Upon his return from Scotland, Charles was greeted by a London teeming with tension between parliamentary and royalist allegiances. In the London elections of 1641, antagonism toward the city commercial oligarchs and a rise in Puritan sympathies gave Pym and his allies’ control of London’s political machine and military faction.\textsuperscript{245} Parliament was also divided between the Houses, with the Commons resenting and not trusting the Lords who counted a

\textsuperscript{241} Ibid., 64.

\textsuperscript{242} Ibid., 58.

\textsuperscript{243} Ibid., 66.

\textsuperscript{244} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{245} Worden, “English Civil Wars,” 38.
number of Catholics and bishops in its membership. Parliament had also removed a number of Charles’ ministers and virtually taken control of the fiscal devices of government thereby making Charles even more dependent upon it for his own survival. Additionally, Parliament’ passing (by a small margin) and presentation of the Grand Remonstrance to Charles on December 1, 1641 and his subsequent refusal to honor a majority of its demands, sent a confirming message to Parliament that Charles was unbending.

On the heels of Charles’ refusal to comply with the Great Remonstrance was his attempt to wrest control of the militia from Parliament. Although he failed to secure the naval forces, he was successful in appointing a number of his own leaders who assembled armed bands and took control of some areas of the country. The opposing sides that would eventually fight in the War were slowly taking form in the streets of London and other areas of the country. Parliament, though somewhat divided between its houses, continued to become a surrogate ruler as Charles majesty diminished. While not a central contributor to the cause of the war, this diminishment hindered Charles’ ability to mobilize opposition to Parliament. Speaking to this point, Lord Brooke once said that Charles’ servants “had the courage almost to despit him in the face.”

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246 Miller, “English Civil Wars,” 69.

telling and pivotal examples of this occurred when Charles attempted to arrest Pym and four others in the Commons. Having failed to secure those arrests, he returned to the streets of London only to be confronted by the mayor and large crowds yelling, “Privileges of Parliament!” On November 22, 1642, barely over ten months later and amidst a crescendo of conflict and unrest, the Royalist standard was planted in Nottingham.

Following almost four years of fighting, the Royalist army was defeated by Parliamentary troops and the New Model Army, but the Royalist presence was still palpable. Charles, cognizant that he still had a fair amount of support, was not completely resigned to his station, and, in fact, held to the belief that the recent event was not a war, but rather a rebellion against his rightful authority. He was also aware that Parliament had now become the focus of strife within England and detected the stirrings for order. Accordingly, a third force had developed, the so-called “clubmen,” whose members had become weary of the hostilities and advocated a settlement between the two parties. While the effort eventually lost momentum, it manifested a palpable degree of public sentiment.

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249 Miller, *English Civil Wars*, 150.

250 Worden, *The English Civil Wars*, 75.
between the New Model Army and Parliament. The former petitioned the latter with a number of concerns, many related to the rights and liberties of subjects but some aimed squarely at the king. Charles was presented with the New Model Army’s propositions but promptly turned it down. Tensions continued to increase between Parliament and the New Model Army with the latter eventually gaining the upper hand against the former. With the New Model Army directing much of the political action, it offered Charles another settlement which he also declined.

During this time, a group known as the Levellers had gained momentum in political circles through its advocating of popular rights and liberties for subjects and decreased royal and Parliamentary power. Based on the Leveller’s growing political influence and shared concerns about the role of the king and Parliament, the New Model Army felt it fruitful to meet with the group in order to flesh out a consensus about the form of power in England.

These meetings, known as the Putney Debates, lasted from October 18 until November 9 of 1647. During the meetings, the Levellers drafted the Agreement of the People and presented it to the army. The discussions and events stemming from its consideration were peppered with disagreements and posturing on both sides. A major area of contention was the Leveller’s insistence on universal male suffrage. At its core, the issue was “a classic confrontation
between the ideal of egalitarian democracy [the Levellers] and the conviction that authority should be based on property and precedent [New Model Army].”

Adding to the tension was the New Model Army’s demand that Parliament make no further effort to approach Charles. Incensed, the Levellers and their supporters attempted to incite sympathetic army troops in an effort to disrupt Army organization. A main goal of this action was to have Charles forcibly removed from Hampton Court where he had been under house arrest by the Army. This minor uprising was quickly quelled by the Army and the king remained at Hampton Court. In the end, the New Model Army permanently established its superior position, and the Levellers no longer played a role in its plans. However, while the Army was busying itself with constitutional concerns, Charles was concentrating on a different subject: his return to the throne.

In the summer of 1648, Charles secret plans with the Scots (he promised the imposition of the Scottish Covenant in England) came to fruition when Scottish troops invaded England. Royalists’ uprisings accompanied the invasion, and Cromwell’s troops fought heated battles against both factions until the war ended in August of 1649 at the Battle of Preston. Charles, defeated once again,


252 Miller, English Civil Wars, 172.
was taken into custody. By the time Charles was detained, Parliament had been purged and now consisted mainly of Army supporters and those sympathetic to its cause, the “Rump Parliament.” The Rump established a High Court of Justice in January 1649 and charged Charles with treason on January 20 of that year.

The trial was filled with tension and also showcased Charles’ intransigence. In an effort to avoid bloodshed, the Army offered to acquit Charles if he agreed to sell the lands of the bishops and denounce his veto rights. He refused. Having no other option, the trial proceeded. Charles was also charged with being the author of the Civil War, as well as being a tyrant and a murderer. Charles railed against the authority of the High Court, saying, “I have a trust committed to me by God, by old and lawful descent, I will not betray it, to answer a new unlawful authority; therefore resolve me that, and you shall hear more of me.”

In response to Charles’ admonition to the Court, Judge Bradshaw retorted,

> There is a contract and a bargain made between the King and his people, and your oath is taken: and certainly, Sir, the bond is reciprocal; for as you are the liege lord, so they liege subjects...This we know, the one tie, the one bond, is the bond of protection that is due from the sovereign; the other is the bond of subjection that is due from the subject. Sir, if this bond be once broken, farewell sovereignty!

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254 Ibid.
Charles, as Bradshaw discerned, had broken the bond between king and subject. He had stepped outside the bounds of what was expected of a king in early modern England, and was, as Salisbury would agree, a disease in the body politic that needed eradication.

Bradshaw’s response to Charles is simultaneously clear and questioning. What exactly did he mean when he said, “farewell sovereign”? Was this an allusion to exile or, as was the case, execution? Historians have occupied themselves with the question of exactly when the decision to kill Charles was made. Some, such as Sean Kelsey argue that there are grounds for believing the trial did not need to end with a verdict for execution. Kelsey notes that contemporary opinions seemed to run counter to such a verdict, citing Cromwell’s argument “that there was no policy in taking away his life...[and] that if they should at any time loose the day, they could produce the King, their stake; and by His meanes work their peace.” Cromwell, however, apparently contradicted himself on another occasion. During the deliberation about the

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charges to be made against Charles, he said, “we will cut off his head with the
crown upon it.”

In opposition to Kelsey’s contention, I believe the decision to execute
Charles was established much earlier and grounded on two of the three main
contentions of this analysis: his failure to conform to the expectations of divine
kingship and his intransigent and untrustworthy character. As Bradshaw so
aptly noted, Charles broke the bond between king and subject largely through
his violation of the common law and constitutional channels. He also failed to
ensure England had a proper and acceptable religion. In Charles, “they found a
negligent king who was oblivious to the threat of popery at home, abroad, and
within the church of which he was supreme governor.” In effect, his actions
constituted a form of abdication, a king who failed to fulfill his duties in both the
political and religious spheres. England needed a ruler who would commit to
keeping it in God’s favor, not one who would bring His wrath upon it. Pursuers
of regicide had to be careful, however. In spite of Charles actions, he still held a
degree of majesty as evidenced by the dissenting contemporary opinions about
his regicide; perhaps killing a divine king would bring a similar wrath of its own.

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257 Robert and Marilyn Aitken, “The King Who Lost His Head: The Trial of Charles I,”
2014).
In its simplest terms, the regicide of a divine king has two requirements. The willingness to countenance resisting a divine king is the first. In Charles’ case, this was already in place. The civil wars themselves are certainly clear evidence that Charles’ subjects were engaged in an act of resistance to authority, an idea that was well settled in the Civil War period.

Rationale for resisting a ruler, both from a legal and ecclesiastical perspective, abounded during Charles’ reign. In contrast to the earlier forms of divine kingship in England, those in opposition to the king were more inclined to resist his prerogative. John Miller insists that if the king threatens his subject’s person, property, or liberty, they were no longer bound to obey him.258 David Wootton finds early evidence of this during the war period, and chides those who believe such an idea materialized from religious sects of the period or “from below” rather than recognizing that it began earlier, the result of “men immersed in the constitutionalist debate over the right of resistance.”259 Stephen Marshall, arguing from the legal standpoint, believed Parliament had the right to resist the


king in order to protect the liberties of Englishmen. In his work, *A Treatise of Monarchie*, Philip Hunton declared Parliament’s right to “use the power of the sword contrary to the king’s command” when “the Lawes and Frame of government are secretly undermined, or openly assaulted” or when “the Fundamentall Rights of either of the three Estates bee invaded by one or both the rest.” John Goodwin, recognizing that Parliament was fighting for “the defence of Your lives, your Liberties, your Estates, your houses, your Wives, your Children, your Brethren,” also concluded that “we ought not to submit in any thing whereby God may be dishonoured or disobeyed…[no kings had power] to doe any thing which is unjust, or unrighteous.” The pulpit was another source of inspiration as well. Often, these sermons emphasized that while God may approve of the resistance taken against the king, such resistance must be for a justifiable cause.

That the opponents of the king and his supporters felt sufficiently justified in their resistance should go without question. Such justification was established

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262 John Goodwin, *Anti-Cavalierisme, or, Truth Pleading as well the Necessity, as the Lawfulness of this Present War* (London, 1642), as quoted in Burgess, “English Civil War,” 188.

on both legal and religious grounds. The importance and efficacy of the opponents’ dedication to this idea can be found in the mantra of the Royalists, many of whom “reverted to harping upon his [Charles’] divine right and the sin of rebellion” once the tactic of seeking a moderate stance was abandoned.264

The leap from resisting a divinely ordained ruler to his execution is a rather long one. Past English kings had been deposed but none suffered the ultimate price at the hands of a legal instrument. Kelsey says, “Firm evidence that the trial was envisaged simply as a means to the end of the regicide is extremely thin.”265 The problem with Kelsey’s emphatic statement is that it does not consider the deeper mutual history experienced by Charles and those opposed to him. Those responsible for deciding his fate had long roots of involvement with Charles and knew better than most what he was capable of. The deciding factor was in fact Charles’ fulfillment of the second requirement: a personality characterized by traits that engendered a lack of trust.

Charles held tightly to his arrogance and inflexibility to the bitter end. He firmly believed England would be unable to manage its affairs without him. The scaffold was no persuader, either. As he stood facing the executioner, Charles declared,

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For the people, and I truly desire their liberty and freedom as much as anybody whatsoever; but I must tell you that their liberty and freedom consists in having of government those laws by which their life and their goods may be most their own. It is not having share in government, sirs; that is nothing pertaining to them.  

One cannot fault Charles for fatally choosing this stance. Although probing the mind of a seventeenth century Englishman is difficult, Kevin Sharpe attempts to do so in his somewhat apologetic article, *Private Conscience and Public Duty in the Writings of Charles I*. Sharpe argues that Charles’ failure as king was the result of him following his conscience at the cost of political success. According to Sharpe, Charles truly believed he was doing God’s will and placed this interpreted will over political considerations. Further evidence of this can be found at trial where stated he had a trust “committed to me by God…I will not betray it.”

Unfortunately, Charles’ God was not a seventeenth century English Parliamentary one. The Puritan minds of Parliament had an English God who was going to right England and move it along the path of righteousness and purpose, not subvert the rights and liberties of its people. Charles’ failure to

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268 Ibid.
properly comprehend early modern English divine-right kingship also placed blinders on his understanding of the Puritans' nexus between religion and liberty. And then there was the blasphemous Church of England. Oliver Cromwell schemed to rewrite the constitution of the Church of England and replace it with what became known as the “Root and Branch Bill.” Tired of the prevailing Laudian reforms that Charles had sanctioned through his sympathy, Cromwell and Oliver St. John and Henry Vane the Younger had unsuccessfully lobbied for its passage. The primary goal of the bill was to remove episcopacy from the Church, which, according to Vane, was “rotten and corrupt from the very foundation to the top.”

Cromwell and his cronies thought Charles may have been a crypto-Catholic or Arminian, but he surely was no true Protestant.

Charles’ engagement in these behaviors increased as England moved nearer to war, and he became more desperate. Richard Cust contends that while Charles failed the truth test due to his actions in the Five Knights case and Forced Loan event, his failure to behave honestly upon agreeing to the Petition of Right was the “clearest possible demonstration of the extent of mutual distrust” between him and Parliament. Sharpe also points out that when Charles was faced with a choice between moral principle and political compromise, he

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269 Wilson, *King and the Gentleman*, 283.

frequently sought to harmonize the two. Failing the latter, he resumed a rigid
stance. This, according to Sharpe, led to the charge of the duplicity, a
characteristic commonly noted by historians.

In the latter half of 1647 following Charles’ surrender, there was talk
among the army that Charles “was the main obstacle to a settlement and that he
was incorrigible and deserving of condign punishment.” Charles’ reign had
been a narrative of distrust and double-dealing. He squandered his
opportunities to reach a compromise with Parliament and the Army in place of
finding what suited his best interests. As Michael Young affirms, although
Charles could not be trusted to command an army, negotiate in good faith,
employ good counsel, or maintain the Church of England, he was, in the end, a
victim of his own “weasel ways.”

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271 Ibid., 649.

272 Miller, “English Civil Wars,” 168

273 Hirst, Authority and Conflict, 138, as quoted in Young, “Erosion of Trust,” 235.
CONCLUSION

Historians have not always been kind to Charles. Sharpe remarked that "there can be little doubt that his [Charles] manner of dying was the most popular thing Charles I ever did."\(^{274}\) It is true, however, that among the many individuals, factions, and issues contributing to the English Civil War, nothing stands more center stage than Charles I. Although he faced religious and political divisions rivaling those of his predecessors, his responses to these challenges resulted in something his predecessors did not experience, the transformation of English government from a monarchy to a republic and the execution of a sovereign. The narrative of the War is one of rapidity. The changes in the loci of power, the rising and falling of political and religious ideas, and intrigue both within and without, bears witness to an event that took very few years to move from disagreements in Parliament to the scaffold.

Among my findings, I have demonstrated that the Reformation had an immense impact upon both the ensuing Civil War and Charles’ death. Henry’s severance of Roman ties to facilitate his marriage to Anne Boleyn created a

situation that was well beyond his ability to resolve. The nascent Church of England struggled for an identity and its Catholic trappings were not far removed. Subsequent reigns up until Charles struggled similarly. Although Edward VI and Somerset embarked on a course of creating a more Protestant Church, Somerset’s underlying motives and Edward’s untimely death cut the course short. Mary’s ascension and attempt at bringing England back to the Roman faith met with a fair amount of resistance and left a trail of Protestant martyrs in its wake. Elizabeth, on the other hand, brought a degree of order back but her commitment to true Protestantism was a calculated affair. She recognized the errors of Mary and sought to allow for a certain amount of deviation, provided it was not an affront to official policy or her royal will. Puritanism existed but did not directly threaten her rule as it would Charles. In James’ reign, the seeds of religious tension began to manifest themselves in a more evident manner. The introduction of Arminanism posed a challenge as did the Puritans, particularly those in the Commons. James, however, was able to stave off these political and ecclesiastical threats and experienced no significant crises as a result.

Charles inherited an England that was in religious turmoil. Although his predecessors had been able to balance their rule with the religious ambiguity of and challenges to the Church of England, Charles was unable to do so. His long
leash on Laud allowed the latter to inject the Church with a strong dose of Arminianism at a time when the Commons was becoming a hotbed of Puritan thought. The perceived difference between Arminian and Catholic was a hair’s breadth, and Charles fell under great suspicion of being a crypto-Catholic, the Puritan equivalent of the Antichrist. Adding to Charles woes was also his marriage to the Catholic Henrietta, a much resented member of the court and perceived as a dangerous influence over Charles.

Charles also sabotaged his reign as a result of personal characteristics that led to a lack of trust with his subjects. The Five Knights case and the Forced Loan are clear examples of his attempt to commit fraud and forgery in order to subvert men’s liberty, at least in the minds of most seventeenth-century Englishmen. These behaviors continued throughout his reign and were quite evident following his surrender when he attempted to gain the upper hand on Parliament and the Army by prevaricating on any kind of settlement.

Finally, Charles’ misunderstanding of the contemporary form of divine-right kingship in England led him to fail to respect the common law and follow the constitutional principles of the past as was the practice of his predecessors. Such a breach was viewed by relevant members of Parliament and the Army as an act of treason. This, coupled with his penchant for dishonesty and duplicity,
pushed Cromwell and the High Court into a corner, forcing them to execute the obstacle to their progress.
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