

Henry VIII: Catholic or Protestant?

MOST evidence suggests that in the early sixteenth century ordinary people were still quite happy with the Church. They did not mind that services and churches had not changed much since the Middle Ages. But in the 1500s this situation changed.

People began to criticise the Church. They said it was too wealthy and did not use its money to help the poor. Instead, the bishops and the monks in MONASTERIES lived in luxury.

Many priests and bishops had several jobs. This meant they couldn't do them all properly. Some priests never visited their parishes, leaving people who could not read or write to take the services.

The services and the Bible were still in Latin. Many people said they found it difficult to feel close to God if they couldn't read the Bible for themselves or understand the services.

In England, a group called the Lollards had been making these criticisms for years. Then in 1519 in Germany a monk called Luther attacked the Catholic Church. He was especially angry about the idea of paying to have your sins forgiven (indulgences). Soon many people joined Luther in protesting against these things. They were called 'Protestants'. The changes and reforms the Protestants brought about in churches all over Europe are known as the Reformation.

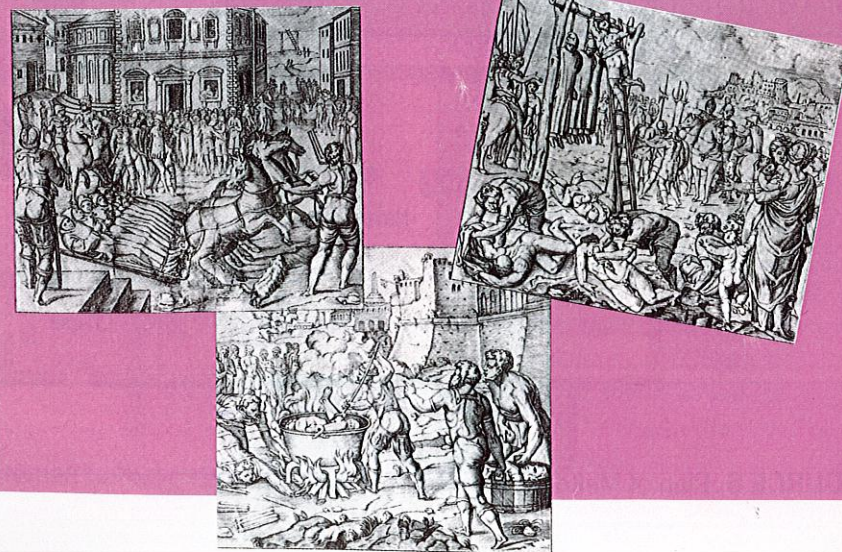
Henry VIII

When King Henry VIII of England first heard of Luther's ideas he wrote a book defending the Catholic Church. Yet by 1536 he had declared himself, rather than the Pope, to be head of the English Church, and had closed down all the monasteries in England.

Do these events show that Henry was a Protestant, or did he have other reasons for these actions?

1. Look at Sources 1–3. Which of Henry's actions seem to support the Protestants?
2. Which seem to support the Catholics?

► **SOURCE 1** Engraving showing the punishment of monks in 1535. They had stood up to Henry and refused to recognise him as Head of the Church



SOURCE 2 Religious policies of Henry VIII

- 1532–3 Acts passed which stopped all payments to the Pope from the English Church.
- 1534 Act of Supremacy made the king head of the English Church instead of the Pope.
- 1536 Smaller monasteries dissolved (closed down).
- 1538 Henry's son Edward born. Although he knew Edward would be the next king, Henry decided to have him educated by two leading Protestants.
- 1539 Larger monasteries dissolved.
- 1539 English translation of the Bible published.
- 1539 Act of Six Articles supported all Catholic beliefs and Catholic church services; said Protestants were to be persecuted.



SOURCE 3 The execution of William Tyndale in 1536. He was persecuted by Henry, and later executed by the Holy Roman Emperor for translating the Bible into English so that ordinary people could read it



If we are going to understand these confusing actions, we need to know a little more about Henry's problems.

■ **Henry wanted a son.** His wife, Catherine of Aragon, had given him a daughter, Mary, but no son. Catherine had had several miscarriages and it was clear that the chances of her giving birth to a healthy son were small. Henry believed that to make sure the Tudor dynasty survived he needed a son.

By 1525 Henry had decided that he wanted a new wife to give him a son. Only the Pope could give Henry a divorce and the Pope refused.

Meanwhile, Henry had fallen in love with Anne Boleyn. At the end of 1532 she was pregnant with Henry's child. In 1533 Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, acted on orders from Henry and declared Anne and Henry man and wife.



■ **Henry was bankrupt.** He wanted to be powerful in Europe. He had already fought some very expensive wars in Europe and now desperately needed more money. The monasteries were very rich. They owned about a quarter of all the land in the country. If Henry took over the monasteries he would be very rich.

■ **Henry wanted to control the Church.** Since medieval times there had been repeated struggles over whether the priests and Church leaders should obey the Pope or the king. (You will remember the battle between Archbishop Becket and King Henry II that led to Becket's murder.) The powerful monasteries were loyal to the Pope. Henry VIII resented an outsider being in control of so big a part of English life. He wanted to control the Church in his own country.

3. Look back at Sources 1–3. Which of these statements do you most agree with now?
 - 'Henry couldn't decide if he supported the Catholics or the Protestants.'
 - 'Henry supported whoever would help him get what he wanted.'
 - 'Henry generally supported the Catholics, but went along with Protestant ideas when they could get him what he wanted.'

Why did Henry close the monasteries?

Most of the monasteries and nunneries in England were supposed to follow strict rules, laid down by Saint Benedict 900 years earlier. These showed how monks and nuns were meant to live. The rules made sure they devoted their lives to God and to helping other people.

SOURCE 4 The rules for monks and nuns

- They should:
- live as poor people
 - not marry or have sexual relationships
 - look after the poor, the sick and the old
 - give shelter and food to travellers
 - eat simply and fast regularly. Their main meal at two o'clock should be fish, vegetables and bread. No meat was allowed
 - wear simple, rough clothes
 - sleep in dormitories with the other monks or nuns. Have just a mattress, blanket and pillow on their bed
 - help to educate children
 - copy out precious or rare manuscripts.

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HENRY VIII: CATHOLIC OR PROTESTANT?

In 1535 Thomas Cromwell, Henry's chief minister, sent out handpicked inspectors to report on the state of the monasteries. He was looking for excuses to close them down. The inspectors were given a list of questions. They then wrote reports back to Cromwell. Some reports which praised the monasteries were sent back to the inspectors by Cromwell with instructions to be more critical.

SOURCE 5 Extracts from some of the reports Cromwell received

a) About Crossed Friars monastery, London

“Found the prior at that time in bed with a woman, both naked, about 11 o'clock in the morning.”

b) About an abbey near Chichester

“The Abbey of Essebourne and the Priory of Shulbred, because of their poverty, were not able to lodge us. We were compelled to ride out of our way to Waverley Abbey to lodge.”

c) About Langdon in Kent

“I spent a good time knocking at the abbot's door, neither sound nor sign of life appearing. I found a short pole-axe standing behind the door, and with it I dashed the door to pieces. About the house I go, and find his woman.”

d) About Woolsthorpe in Lincolnshire

“I write to you in support of the house of Woolstroe. The abbot is well beloved, having eight religious persons, being priests of right good conversation and living religiously, having such qualities of virtue as we have not found the like in any place.”

e) About St Edmund's monastery, in Suffolk

“The Abbot delighted much in playing at dice and in that spent much money. For his own pleasure he has had lots of beautiful buildings built.”

f) About the St Edmund's convent

“I could not find out anything bad about the convent, no matter how hard I tried. I believe I couldn't find anything because everybody had got together and agreed to keep the convent's secrets... Among the relics we found were enough pieces of the Holy Cross to make a whole cross.”

1. Look at Source 5. What examples are there of monks not living as they should?
2. What was the most common crime reported?
3. What evidence is there that the inspectors were deliberately trying to find something wrong?
4. Does the evidence in Source 5 prove that the monasteries were corrupt and should be closed down?

The inspectors did not visit all the monasteries they reported on. Instead of a personal visit they often just asked people living close by to tell them what the monastery was like.

Most monasteries had also been regularly visited by their local bishop. The bishops usually came to different judgements to the inspectors'. For example, at Shulbrede in Sussex Cromwell's inspectors reported that the prior had seven mistresses. The bishop, on the other hand, said all was well.

SOURCE 6 Robert Aske explains why he and thousands of others in northern England rebelled against Henry in 1536

“The closing of the monasteries means that religious services will not be carried out, and the poor will not be looked after. The monasteries are much loved by the people.”

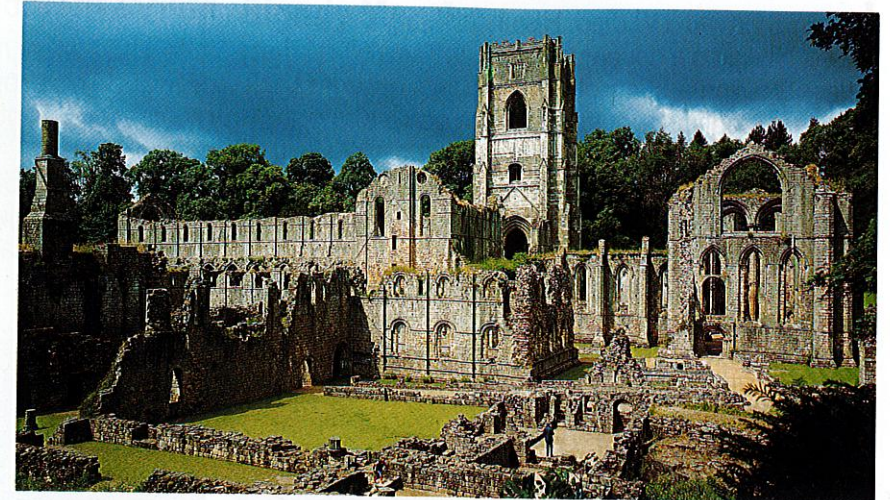
SOURCE 7 By a modern historian

“Henry's normal income before 1536 was about £100,000 a year. Between 1536 and 1547 he received an extra £140,000 a year from the dissolution of the monasteries.”

5. Does the new evidence you have just read show why it is important for historians to look at as much evidence as possible?

In 1536 the small monasteries were dissolved (closed down). In 1539 all the big monasteries were also dissolved. Not one monastery was left in England. The King took much of the land and the valuables. Other land was sold to the nobles and gentry. Some abbey buildings fell into ruin, some became private houses while a few became cathedrals.

6. Do you think Henry VIII closed the monasteries:
 - because they were so corrupt
 - because he needed money
 - for other reasons?
 Explain your answer by referring to the evidence on pages 28–30.



► **SOURCE 8** Fountains Abbey, which fell into ruins after it was sold off by Henry VIII

Edward VI

When Henry died in 1547, his only surviving son Edward became king at the age of nine. He had been educated as a Protestant. Edward's Protestant advisers influenced him to change official policies on religion. Real changes in the services and beliefs of the Church began to take place.

SOURCE 9 Religious policies of Edward VI

“1547 Chuntries were dissolved – this was an attack on the belief in Purgatory and the practice of saying prayers for the dead.”

1549 Priests were allowed to get married. The Catholic church did not allow priests to marry.

1552 A new Protestant Prayer Book was introduced for the Church, with services in English, not Latin. Remember that the Prayer Book laid down all the beliefs of the Church.”

SOURCE 10 Changes in the new Prayer Book

“The Mass was abolished and replaced with the communion service. At communion the bread and the wine only represented Christ, they did not become Christ. It was a service of remembrance, not a sacrifice.”

■ Altars were replaced by simple tables.

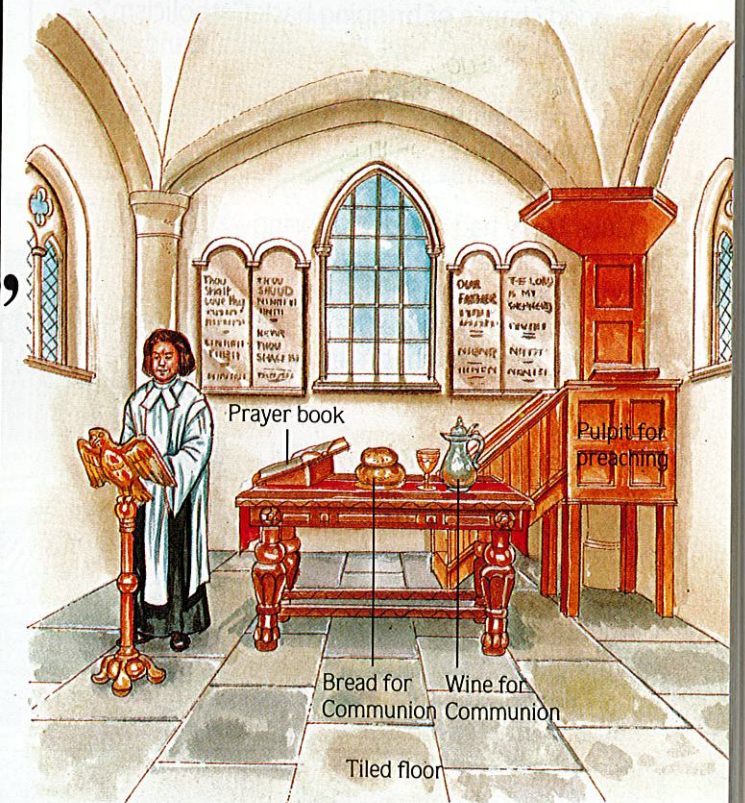
■ Priests no longer wore the elaborate vestments popular in Catholic churches.

■ Finally, the idea of Predestination was accepted. This was the belief that it had already been decided whether a person was going to Heaven or Hell. You could not buy your way to heaven by good works or prayers for your soul.”

Activity

Look at Sources 9–11. Make a list of all the changes made to the Church during Edward's reign. Then make a list of all the changes made to the Church by Henry.

Who do you think changed the Church more?



SOURCE 11 A church in Edward's reign