



# **Key topic 1: Queen, government and religion, 1558–69**

## **1 The situation on Elizabeth's accession**

- Elizabethan England in 1558: society and government.
- The Virgin Queen: the problem of her legitimacy, gender, marriage. Her character and strengths.
- Challenges at home and from abroad: the French threat, financial weaknesses.

## **2 The 'settlement' of religion**

- Religious divisions in England in 1558.
- Elizabeth's religious settlement (1559): its features and impact.
- The Church of England: its role in society.

## **3 Challenge to the religious settlement**

- The nature and extent of the Puritan challenge.
- The nature and extent of the Catholic challenge, including the role of the nobility, Papacy and foreign powers.

## **4 The problem of Mary, Queen of Scots**

- Mary, Queen of Scots: her claim to the English throne, her arrival in England in 1568.
- Relations between Elizabeth and Mary, 1568–69.

# How did Elizabeth's background and character create problems?

3

Elizabeth became queen when her sister, Mary I, died. She was the third child of Henry VIII to become the ruler of England. She had a number of problems.

**Legitimacy:** In order to inherit the throne, a monarch had to be **legitimately** born. This meant being born whilst their parents were married. This was called in to doubt by some people, especially Catholics.

Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII had asked the Pope for a divorce from his first wife, Catherine of Aragon so he could marry Anne Boleyn. The Pope refused. Henry decided to separate the English Church from the Catholic Church and make himself the head of the Church of England, and gave himself a divorce

Henry then married Anne Boleyn and they had a daughter. Some Catholics did not believe Henry had legally married Anne and so did not recognise her as the legitimate daughter of Henry VIII.

**Elizabeth was a woman:** A queen who ruled in her own right was something very new and seemed unnatural in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Monarchs were expected to lead armies in to battle, a woman could not do this. Women were not considered mentally, physically or emotionally capable of government. It was believed that a woman should be underneath her husband, the pressure was on to marry.

Elizabeth's sister, Mary, was not seen as a successful monarch and many people in England felt it was time for a male ruler. Mary had left the country financially weak, she had lost a war with France and caused religious tensions.

There had been a Queen of England in the Medieval period. Queen Matilda had ruled at a time of great unrest and civil war in England and some people felt this was evidence that women should not rule.

**Elizabeth was not married:** Elizabeth was not married when she came to the throne. She never married and was known as the Virgin Queen. Elizabeth was reluctant to marry as she would then have had to obey her husband. She turned down offers from some of the most eligible princes of Europe, including Philip II of Spain and King Eric of Sweden.

Many people in England feared that if Elizabeth did not marry she would not produce a child to be her heir. This would leave England weak and in danger of a civil war. Also, people worried that if the Queen married the wrong person England would be weakened.

**There were some arguments in favour of Elizabeth getting married.** She would be able to produce an heir who could take over when she died. Until Elizabeth had an heir she would not be safe – people would try and kill her and take the throne. A husband could also be a military leader in battle – something Elizabeth could not do.

**There were arguments against her getting married.** Elizabeth would be expected to obey her husband – this would weaken her power as Queen. She would also have to marry someone of equal status. This would be a foreign prince who may be more interested in helping his own country and so would neglect or damage England.

**Elizabeth's personality:** Elizabeth could make her views strongly felt and had a temper that people feared. She also often took a long time to make up her mind, especially over serious matters, and her Privy Council and advisors could find her extremely frustrating.

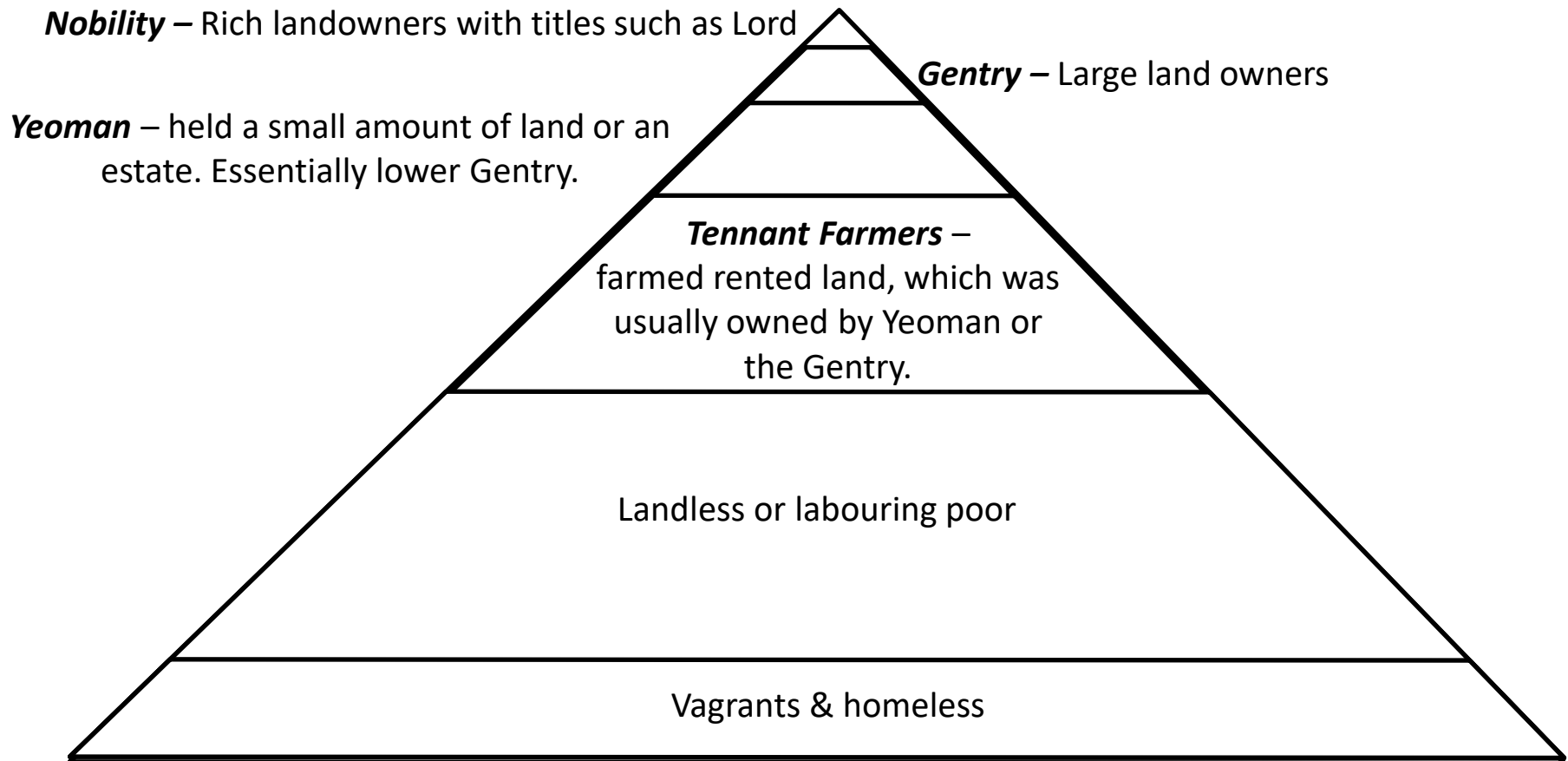
However, Elizabeth was highly intelligent and well educated, with an eye for detail and an excellent grasp of politics. She spoke Latin, Greek, French and Italian. She also had experience of being a prisoner in the Tower of London, where she was held in 1554 on suspicion of treason against her sister, Mary I. She understood the dangerous world of court politics where ambitious schemers plotted to gain power and influence.

Elizabeth was confident and charismatic, able to make great speeches and win over her subjects.

# What was society like in the countryside in 1588?

5

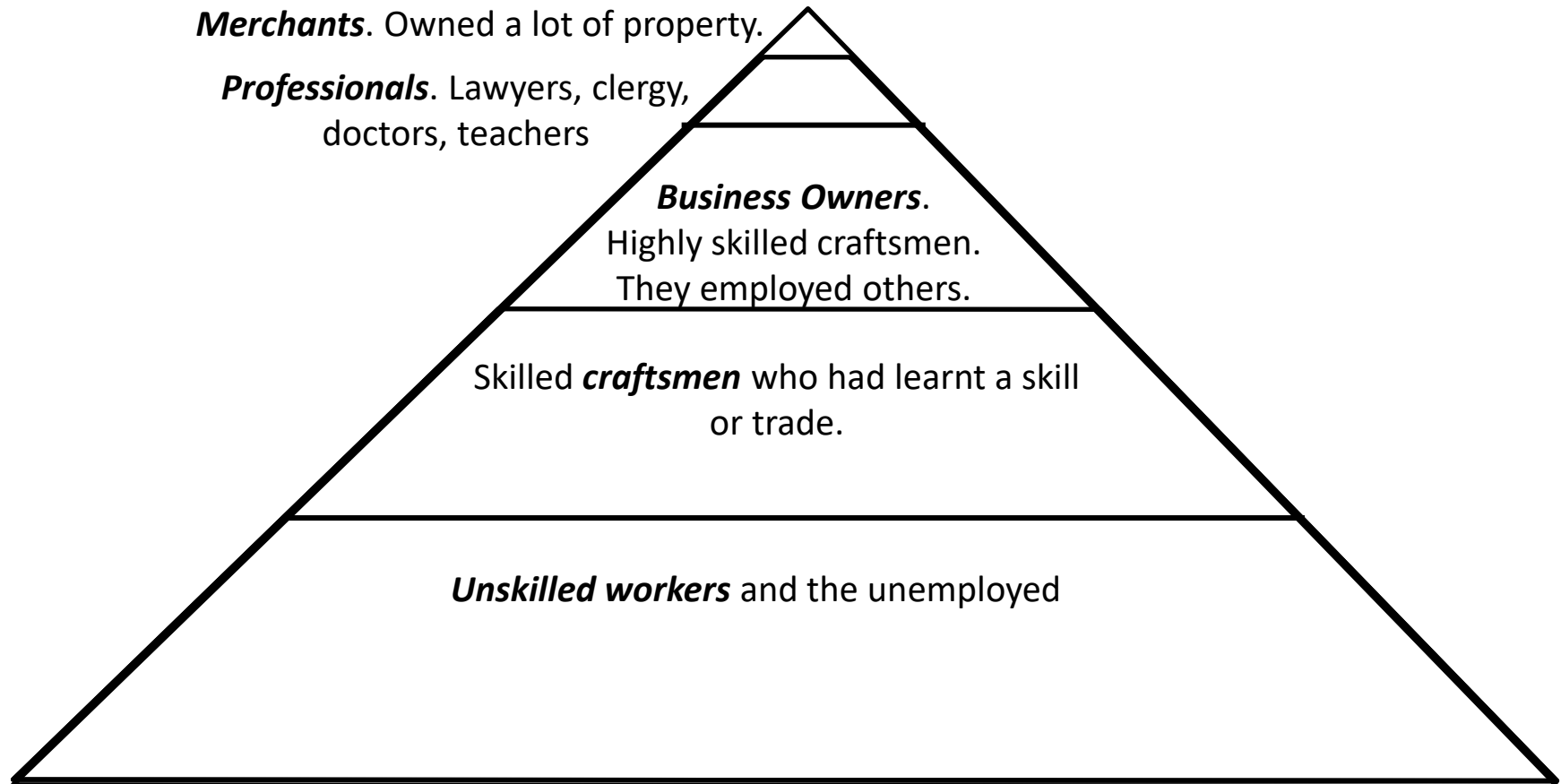
Elizabethan England could be a violent and dangerous place. As there was no police force or permanent army, keeping order depended on a social structure in which everyone knew their place and had a role. Elizabethans were not interested in equality. In fact, all systems of law and order, government and society were based on inequality. Where you fit in the social structure depended on how much land you had and whether you rented or owned it. About 90% of the population lived in the countryside.



# What was society like in the towns in 1588?

For the 10% of people who lived in towns, the social hierarchy was slightly different and based on wealth and occupation.

Wherever you were in Elizabethan Society, you paid respect to the people above you and had a duty of care for the people below you. Households were run along the same lines. The father was the head of the household and his wife, children and servants were expected to be obedient to him.



# How did Elizabeth's government work?

7

What	Key features	Role
Court	A body of people who lived in, or near, the same palace or house as the monarch. It was made up of members of the nobility and they were the monarch's key servants, advisors and friends.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To entertain and advise the monarch.</li> <li>A public display of wealth and power.</li> <li>Courtiers had influence with the monarch rather than actual power.</li> </ul>
Privy Council	Leading courtiers and advisors as well nobles and very senior government officials. There were about 19 members who were chosen by the monarch. They met three times a week.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To debate current issues and advise the monarch on government policy.</li> <li>Made sure the monarch's decisions were put in to place.</li> <li>Oversaw law, order, local government and national security.</li> <li>Monitored Justices of the Peace and governmental proceedings.</li> </ul>
Parliament	Parliament was made up of the House of Lords (which included bishops) and the House of Commons. Parliament could only be called by the monarch. Elections were held before each new parliament, but very few people could vote. MPs had the right to free speech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To grant extra-ordinary taxation (occasional, extra taxation for unexpected expenses, especially war)</li> <li>Passed laws (Acts of Parliament)</li> <li>Offered advice to the monarch.</li> </ul>
Monarch	The head of state who ruled England. This was known as the Divine Right.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Declare war and make peace</li> <li>Call and dismiss Parliament</li> <li>Agree or reject any laws parliament made</li> <li>Rule in some legal cases (to clarify laws or if people asked for help)</li> <li>Grant titles, land, money and jobs.</li> </ul>
Monarch and Parliament	Although the monarch had regular income, there were often times when more was needed. Raising extraordinary taxation could only be done with Parliament's permission. Therefore it was not possible to rule without parliament.	

# What financial problems did Elizabeth face?

## **Financial Weakness**

Monarchs could raise money from:

- Rents and incomes from their own lands
- Taxes and trade
- Profits of justice (fines, confiscated property)
- Loans (sometimes “loans” were forced, which meant that they were compulsory and often never repaid)

Elizabeth's government did not have a lot of money when she became Queen. Her father and sister, had fought expensive wars. Her annual income was £286,000. However she was £300,000 in debt.

Defending England was expensive.

To make more money for war in the 1540s, the government had reduced the amount of silver in each coin, known as debasement. This caused inflation and prices rose rapidly.

The population had risen from 3 to 4 million, which put pressure on resources and caused living standards to drop. A series of bad harvests made this even worse.

Taxes were unpopular and she had to ask Parliament for permission to raise them. Parliament would only allow taxes if Elizabeth would agree to their demands. This weakened Elizabeth so she tried to avoid asking Parliament for help.



# What problems did she face from France?

9

France was wealthier and had a larger population than England. It was right next door to England and was a traditional enemy. France was seen as a threat to Elizabeth's power.

**France and Scotland:** Scotland was another of England's old enemies. Scotland was also an ally of France. Their friendship was known as the "Auld Alliance". ***Mary Queen of Scots*** was Elizabeth's cousin and had a claim to the throne of England. She declared herself the true Catholic monarch of England.

Mary Queen of Scots was also married to Francis, the heir to the French throne. In 1559, Francis became King of France and Mary became his Queen.

In 1588, Mary's mother, ***Mary of Guise***, was ruling Scotland on her daughters behalf. She allowed French soldiers to be based in Scotland. This was a clear threat.

**France and Calais:** The port of Calais had been owned by England until Mary I lost it in a war. Elizabeth wanted Calais back and pledged to recapture it. This angered the French.

**Spain, France and Religion:** France and Spain were Catholic countries. Elizabeth was not. She was afraid that Spain and France would unite and try and capture England and put a Catholic monarch in charge.

# What was the English Reformation?

Religion was central to life in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Until 1517, Catholicism dominated western Europe. Baptism, marriage and death were all marked with special ceremonies.

The **Reformation** (a challenge to the teachings of the Catholic Church) began in Europe as many people began to feel that the Catholic Church had become greedy, corrupt and no longer represented a truly Christian life. This led to some people protesting by leaving the Catholic Church (**Protestants**) and establishing their own Churches, without a Pope.

The English Reformation began in 1532, when Henry VIII created the **Church of England** in order to divorce his wife, Katherine of Aragon, because the Pope would not give him permission. Henry was never a true Protestant, but this gave hope to people in England who wanted to move away from the Catholic Church.

By 1558, the Reformation was causing major problems and issues in Europe. Elizabeth worried that would happen in England also:

1. Elizabeth I was a protestant, however, it is possible that most of her population was Catholic.
2. Catholics in England who had never accepted Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon thought that Elizabeth was illegitimate, and therefore should not be queen. To make matters worse, there was another, Catholic person who could be queen: Elizabeth's cousin, Mary Queen of Scots.
3. Changing religion would require an Act of Parliament and, although the House of Commons were likely to agree to whatever Elizabeth wanted, there were lots of Catholic Bishops in the House of Lords. Although many priests would simply change their religion to keep their jobs, others were committed Catholics who would refuse to work in a Protestant Church. Even risking their lives.

# What were the different religious beliefs in 1558?

## Catholicism

### Catholics believed

- The Pope is the head of the Church.
- The Mass should be in Latin, as should the Bible.
- It is not necessary for the people to interpret the Bible themselves.
- The Church can forgive sins to help you get to Heaven.
- During Mass a miracle occurs where the bread and wine are turned in to the body and blood of Christ.
- Priests are special and should wear special clothing, vestments.
- Churches should be highly decorated in order to glorify and celebrate God.
- Priests are forbidden to marry.

Strong Catholic areas:  
North and North West

## Protestantism

### Protestants believed

- There should not be a Pope.
- The Bible and church services should be in the local language.
- People have their own, direct relationship with God through prayer and studying the Bible.
- Sins can only be forgiven by God.
- The bread and wine simply represent body and blood of Christ.
- Churches should be plain and simple so as not to distract from worship.
- Priests are permitted to marry if they wish.

Strong Protestant areas:  
East Anglia and London

## Puritanism

Extreme Protestants are often referred to as Puritans

### Puritans believed

- They should “purify” the Christian religion by getting rid of anything that wasn’t the Bible.
- They should live a simple life devoted to God. No crucifixes, organ music, vestments or Holy Days.
- There should be a new religious leader who was neither the Pope nor the Queen.

# Why did Elizabeth want a religious settlement 1559?

12

When she came to the throne, Elizabeth knew she would have major problems if she did not find a solution to the problem of religion. She had large numbers of Catholics and Protestants who would not agree on religion/ She needed a “settlement” of the religious issue.

**She needed her people to follow her religion:** Elizabeth needed her subjects to follow the same religion as her. It was normal for the people to follow the monarch's religion. If they did not follow her religion she would appear weak.

**She needed to avoid rebellion:**

Elizabeth wanted to find a compromise. She needed a form of Protestantism that Catholics could accept. If she did not find a way of letting the Catholics worship in their own way they would rebel and cause problems in England.

# What was the Religious Settlement 1559?

The Religious Settlement had three parts.

The **Act of Supremacy** made Elizabeth supreme governor of all the Church of England. All clergy and royal officials had to swear an oath of loyalty to her. An Ecclesiastical High Commission was set up to help her enforce this.

The **Act of Uniformity** established the appearance of churches and the form of service they had. A

Book of Common Prayer was to be used in all churches. The wording made the issue of the Eucharist deliberately vague so that Protestants and Catholics assumed they were following their beliefs.

It also made it clear that priests had to wear special clothing. Said that everyone had to attend Church on Sundays and Holy Days (such as Good Friday) or else be fined one shilling for every absence. Anyone who failed to attend would be reported.

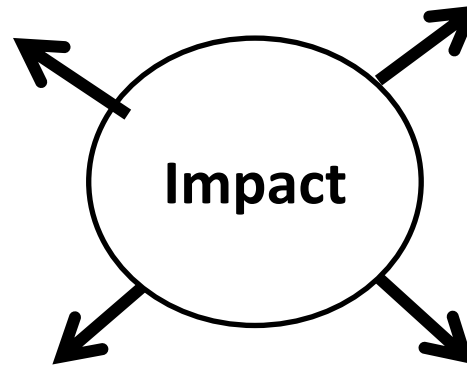
The **Royal Injunctions** were a set of instructions issued from the queen to the clergy to reinforce the Acts. For example

- Every parish was to have a copy of the Bible in English
- No one was allowed to preach without a licence from the Government
- The clergy were to wear special vestments
- Pilgrimages\_ are journeys to holy places, for example, where saints were buried or miracles had happened were important to Catholics. “Fake” Pilgrimages were made illegal.

# What was the impact of the religious settlement 1559?

The clergy all had to take the Oath of Supremacy if they were to keep their posts. 8000 priests and lower clergy did so. However, only one bishop agreed to take the oath. The other 27 refused. There were many bishops in the House of Lords.

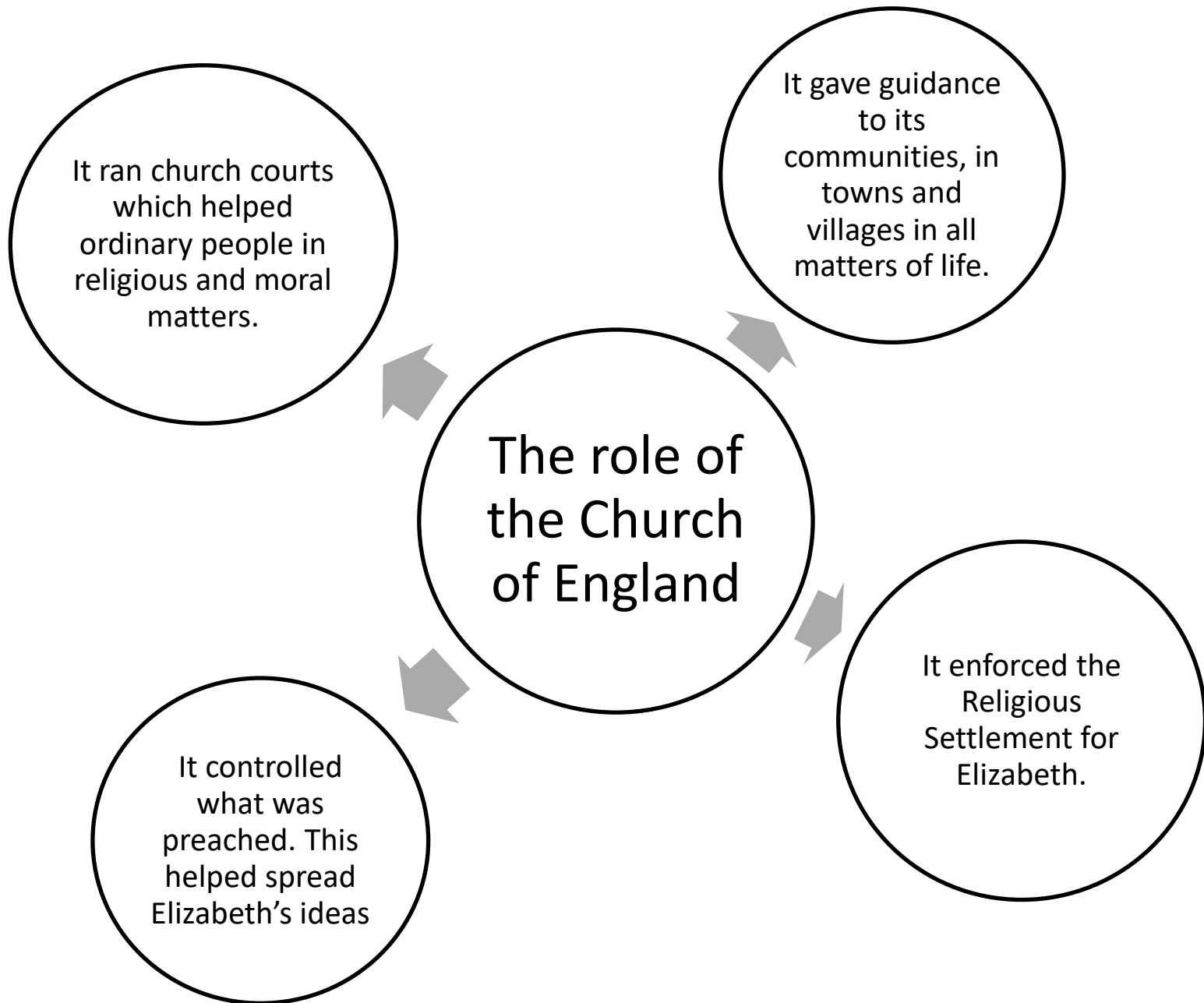
The people mostly accepted Elizabeth's reforms and attended the Church of England services, even though many of them held on to their Catholic beliefs. Some places were slower to adopt the new practices. However, Elizabeth did not want the settlement enforced too strongly.



The church courts were controlled by the monarch. Although they mainly focussed on religious matters, they also could act in minor disputes and moral issues, such as ensuring couples getting married were both a suitable age and marrying out of free will.

Enforcing the Settlement was partly the responsibility of the Church itself. Visitations, or inspections, of the churches and clergy by bishops. The first visitations in 1559 resulted in 400 clergy being dismissed. After 1559, visitations happened every 3-4 years.





# How serious was the Catholic Challenge in England?

- The Pope was trying to tackle the spread of Protestantism by being very harsh on Protestants. This was known as the **Counter Reformation**. However, the Pope did not offer much support to Catholics in England. In 1566 the Pope said that they should not attend Protestant Services, but this was all the guidance it gave.
- The Catholic **nobility** caused more of a problem than the ordinary people. Around one third of nobles were Catholics who refused to attend Church. These were mainly in the north and west
- In November 1569, the earls of Northumberland and Westmorland led a rebellion in the north of England, known as the **Revolt of the Northern Earls**. Many Catholics supported them and even captured Durham Cathedral and celebrated a full Catholic Mass. By November 22<sup>nd</sup>, they controlled land as far south as Leeds. The Earls appealed to other Catholic nobility, but most remained loyal to Elizabeth. On 24<sup>th</sup> November 1569 they were forced to retreat and the rebellion was successfully put down by royal troops under the command of the Earl of Sussex. Hundreds of rebels were executed and Elizabeth's relationship with her Catholic subjects more difficult.
- The Pope **Excommunicated** Elizabeth in 1570. This meant Catholics had a duty to try and overthrow her. He said no one was to obey Elizabeth on pain of excommunication.

# How serious was the Puritan Challenge in England?

- The Puritan bishops caused problems refusing to obey parts of the Religious settlement, eg, by refusing to have crucifixes and some religious clothing. Some priests and bishops were sacked from their jobs and this caused bitterness.
- They wanted to get rid of Holy Days which would upset the ordinary people.
- They caused more clashes with Catholics.

# How bad was the Catholic Challenge? - France

- When religious war broke out in France in 1562, Elizabeth was concerned about the potential for ideas of conflict to spread to England.
- Elizabeth had agreed to support the Protestants in 1562 in the hope of regaining Calais. However, it backfired as they made peace with the Catholics later in 1562.
- In 1564, Elizabeth signed the Treaty of Troyes, confirming the Calais belonged to France.
- All that she had really achieved in doing was angering Philip II of Spain by supporting Protestant rebels.

# How bad was the Catholic Challenge? - Spain

- Philip II was so annoyed with Elizabeth that in 1563, he banned the import of English cloth.
- In retaliation, Elizabeth stopped all trading with the Netherlands.
- This ban affected both countries' economies badly and only lasted a year.
- Elizabeth also ended the embargo as she was concerned that Catholic France and Spain may make an alliance against her.

# How bad was the Catholic Challenge? – Mary Queen of Scots

Mary Queen of Scots was Henry VIII's great granddaughter and Elizabeth I second cousin. She became Queen at the age of 6 days. Why was she a problem to Elizabeth:

***She was a Catholic who claimed the English throne:*** She was a Catholic and claimed to be the true ruler of England. She said Elizabeth was not legitimate.

***She was friendly with France:*** Mary was married to the King of France - her French mother, Mary of Guise, ruled for her while she was in France. Mary of Guise allowed French troops to be stationed in Scotland.

***The Scottish Protestants wanted help:*** The Protestant Scottish nobles rebelled against Mary of Guise. Elizabeth felt that she had to support the rebels because Mary was married to Francis II of France. This could be a threat to England. She did this secretly because she was worried about deposing an anointed (chosen by God) monarch. The rebellion ended with the Treaty of Edinburgh in 1560. This said that Mary would give up her claim to the English throne. However, Mary did not accept the Treaty. She returned to Scotland after her husband, the King of France, died.

***She probably killed her second husband:*** Mary married her second Husband, Lord Darnley, in 1565. He was probably killed by the Earl of Bothwell. Mary then married Bothwell.

***Mary was forced to abdicate:*** The Protestant Lords were outraged at Mary's actions and forced her to abdicate. She was imprisoned before she escaped to England. Mary raised an army to get back her throne but was defeated and fled to England. She asked Elizabeth for help. Elizabeth was in a difficult position – if she allowed Mary to get back her throne she was a threat to Elizabeth. If she did not help Mary she was sending a message that nobles could force Monarchs to abdicate. Mary was kept captive in England and Elizabeth did not know what to do with her.

***She became involved in a plot:*** In 1569, Mary agreed to be part of a plot against Elizabeth. Mary would marry the Duke of Norfolk and then claim the throne. Some Catholic nobles supported this and there was a rebellion. Elizabeth found out about the plot. She refused to act against Mary and left her in prison.