

'The Tudor Monarchs Did Not Like Governing Through Parliament'

Szerző dezs

Angol érettségi tétel

'The Tudor Monarchs Did Not Like Governing Through Parliament' - Religious Issues

Firstly I would like to describe the nature of the British Reformation , then I will talk about how the Tudor rulers managed to solve this question , then I will also describe the organization of the Church of England and finally I will try explain what the role of Parliament was in dealing with religious problems. These facts will give us the answer whether the assertion in the title can be regarded true or not.

Comparing to Germany , where the Reformation was indicated by common people whose reasons where moral and not economic , the British Reformation was completely different. Henry VIII did not want to change the Catholic religion itself . He was even rewarded with the title Fidei Defensor (Defender of the Faith) by the Pope for criticising Luther's teaching.
(1) He needed new sources of money and since monasteries were not as important for the society as they were before , it seemed to be quite obvious to dissolve them and confiscate their lands. All he needed was an excuse and his time had come when the Pope forbade his divorce.(2) He governed England through his close advisers but he used Parliament to make the break legal , it passed the Act of Supremacy in 1534.(3)

After his death a struggle began between Catholics and Protestants. The influence of the European Reformation caused the English , Scottish and Welsh churches to move gradually away from some of Rome's doctrines (Ireland remained Catholic). This movement accelerated under Edward VI , when practices and beliefs became more protestant. During the reign of Mary , who married King Philip of Spain and began to burn protestants , the hatred of Catholics became an important political force.(4)

It was Queen Elizabeth who tried to create the kind of Protestantism which is the best for the royal court. It resembled more to the Catholic religion than to the other Protestant religions and it was much easier to control. This policy helped her to avoid such dangerous problems as the

Peasant Revolt of Münzer in Germany , because the people could see that some of their claims had been fulfilled. We also have to know that the English Catholics ,who were encouraged by the Pope to revolt against the Queen at the appropriate moment , especially in case of a foreign invasion , meant a quite serious factor of danger too.(5)

The Reformation in England had political and economic reasons but it became an important cohesive power , a characteristic feature of the nation.

According to religious issues (and other issues of course) the most 'skillful' monarch of the Tudor period was Elizabeth. She was much more judicious than her father and she used religion as a tool to establish a strong monarchy. I would compare her to Henry IV , the king of France , who even changed his religion to assure his position and to help consolidation. Unlike her Catholic half sister , Mary , who had tried to bring back the Catholic faith , she was able to satisfy the people with her religious policy. The execution of Mary , the Queen of Scots , who was wished to be Queen of England by the Catholic rulers of France and Spain , was also a popular decision.(6)

She established the Protestant status of the Church of England by the terms of her Church Settlement. The Church's doctrine was stated in the Thirty-Nine Articles of Faith (1562) and its rituals were largely contained in the Book of Common Prayer (1549-1662). The two most important changes were the English replacing the Latin language in church documents and services and the fact that the priests of the Church of England were allowed to marry. This was the final confirmation of the Protestant Church.(7)

Now let me tell you some words about the organization of the Church of England. The church is divided into the two provinces of Canterbury and York , each under the control of an archbishop. The two provinces are subdivided into 43 dioceses , each under the control of a bishop. The dioceses are divided into some 13000 parishes and each is centred on a parish church. Most of them have a priest (called either a vicar or a rector) in charge , and a large parish may have additional assistant priests (curates).(8)

The Church has a special relationship with the state. The monarch is the head of the church and he or she appoints the archbishops , bishops and deans on the advice of the Prime Minister , because Parliament has a voice in its organization and rituals. The two archbishops of Canterbury and York , together with twenty-four other senior bishops , sit in the House of Lords and take

part in proceedings. But we can not say that it would be a state church because it receives no financial aid as it occurs in some European countries.(9)
 Comparing to the Scottish Kirk , the Church of England is more bureaucratic while the Church of Scotland , which followed the teachings of Calvin , claims that it has a democratic structure.(10)

During the Tudor period Parliament was much weaker than under the Stuarts. It was a period of royal dominance , the Tudor monarchs controlled Parliament , although its using to strengthen their policy actually increased Parliament's authority. This occurred first when Henry VIII invited it to make new laws for the Reformation and the process continued when Edward VI used Parliament to forbid the Catholic mass and to order the new prayer book to be used in all churches.(11) We also have to mention that under the Catholic Queen Mary Parliament cancelled all the new Reformation laws and it agreed to her marriage to Philip of Spain , although it did not accept his succession.(12)

Elizabeth used Parliament for the Reformation Settlement , but otherwise she always tried to avoid using it , just like her grandfather , Henry VII (she only let it meet thirteen times in forty-four years).(13)

"Only two things persuaded Tudor Monarchs not to get rid of Parliament altogether : they needed money and they needed the support of the merchants and the landowners."(14) The power moved to the House of Commons from the House of Lords during the century and it was inevitable , because the Commons represented richer and more influential classes than the Lords. Their size also nearly doubled because of the inclusion of the Welsh boroughs and counties and the inclusion of more English boroughs.(15) Parliament did not really represent the people , its three main jobs were :
 agree to the taxes needed , make the laws which the Crown suggested , and advise to the Crown when asked to do so.
 The 'Speaker' was appointed by the Crown to make sure that Parliament discussed what the monarch wanted.(16)

All the Tudor monarchs tried to get money omitting Parliament , that was the main reason for Henry VIII's Reformation and for Elizabeth's selling monopolies (a completely wrong policy) and encouraging the 'sea dogs' , who were attacking Spanish ships.(17) But the risk of these methods was too high and the Tudor monarchs had to govern through Parliament ,

even if they certainly did not like it.

According to religious issues , the changes in religion could not have been carried out without the confirmation of Parliament.

It had played a very important role in English Reformation and later on , under the Stuarts , it became the most important Anglican power in the monarchy.

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