

Oxford AQA History



**A LEVEL
AND AS**

Component 2

Religious Conflict and
the Church in England
c1529–c1570



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1

The Church in c1529

1 The political and social role of the Church

SOURCE 1

A critical poem on the condition of religion and the Church in England. This was published in Strasbourg in 1528:

As for bishops take no care,
They drink from golden bowls
the blood of poor simple souls,
Perishing for lack of **sustenance**.
Their hungry cures they never teach
Nor will suffer none other to preach
But such as can lie and flatter.

As for religious folk, to be brief,
In all England they have the chief
And most pleasant commodities
The goodly soils, the goodly land
Wrongfully they hold their lands
They are the cause of misery
of whoredom, theft and beggary.

ACTIVITY

Evaluating primary sources

In groups, consider the views of the Church as expressed in Source 1. What does this tell us about why the poem was not published in England? What does this source tell us about the importance of the Church in England?

In the sixteenth century the Church in England was part of the much wider Catholic Church; a powerful and wealthy Church, with property that was greater than any king's. Alongside the systems of law and order and taxation through which the king controlled England, the Catholic Church with its base in Rome had its own structure, its own legal system and its own system of taxation. It exerted its authority over churches in each country through the cathedrals in cities, priories in towns, monasteries in the countryside, and parish churches in local areas. Senior churchmen in England known as archbishops provided links to the wider Catholic Church. The monarch relied on the Church to give his position legitimacy by being anointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury as God's representative on earth, an act which took place during his coronation in Westminster Abbey. The monarch also turned to the Church to reinforce law and order through its beliefs and teachings. In addition, leading figures in the Church played a key role in advising the king as members of the Privy Council.

A CLOSER LOOK

England and Rome

England was one of the oldest Catholic countries. Some people believed that its conversion from paganism dated from the second century but a more realistic link dates it from the seventh century. English people believed that England's relationship to Rome was special. This may be because of England's island status – separate from mainland Europe.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this chapter you will learn about:

- Churchmen as royal advisers
- The Church's teachings on monarchical authority
- The wealth of the Church
- Church courts
- Parish churches and monasteries

KEY TERM

sustenance: nourishment. In this context, the poem suggests that the priests do not provide the **laity** with enough spiritual support

laity: those who were not members of the clergy

CROSS-REFERENCE

See page 6 for more information on what functions religious houses served.

The papacy: office of the pope

- God's representative on earth

The secular clergy

- clergy who provided religious services to the laity

Roman curia

- administered the church

Cardinals

- senior churchmen
- elected popes

Archbishops

- senior churchmen in each country

Bishops

- regional leaders of the church

Parish priests

- ministered to each congregation
- special rights kept them apart from the laity

Other orders

- Deacons regarded as clergy

Fig. 1 *The structure of the Church in England at the beginning of the sixteenth century*

KEY TERM

abbots: abbots were heads of monastic houses who provided earthly and spiritual leadership

bishops: bishops were regional leaders of the Church who provided earthly and spiritual leadership to the laity

Churchmen as royal advisers

England thought of itself as part of 'Christendom'. Henry VIII looked to the Head of the Church (the Pope in Rome) to re-inforce his authority to govern. The Pope had enormous powers and prestige, particularly since he could draw up non-secular laws which applied to all of Christendom. English kings were keen to demonstrate their allegiance to the Catholic Church. One of the most high-profile acts of Henry VIII's father, Henry VII, had been the construction of the Lady Chapel at Westminster Abbey. This, he had hoped, would establish the security of the Tudors in the eyes of the Church and the people.

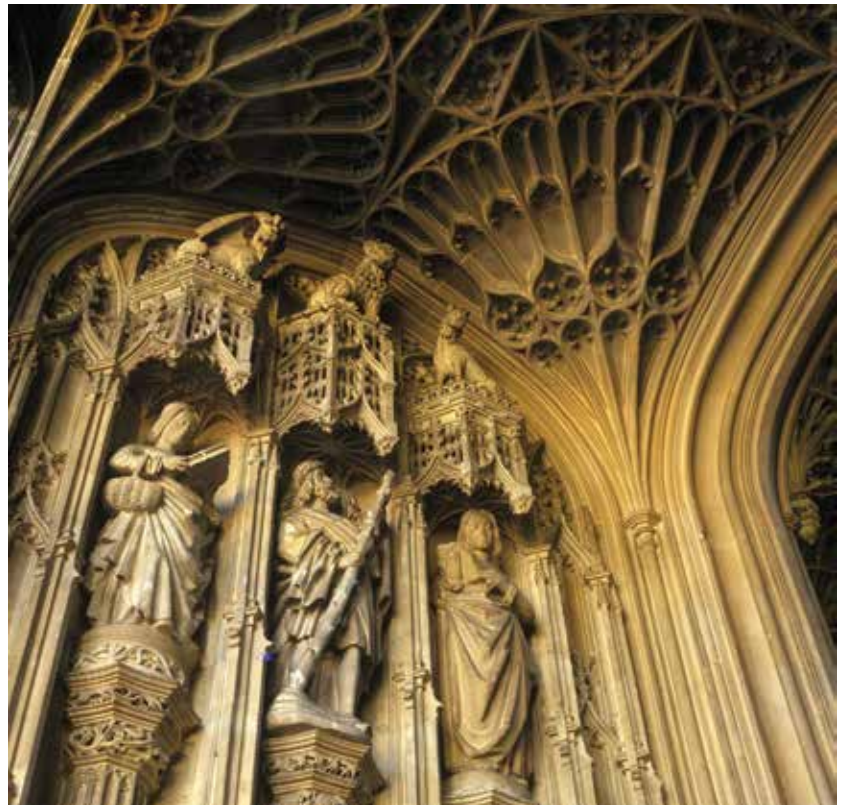


Fig. 2 *Lady Chapel at Westminster Abbey*

The Catholic Church played a central part in politics. **Abbots** and **bishops** sat in the House of Lords alongside the nobility. As well as deciding on legislation, they were instrumental in advising the king. Henry VIII could use the wealth of the Church to reward his advisers and give them prestige.

Henry VIII's Chancellor, **Cardinal Wolsey**, typified the links between the Church and the State:

- As the principal adviser to the king, he was responsible for the day to day government of the country.
- As **Chancellor** he had ultimate authority over the legal system.
- As a cardinal he had significant authority in the Church; cardinals elected the Pope.
- As **Archbishop of York**, he held the second most important position in the Church in England.
- As **legatus a latere** he had the right to act on behalf of the Pope though not in all things.

From 1514 Wolsey was Henry's chief minister and the most important person in the government of England, apart from Henry VIII himself. It is clear that Wolsey exploited his position as Henry's first minister and his role in the Church to achieve outcomes that enhanced both Henry's position and his own.



Fig. 3 A Victorian representation of Cardinal Wolsey; in what ways does the portrait emphasise Wolsey's self-importance?

SOURCE 2

Sebastian Giustiniani was the Venetian Ambassador to the court of Henry VIII in 1519. As an ambassador, Giustiniani had been in England since 1515, and had regular meetings with Cardinal Wolsey.

The Cardinal of York rules both king and the entire kingdom. He is very handsome, learned, extremely eloquent, of vast ability and untiring. At first he used to say to me 'His majesty will do so and so'. Subsequently, by degrees, he went forgetting himself and commenced saying 'We shall do so and so'. He had then reached such a pitch that he used to say 'I shall do so and so'. All state affairs, both civil and criminal are managed by him. He does more than all the magistrates, officers and councils of Venice. He has the reputation of being extremely just: he favours the people, especially the poor, hearing and passing judgement on their cases without delay.

SOURCE 3

Polydore Vergil was the ambassador to the Vatican. He was invited by Henry VII to write *Anglica Historia*, an influential account of English history which he began in 1502. The following critical account of Wolsey was not included in his published History of England until 1555:

Wolsey was, indeed, detested by everyone, because he assumed that he could undertake nearly all the offices of state by himself. It was indeed, a fine sight to see this fellow, untrained in the law, sitting in the court and giving judgement. Wolsey with his arrogance and ambition aroused against himself the hatred of the whole country. The government of Wolsey had, at first an appearance of justice for the common people, but this impression quickly disappeared, since it was only a shadow.

KEY PROFILE

Cardinal Wolsey

Thomas Wolsey (1471–1530) gained advancement through Church appointments. In 1515 he was made Archbishop of York and Lord Chancellor of England. In 1515, Wolsey was made a cardinal. His prestige was further enhanced when he was appointed *legatus a latere*. This role gave Wolsey the authority to act on the Pope's behalf.

KEY TERM

Chancellor: this was the senior politician responsible for law and order in England. The Chancellor was appointed by the monarch and sat on the woolsack in the House of Lords

legatus a latere: this was a responsibility granted by the Pope which enabled those nominated to act on behalf of the Pope (literally 'from the side'). This was seen to be particularly useful when communications were slow and difficult

STUDY TIP

Both these sources were written by contemporaries who met Cardinal Wolsey. However the tone used is quite different; Vergil is much more openly critical, although Giustiniani also identifies Wolsey's arrogance. Both were written for foreign powers, although Vergil's was not published until later - perhaps due to its overtly critical nature.



PRACTICE QUESTION

Evaluating primary sources

With reference to Sources 2 and 3 and your understanding of the historical context, which of these two sources is more valuable in explaining Cardinal Wolsey's influence in government?

ACTIVITY

Research task

Read chapter II part I of *Wolf Hall* by Hilary Mantel. This is the first novel in her trilogy based on the life of Thomas Cromwell, chief minister to Henry VIII. Mantel demonstrates how Wolsey used his position in the Church and his role as first minister to control Henry VIII.

KEY TERM

excommunicate: to cast out of the Church and the salvation it offered; also to condemn to hell for all eternity after death

archdiocese: England was divided into two provinces: Canterbury and York. Each was presided over by an archbishop. The area over which they had responsibility was an archdiocese

liturgy: the form of services held in the Church

Church teachings on monarchical authority

Church law was known as canon law. It covered the beliefs of the Church, its teachings and its practices, and the Pope acted as the final arbiter in cases based on canon law. Whilst the Church taught obedience to the monarch in temporal matters, the Pope had the authority to **excommunicate** the king, should he be a heretic or tyrant. The interpretation of canon law within England depended on the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. Beneath the **archdioceses** came the dioceses, headed by bishops and beneath them, the parishes, each with its own priest but owing its loyalty to a bishop and to Rome.

The Church had authority, not only over its clergy, but over the whole population regardless of their position in society. Everyone was a parishioner in one of the 9000 parishes into which England was divided. As Church law required them to do, people would attend services every Sunday, where they celebrated the Liturgy. They could also be tried and sentenced in the Church courts. **Liturgy** is the collective term for the practices of the Church; how the beliefs are put into practice in services held for the laity.

Henry VIII was dependent on the Church as a means of social control. Although his government had wide and deep roots in the localities, the king was personally unknown outside the small circle of the nobility. In contrast, the Church was the physical centre of each parish and each parishioner would know the priest. Although many parishioners were illiterate, the law of the land could be reinforced through the Church. Within the Church building, wall paintings were a very visible threat of what might happen to those who sinned and the Ten Commandments provided a clear statement of what the godly should and should not do. Social tensions were eased as the importance of giving to the poor was constantly stressed; many of the poor in a parish were able to be supported in times of hardship by gifts of food and clothing from the wealthier members of a community.

CROSS-REFERENCE

The **Church Courts** are described in detail on page 5.

KEY TERM

Creed: statement of the beliefs of the Church concerning the nature of Jesus Christ

A CLOSER LOOK

Justification by faith

Catholics believed in **salvation:** being saved by Christ through 'good works' as well as faith. Those who held new religious views: the reformists, believed that faith in Christ was sufficient. This is also known as *sola fide*. This means that a person will be able to go to heaven when they die simply through their faith

in the saving grace of Christ when he died on the Cross. Catholics believed that by living a good life, doing good works, helping the poor and needy and seeking forgiveness for sins, could a person go to heaven. Catholics believed in purgatory; religious reformers believed that a soul would go directly to heaven.

Wealth of the Church

The Church in England was also responsible for collecting Church taxes. A significant number of clergy held more than one parish, allowing them to accumulate income from several lands and some of the money went from English parishes to Rome. It has been estimated that in the 1520s Rome received approximately £4500 per year in taxation and religious fees from England, whereas Henry VIII was amassing £12,500 per year from Church taxes.

Ordinary people also paid taxes to the Church. From the eleventh century every house in England paid an annual tax of one penny to Rome known as Peter's Pence after the first Bishop of Rome, Saint Peter. The most significant tax paid was the annual **tithe**. Everyone, regardless of their wealth or income, was required to pay a tenth of what they had produced or earned in that year to the Church. This could include crops, wool or even hens' eggs. The produce, which was stored in the tithe barn, was intended to support the priest and help the poor in the parish, but was often sold.

Communities were served not just by the parish church but by monastic orders; most parishes were less than four miles from a monastery or a priory. Monasteries, individually and even more as a group, were extremely wealthy and had great economic, as well as political, power. Whilst individual monks had to swear a vow of poverty, some of the institutions were very rich. Members of the nobility and gentry would give gifts of land and silver or gold. Property of one kind or another was also given when a man or woman was accepted into a religious institution. The poor might become lay brothers, working in the monastery. The monasteries had extensive possessions by the sixteenth century.

Church courts

The Church courts could fine an individual for non-attendance at Church and for breaking the Ten Commandments. Infringements of society's moral code, including cases of slander and adultery were brought before the Church courts. Those found guilty in a Church court could be fined or imprisoned but they could not be executed except for the charge of **heresy**. Heresy was an act against the beliefs and teaching of the Church. Minor cases might incur fines but what every Christian feared was excommunication. This was very serious. An individual could not attend a church service, obtain forgiveness for their sins or participate in the Mass. Those who refused to renounce their beliefs could be burned in a public ceremony.

Church courts were also used for proving wills. Wills became more frequent by the sixteenth century as people had more possessions to leave. It was common for people to leave significant amounts to the Church. Wills were often dictated to a priest shortly before a person died.

SOURCE 4

From the will of Thomas Foldyngton, 22 June 1530:

I, Thomas Foldyngton of Barholm in Lincolnshire, will my body to be buried in the chapel of Our Blessed Lady within the parish church of St Martin in Barholm.

I leave my best goods to my priest to pray for my soul, to set my name in the bede roll.

KEY TERM

tithe: a tenth of a person's income (what they produced or earned) paid to the Church annually

KEY TERM

heresy: the holding of beliefs which contradicted the established doctrine of the Church in Rome

ACTIVITY

Evaluating primary sources

Discuss with a partner what an historian can learn from studying Source 4.

To the Church at Barholm to provide a blue cloth to lay over the sacrament upon Corpus Christi day.

To the orders of Friars at Stamford five shillings for each of the orders to sing for my soul.

Also I leave money so that my daughter may light candles before the image of Our Lady and repair the church bell, then give the bellringers a pennyworth of bread and a gallon of ale.

To the High Altar, for tithes which I have failed to pay – a sack of barley.

CROSS-REFERENCE

For more detail on the **Mass and sacraments**, see Chapter 2, page 14.

KEY TERM

Chantry: an endowment for the singing of Masses for the soul of the founder or others designated by him

CROSS-REFERENCE

Chantries and lay religious guilds are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, page 13.

Parish churches and monasteries

Parish churches

The parish church would have been the most magnificent building that the majority of people would ever enter. Most were built of stone, unlike houses, which tended to be basic wooden structures. The church was strictly divided by a screen into the areas where ordinary people, the laity, could go and the area reserved for the choir and the clergy. The high altar, which would be richly decorated with hangings and lit with candles, would be the main focus of the church. In many churches there would be a highly decorated screen behind the high altar known as the reredos. The high altar was used for masses held on Sundays and holy days and the reserved sacrament was held there so that there was the continuous presence of the body of Christ. During the week side altars would be used for masses, often in **chantry** chapels. Masses were said for souls of the dead. Some chantry chapels were for the sole benefit of a particular person or family. In other cases individuals would join a chantry guild so that a mass would be said for their soul at key times, often on the anniversary of their deaths. This was known as 'year's mind'.

The Church was generally at the physical centre of the parish. Unlike modern churches there were no pews for the congregation to sit down. Those who were old or sick would 'go to the wall' where there were benches on which to sit. The open space of the parish church meant that it could be used for activities other than religious services. Churches could accommodate both people and animals in times of severe weather. More commonly the main body of the church was used to hold markets and social activities. Important village meetings could also be held there.

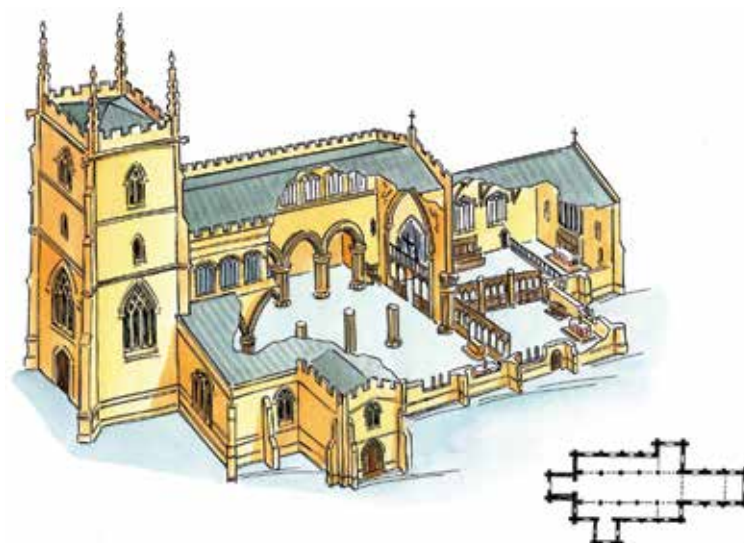


Fig. 4 A parish church in the sixteenth century

For wealthy people, the church was not only a place to worship; it provided an opportunity for people to impress other members of the community with their wealth and piety. Parish churches were always willing to receive gifts of gold and silver, vestments, altar cloths, service books and processional banners. All would be given in the name of the donor and this would be recorded as an indication of their generosity. A very large gift could even have the giver's name recorded in stone. In some cases communities would join together to donate a gift.

ACTIVITY

Research task

Visit a parish church close to where you live, which dates back to before the sixteenth century. Identify how much remains from before the Reformation and how much has changed since. Often details such as these are given in the guidebook.

The role of monasteries in the community

Monastery is a term commonly used today to describe religious houses. In the sixteenth century people would have been much more familiar with the use of 'abbey' or 'priory' or 'nunnery'. When Henry VIII became king in 1509 there were more than 850 such institutions in England. Large, rural, monastic houses were known as abbeys, and settlements which were made by the larger abbeys, often in towns, were most commonly known as priories. In many ways the location of the institutions was determined by the type of role they undertook. The rural abbeys were places of prayer and learning, often with large land-holdings, whereas monks who lived in the towns in priories worked within the community; in addition to their prayers they would help the poor and the sick. Monasteries were at the forefront of the fight against disease because of the monks' medical knowledge (much of which was acquired from Greek texts) and they were able to provide some elementary health care. Monks were valued also for their contribution to learning and provided education to the sons of the nobility and gentry.

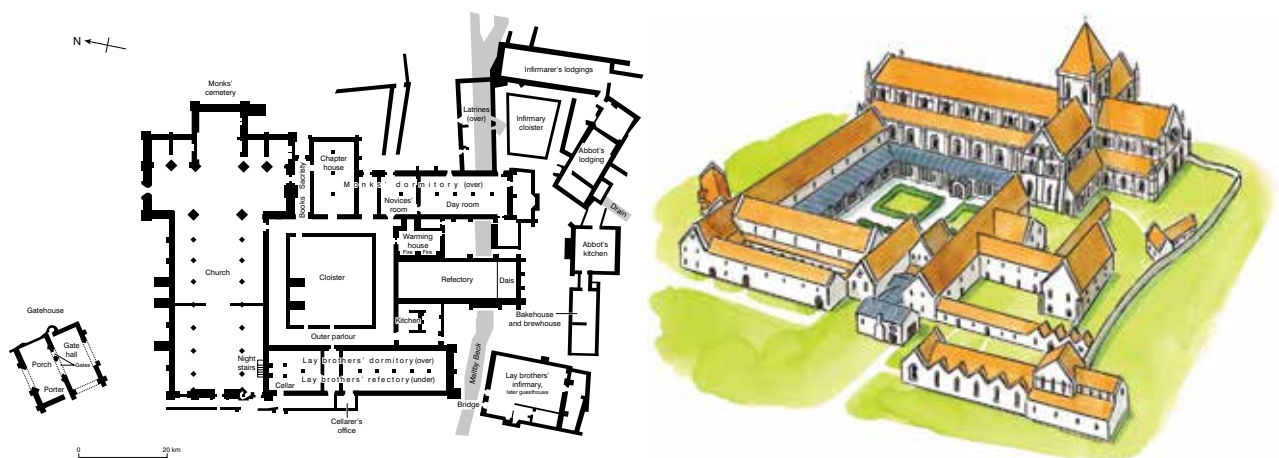


Fig. 5 Two typical Cistercian monasteries in the early sixteenth century: Roche Abbey (plan) and Byland Abbey (drawing)

ACTIVITY

Research task

Use the Internet to research how the work of religious orders affected the area in which you live. The English Heritage website is a very good starting point and uses a range of primary sources.

The importance of the monastic lands to the individual communities and the wider economy of England cannot be overstated. Monasteries had large land-holdings throughout the country, much of which had been given to the monastic orders when sons of the nobility had become monks. Land was also given to the monasteries to provide funding for monks to say prayers for the dead. Arable land and farms produced food not just for the monasteries, but for the wider market and provided employment for labourers. Not only were the monasteries major producers of wool, they were also renowned for the selective breeding of sheep to improve productivity. The abbeys were also producers of iron and by the sixteenth century were experimenting with different methods of production to increase output and improve quality.

A CLOSER LOOK

Roche Abbey, Yorkshire

Roche was part of the Catholic religious order of the Cistercians who had originally sought to live simply by the fruits of their own labour. The abbey had acquired a variety of possessions, such as arable and pastoral land, woodland, mills and fisheries, to sustain a self-sufficient community and give help in the neighbourhood. Roche was a medium-sized house. The abbey's holdings stretched across the five counties of Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Lincolnshire and Lancashire. Most of Roche's possessions were concentrated within a 15 mile radius of the abbey, and a number of these lay within five miles of the house.



Fig. 6 The lands of Roche Abbey in the early sixteenth century

**PRACTICE QUESTION****Evaluating primary sources**

Look back at Sources 1, 2 and 3. With reference to these sources and your understanding of the historical context, assess the value of these three sources to an historian studying the relationship between the Church and State in the years before 1529.

STUDY TIP

When examining the sources consider by whom they were written and for what purpose. Consider the style and tone of the source. What is the significance of the writing of a poem?

**PRACTICE QUESTION**

'The Church's main role in the early sixteenth century was religious and social.' Explain why you agree or disagree with this view.

STUDY TIP

You will need to provide a balanced answer, considering the Church's religious and social role but balancing this against other roles - political and financial. You should reach a judgement on what its 'main role' was.

Summary

- In sixteenth-century England, the Church played a significant role in matters of state. The Church's taxation structures and legal systems, including the Church courts, were as necessary for the king as for Rome.
- The king was dependent on senior religious figures, such as Cardinal Wolsey, to provide advice on government.
- The Church provided key economic and social functions in local communities and the country as a whole.
- The Church provided the religious basis of the secular laws of the country, which had to be obeyed by all the king's subjects.

ACTIVITY**Summary**

Create a diagram to illustrate the influence of the Church in England in c1529.

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Sally Waller is a respected author, enthusiastic History teacher, and she has many years of examining experience. She is currently teaching History at Cheltenham Ladies' College.

What's on the cover?

Hans Holbein the Younger painted the portrait of Henry VIII. Henry was a key figure during this period of major change in 16th century England



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