Religious and Political Change in Henrician England and its impact on the Pilgrimage of Grace

By: Govind Ramagopal

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Written under the supervision of Professor Alastair Bellany

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If someone had asked me a year ago whether it would have been possible for me to write a one hundred page thesis with my sanity more or less intact, I would have scoffed. Yet, here I am at the other end of this journey with my senses not only sound, but stimulated from what has been a truly enriching and captivating experience. Surely, this project has taken persistence, patience, and openness to new ideas. However, what enabled me to complete this thesis was a deep and abiding passion for the period of history I have researched and written about. I am stating the obvious, but it is worth saying that history is a subject that can only be enjoyed if one has a fundamental curiosity about its many facets, and reading and writing throughout the course of this year has only deepened my love for the subject and made me appreciate the value in understanding it.

I came upon the topic of the Pilgrimage of Grace while I was abroad studying at Oxford University junior year. I was taken by the complexity and volatility of that episode in Henry VIII’s reign and through my initial readings on the subject overseas. Additionally, I wanted to use my budding views on the subject to answer a deeper series of questions about Early Modern England’s political and religious development during the period.

Most importantly though, this entire project would not have been possible without the tremendous support of Professor Alastair Bellany this past year. I can not thank him enough for spending as much time with me as he did offering me advice, critiquing my writing, and helping me wrap my head around the swirling currents of 16th century Henrician England. I would also like to thank Professor Jennifer Jones for being my second reader and taking time out on a Monday afternoon to ask me questions about my research.

I would also like to give a special thanks to my parents for reading the various drafts I asked them to critique along with offering me the idea that as I would like to go to law school one day, trying to incorporate legal issues into the wider narrative of my thesis. My comments here might be taken amiss if I did not also thank my roommates for putting up with me all this time for the number of evening activities like poker that I have missed out on.
Introduction: The Pilgrimage of Grace and how it came about

The nature and causes of rebellion are often discussed, but very rarely fully understood. Uprisings against those in positions of authority have been commonplace throughout human history, with those rebelling against the established authorities seeking changes to the existing social, economic, and political order. This broad portrait very much encapsulates the overall nature of the Pilgrimage of Grace, which is regarded as the most threatening rebellion to the stability of the English realm during the reign of Henry VIII. What distinguishes the Pilgrimage of Grace from other rebellions in Europe is that it was the direct result of the English monarch divorcing himself from the political and spiritual orbit of the Roman Catholic Church. The actions Henry VIII took had never before been executed with such swiftness and brazenness in European history. Conflicts over ecclesiastical jurisdiction and doctrinal issues were nothing new to the complicated relationship between European monarchs and the Papacy, but the scope of the challenge to the Church by Henry VIII was unprecedented. Never before had a monarch declared both spiritual and temporal supremacy over a particular administrative area. This distinctive role played by Henry in his capacity as English monarch would set the stage for the turmoil of the mid-1530s during which his subjects either endorsed or wholly opposed the substantial alterations to the religious and political structures that had governed England for centuries.

The inability of Henry to produce a male heir with his first wife Queen Catherine of Aragon precipitated the dramatic reforms that would result in the Pilgrimage of Grace. As Henry’s abiding preoccupation was the preservation of his Tudor dynasty, producing a male heir to succeed him was of the utmost importance. Recognizing that trying to
produce a male heir was fruitless with Catherine, Henry sought to end to his marriage to her so he could make Anne Boleyn his consort. Matters were complicated for Henry’s government after the Pope refused to annul his marriage. After traditional diplomatic efforts failed, Henry adopted the radical solution of severing ties with the Vatican, partly as a result of the Pope’s intransigence. It seems that the lack of an heir played a significant role in influencing his decision, but the growing humanist influence in his government, and in his own mind, led Henry to renounce the corruption and superstitions of traditional Church life. The accumulation of Henry’s criticisms of “traditional” Roman Catholicism helped pave the way for Henry to finally sever links with the Vatican in 1534.

The unprecedented step Henry VIII took to make himself the new Supreme Head of an independent Church of England was welcomed by some, but hotly contested, and in many cases, completely rejected by others. The questions I seek to answer are why people throughout England, but especially in the North took issue with the new religious policies. Was Henry attacking the fundamental tenets of Northern English religious identity? If those who rebelled against the King were against heresy and alterations to traditional religion, why did they rebel against changes to liturgy that were very modest? The fact that Henry’s opponents were against the changes Henry sought to implement highlights the depth of conservative opinion in England toward any semblance of change to long cherished religious practice. That the rebels opposed what were conservative changes to religious policy reveals the nature of the challenge the Crown had to deal with in the lead up to and during the Pilgrimage of Grace.
The Pilgrimage of Grace was more a very large and highly organized protest than a traditional rebellion. It was organized so those who were angry towards what they saw as Henry’s change of direction theologically could make their grievances known to the Crown in a very public way. It is very important to note that those who participated in the Pilgrimage of Grace did not seek the overthrow of Henry VIII even though they had serious objections to the new policies he was implementing. The Pilgrimage of Grace is also very significant in the wider context of Early Modern English history because it made intelligent use of oaths and pledges and evocative religious imagery that seemed to go against all of the precepts of monarchical power that Henry VIII stood for.

The Pilgrimage of Grace started out in York in mid-October 1536 and it is said that tens of thousands of disaffected religious conservatives gathered to hear the rallying cry against what they perceived to be a creeping heresy rooting itself within the heart of the King’s government\(^1\). After the Pilgrims pledged to uphold traditional Catholicism and remove heretical policies and individuals from the King’s Court, they marched through Northern England seizing notable castles like Pontefract and rallying like-minded people to their cause. The Pilgrimage of Grace was rightly a huge cause for concern for royal officials because pacifying such a large segment of the population vehemently opposed to their policies would be no easy task.

The first chapter covers the intellectual justifications used by Henry VIII to proclaim himself the Supreme Head of the Church, which lay in medieval philosophy. The renunciation of Papal Rule that came in 1534 was the product of centuries of conflict between Popes and King’s over jurisdicational rights and yet the first act of complete

severance between the Vatican and a kingdom came with Henry VIII’s actions. He legitimized his new title in the 1534 Act in Restraint of Appeals, a document that proclaimed his ‘imperial sovereignty’, a concept that would not recognize any Head of the English Church but himself, and that fashioned his kingdom as an Empire and redefined his role as its Emperor. Henry’s view of himself as the religious and temporal ruler of the English greatly upset the Papacy because it infringed on its rights, but it also antagonized his fellow countrymen who were disoriented by the changing political landscape and the bifurcation in identity that was taking place. Foreshadowing what was to come, Thomas Cromwell, the King’s Chief Minister used Parliament to pass tough treason statutes that widened the definition of treason from their medieval connotations of simply attempting or actually inflicting physical harm on the monarch. In an attempt to tamp down on growing opposition to the Royal Supremacy, the Crown redefined the disavowing of the new religious policies as a form of treason.

Throughout his dispute with the Papacy over annulling his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, Henry never adopted the more radical Lutheran or Zwinglian views that were gaining traction on mainland Europe. The divisions being produced on the Continent were leading to the breakdown of the existing political order, and in some cases to open war. Despite his adherence to more conservative theology, Henry did harbor humanist views that ran counter to prevailing Catholic doctrine. Those expressions of reformist intent did help give his supporters a feeling that his self-proclaimed ordination as Head of the Church of England was not merely political and dynastic. Religious life in England would change under the auspices of the new Supreme Head. Even though Henry’s philosophical leanings were relatively conservative, and the overall character of the new
church stayed so, those who were vehemently opposed to the invocation of the Royal Supremacy started to denounce his policies through sermons and underground activities such as pamphleteering and lecturing. While much discontent came from parishioners, a more dangerous group started voicing their opposition to the royally sanctioned Act of Supremacy.

The second chapter covers the opposition to the Royal Supremacy. Various clergymen of powerful and middling rank denounced the policies from their pulpits in all corners of the country. The most powerful of these clergymen to denounce the King was Bishop John Fisher who sat in the powerful diocese of Rochester, Kent, just outside London. The vehement opposition expressed by clergymen like Fisher posed a grave danger to the Crown because without the support of the Church hierarchy, Henry’s claim to be the Supreme Head of the Church of England would be undermined. Given the challenge posed by the clergy, the Crown did its best to keep tabs on what was being said in the pulpits of the country’s churches but this was a difficult task as it was hard to produce the manpower necessary to eavesdrop on so many houses of worship. Henry also faced notable opposition from his longtime friend turned adversary Thomas More, who shared many of Henry’s reformist views on cleaning up church corruption, but could not endorse Henry’s views on the Royal Supremacy. The split that ensued would cost Thomas More his life, which showcased the ruthlessness the King was capable of.

Opposition to the Royal Supremacy also came from pre-eminent dons at Oxford University. As a bastion of religious and political conservatism, Oxford dons opposed the Supremacy as they thought it violated the fundamental tenets of traditional religion because it removed the Pope from the governing hierarchy. Thomas More shared those
same opinions as he could not countenance Henry being the head of the English Church because renouncing Papal rule was seen to be uncomfortably close to evangelical doctrine. More had to be careful given that new treason laws made even subtle criticisms of the King’s new position treasonous. Unfortunately for him, the Crown’s suspicions of him were enough to frame him into incriminating himself while being questioned in the Tower of London. The fate of Thomas More shows that amidst the climate of rancor and opposition to the new Royal Supremacy, the Crown was willing to do practically anything to silence dissent, even if it meant killing Henry’s friends and allies.

The opposition to the Royal Supremacy and what Northern conservatives suspected was creeping heresy taking root in Henry’s Court was further entrenched during the period when Thomas Cromwell began implementing his program of dissolving monasteries and nunneries. Furthermore, on the ground, Cromwell’s policy engendered a phenomenal amount of resentment because it appeared as if an unaccountable, possibly heretical royal counselor was confiscating sacred objects from parish churches and abbeys that had been central fixtures in northern life for generations. Also, there was a feeling that a man from London was violating local cultural traditions that had developed according to customs unique to the North of England. What seemed like an assault from London on the North caused bitter resentment.

Chapter three starts off by looking into Thomas Cromwell’s confiscation of the monasteries’ assets, which became a huge grievance the North held against the Crown because the revenue the parish churches and abbeys generated provided for the well being of local people. The assault on the Catholic Church’s religious autonomy looked like Thomas Cromwell, and by extension, Henry, breaching the ancient ‘constitution’ by
interfering in religious affairs, an area that was formerly the papacy’s responsibility.

Narratives at the time seem to have indicated that there were visceral reactions to the Crown’s dissolving the monasteries and confiscating images, candles, relics, jewels, and furniture from their churches because it was an affront to the existing constitutional order that existed between Church and State for centuries and was seen as little more than naked thievery by the Crown².

The Lincolnshire Rising was the first major conflagration in 1536 that resulted from the growing opposition to the Royal Supremacy and broader religious change. Many of the grievances aired in that episode were identical to those put forward by the rebel leaders in the Pilgrimage of Grace. The key difference between the two uprisings will be examined in greater detail. The Lincolnshire Rising did not have as organized a gentry or aristocratic leadership grouping that could channel the assortment of complaints against the government into a movement that had was organized enough to possibly force the Crown to meet their demands. In fact, contemporary historiography from historians like Mervyn James has it that aristocratic leaders were compelled to endorse rebel aims in the initial Lincolnshire rising because commoners who took part thought the aristocracy was working with Henry VIII to undermine the Commons’ conception of traditional religion³. It has been interpreted that as a result of the lack of a clear hierarchy from the beginning, the Lincolnshire Rising disintegrated and was nothing more than a flash in the pan in the wider sweep of the 1536 rebellion.

² The York Articles, Letters and Papers of Henry VIII, xi, 705, (1)
The impact regional differences had on the opposition to Henry VIII’s government is also key to understanding how loyalties were divided during the Pilgrimage of Grace. As the Pilgrimage of Grace began in the North of England, it is important to examine why the North of the country was fertile ground for hostility toward religious innovations, whether locally or nationally inspired. Being distant from the most frequented trading routes between England and the Continent, counties like Yorkshire and Lincolnshire did not experience the same level of cultural diffusion that was more prevalent in counties in the southeastern part of the country. The Southeast of England was a major trading hub where goods like textiles and wool were exchanged with traders from other parts of Europe. London was the epicenter of trading activity, and being a comparatively populous city, hosted people of different nationalities who included reformist scholars from the Continent. Many scholars came to London from the newly ‘Protestant’ German city-states that took the radical steps of removing themselves from the ecclesiastical control of the Holy Roman Emperor in response to Martin Luther’s ascent to the political scene there⁴.

Reformist thought in the Southeast was also influenced by the growing importance of Cambridge as a center of reformist learning, where dons with humanist leanings gained prominence. The presence of such a large number of reform minded scholars in a highly esteemed university town like Cambridge, with connections to commercial outfits in London made the Southeast unique in its intellectual character compared to the rest of the country. The North’s conservative character and relative isolation from the commercial and intellectual exchanges taking place in the Southeast

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was an additional contributing factor to the outbreak of rebellion in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire.

Chapter four covers the Pilgrimage of Grace in all its detail. The Pilgrimage of Grace followed the outbreak in Lincolnshire, and was notable in that it was much more highly organized than the Lincolnshire Rising and made potent use of symbolism through the recitation of oaths and used symbols with Biblical connotations, like badges with the Five Wounds of Christ. Like the Lincolnshire Rising, the Pilgrimage was sparked by the Dissolution of the Monasteries and the establishment of the Royal Supremacy, but it also came to pass because of the introduction of the Ten Articles, a liturgical document that established a framework for the new Church of England under Henry’s control. While the document itself was conservative theologically, it did leave room for more reformist interpretations. This was anathema to the conservatives taking part in the rebellion because any deviation from what they thought was ‘traditional religion’ had to be opposed. The rebels’ actions directed against the Crown show how rigid their religious outlook was and how they viewed even modest changes as heresy and an attack on their identity. In addition, the intentions and demands of the rebels were articulated in well thought out documents like the Oath of Honourable Men, the Pontefract Articles, and the Ballad on the Pilgrimage of Grace\(^5\). These documents were thought out and well articulated manifestations of the grievances religious conservatives had been grappling with ever since Henry VIII started to impose his religious policies on the realm.

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While opposition to specific royally sanctioned policies was at the core of the rebellions of 1536, there was one man who was able to organize these grievances and make them heard. Robert Aske was the main leader of the rebels during the Pilgrimage of Grace and was able to marshal the support of a wide cross section of Northerners to confront the monarchy with a set of complaints. People who flocked to the rebel cause included clergy, gentry, manual laborers, and people of noble rank. Robert Aske’s background, ideological convictions, and personal connections to members of the elite inside the court are key features of interest. On the question of loyalty, Robert Aske showed that his allegiance was towards the institution of the monarchy as well as Henry himself. However, the Crown regarded Aske’s attacks on evil counselors as an extended attack on the King himself, thus the tension between professing loyalty to the Crown and not the King’s ministers is a recurring theme throughout the rebellion. The anger that metastasized from 1530-1537 gathered such critical mass that Robert Aske was the representative of those sections of English society who were suffering from an identity crisis. Too afraid of what an ‘alien’ government was doing in London to their spiritual, political, and even economic well being, Northerners cast aside ancient notions that rebellion against the monarchy was equal to a grave betrayal and even a sin.

The fifth chapter explores Aske’s preeminent position within the rebel hierarchy. After the rebellion was suppressed, Thomas Cromwell used him as a valuable source of information to gain a full understanding as to why Aske sought to disavow the Royal Supremacy and if he, and the more ordinary people taking part in the rebellion were being co-opted by the aristocracy and gentry so the grievances of the Commons could be

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6 The Oath of Honourable Men 1536, *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, xi, 705 (4)
used as a vehicle to extract the social elite’s own set of demands from a King seemingly under siege. Also of interest to Cromwell were Lords Hussey and Darcy, who were accomplices of Aske during the Pilgrimage. Cromwell wanted to know why they sought to undermine the Royal Supremacy and what they thought they would get out of doing so by way of changes to policy or even personal recognition at Court. For all three men, Cromwell’s forensic examination also sought to determine whether the rebellion was a genuine grassroots uprising that was relatively spontaneous, or if an aristocratically sponsored rebellion was being planned for a while, and those responsible for plotting it were waiting for the right circumstances. This particular set of exchanges moves away from analyzing the chronology, the instigators, and the feelings that were aroused in the lead up to the Pilgrimage. Cromwell’s interrogations of the instigators seek to delve into the ‘psychology’ and logistical planning of the rebellion.

The final chapter rounds out the discussion about the rebellions of 1536 because where the bulk of this dissertation examines the nature of conservative grievances towards the Crown and how they sought to express them, the last chapter focuses on the Crown’s propaganda response to the rebels. The works of Richard Morrison, namely his *Lamentation* and *Remedy for Sedition*, take apart the intellectual justifications the rebels used to buttress their case for rebelling against Henry VIII. Even though the rebels said they were not rising up against the King personally or the institution he represented, Morrison sought to make their objective during the 1536 uprisings just that. His two tracts use emotive language to rally support behind the King and admonish the fallacy that was the rebellion. Morrison also articulated the idea that rebelling against a King’s ministers is a rebellion against the King himself, and by extension God. In effect,
Morrison’s propaganda sought to rally the King’s subjects behind him by proclaiming the rebels’ actions as traitorous and unbecoming of loyal Englishmen.

This sets up the framework by which I am going to analyze the Pilgrimage of Grace and discuss how it was a reaction by religious conservatives to what they perceived as an attack on their identity from the outside. Henry VIII's proclamation that he was the Head of the English Church threw many people in England, especially in the North into confusion as the King’s actions upset the balance between religious and temporal authority. Many felt they could not reconcile the merging of authority under the purview of the monarch, and as such, they had to rebel. However, was the rebellion purely a result of these principled grievances of a grassroots mass movement or was it an excuse for a smaller band of disgruntled nobles to extract demands from a King under siege?
Chapter 1: King Henry VIII’s Break from Rome and its Consequences

It had never been attempted before. Henry VIII became the first sitting monarch in the history of Western Europe to declare that he was the head of a Christian ecclesiastical body both structurally and theologically separate from the Roman Catholic Church. Henry VIII’s decision to take the ‘unilateral’ step to sever English ecclesiastical affairs from Rome had its intellectual justifications, but was also brazenly political. The creation of a new Church of England was a novelty because it gave the monarch authority over the spiritual and temporal affairs of an entire nation. While the nobility, gentry, clergy and common folk of England had every expectation that the monarch had ultimate temporal authority over the lands in which he ruled, the seizure of ecclesiastical authority by the Crown represented a serious break with precedent in the eyes of many. Many people viewed Henry’s move to impose the Royal Supremacy on the kingdom as a dangerous break with tradition, which upset the delicate balance between existing religious and secular identities. As they had largely been kept separate in the previous centuries, the attempt by the King to fuse the two caused great upheaval and consternation.

This chapter analyzes the intellectual and political justifications that were used to argue the case for the severance of ecclesiastical ties with the Vatican, and underscores the importance the Crown placed on legitimizing its novel status. It will also examine how the administration of Henry VIII began to create the legal framework, including a new treason law, for ensuring that opposition to his temporal and spiritual authority would be controlled. As the Royal Supremacy was central to the Tudor conception of the

emerging constitutional order in England, the construction of a statutory regime to
entrench the King’s authority across both secular and religious domains was essential to
preserving legitimacy. The Crown had particular concerns about legitimacy because, as
we will see in the next chapter conservatives at Court and around the country in the pulpit
and the shires did not think the monarch had the legal or moral right to play the
equivalent role of the Pope. It is reasonable to presume that there must have been
particular worry in the Henrician Court because of the comparatively ‘radical’ nature of
his move to create an independent English Church and break off spiritual ties with Rome.
Even though Henry VIII wanted to bring stability to his kingdom and cement his
dynasty’s reputation as a force to be reckoned with in the annals of royal history, his
imposition of the Royal Supremacy set off the greatest wave of unrest that his time on the
throne had yet seen.

The creation of a newly independent *Ecclesia Anglicana* was instigated by the
failure of Queen Catherine of Aragon to produce a male heir to throne. Primogeniture
took precedence in the succession of English monarchs. As Henry was only the second
monarch in the relatively young Tudor dynasty, producing a male heir was key to his
express desire of firmly establishing his line as rulers who could stake their claim to the
throne for many years to come. Unfortunately for the King, Catherine was only able to
produce one son early on in his reign, but he died during infancy, leaving Henry without
an established male successor to the throne. Even though Henry had one daughter, Mary
Tudor by 1530, his aim of securing a male heir to the throne remained unfulfilled. Henry
lost faith in his Queen’s ability to produce a male heir, and he tried to seek an annulment
of his marriage to Catherine so he could marry Anne Boleyn who he hoped could bear
him a new son. The pope’s refusal to cooperate in the King’s ‘Great Matter’ would sever ties with the Vatican and redefine the role of the monarchy in the religious, and even temporal life of his nation.

All of the evidence suggests that in the early 1520s, Henry saw himself as a loyal Catholic, theologically and institutionally. He had been raised in a very traditional household, inculcated with orthodox religious attitudes and as an adult Henry became a fervent opponent of Lutheranisn, which had reared its head on the European mainland in 1517. Martin Luther’s dramatic posting of the 95 Theses on the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral spurred the Catholic monarchs of Europe to devise a firm response to the supposed heresy of Luther’s works, and Henry joined the campaign against Luther four years later with his 1521 exposition of the *Assertio Septum Sacramentorum* or ‘Defense of the Seven Sacraments’. He told the Pope he wanted to join forces with other Catholic sovereigns and ‘weed out’ Lutheran heresy, using his “wits” to confront the German “wicked books” by presenting himself to the Holy Apostolic See as ‘Your Holiness most devoted and humble son’.

“Most Holy Father,
As we Catholic Sovereigns should uphold religion, when We saw Luther’s heresy running wild, for the sake of Germany, and still more for the love of the Holy Apostolic See, We tried to weed out this heresy. Seeing its widespread havoc, we called on all to help Us to eradicate it, particularly the Emperor and the Electoral Princes. Lest, however, this be not enough to show Out mind on Luther’s wicked books, We shall defend and guard the Holy Roman Church not only by force of arms, but also by Our wits. And therefore, We dedicate to Your holiness Out first fruits, confident that an abundant harvest will be gathered and Your Holiness approve Our Work.

“From Our Royal Palace at Greenwich, 21st May 1521”
“Your Holiness’ most devoted and humble son, Henry by the grace of God King of England and France, and Lord of Ireland”

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It is difficult to imagine from reading this letter that less than a decade later, Henry would be advocating a full withdrawal from the Vatican’s orbit. However, events would transpire to make that seeming impossibility a reality. When the crisis over the divorce caused Henry to turn to radical solutions, he drew on an array of intellectual justifications to conceptualize and rationalize the new Royal Supremacy, creating a new ‘national’ conception of England’s political and religious identity. The emergence of this ‘national’ identity underpinned by monarchical dominance had its grounding in earlier Medieval history when monarchs and popes routinely fought over money and jurisdictional rights. However, never before had the Papacy’s fundamental jurisdictional rights over ecclesiastical affairs been called into question. English and French kings had many long running disputes with the Vatican, especially over the appointment of Bishops, that produced varying degrees of hostility. Henry’s actions banishing the spiritual and executive authority of the pope in England took the antagonism between the two sides to unprecedented heights.

At Thomas Cromwell’s urging, Henry decided to use statute law to engineer the break with Rome. The 1534 Act in Restraint of Appeals provided the rationale for the Royal Supremacy that was rooted in the notion of “imperial sovereignty” whose intellectual building blocks were medieval in origin. The Act in Restraint of Appeals called for the English monarch to be the uniform sovereign over his realm. The Act began by asserting that “where by divers sundry old authentic histories and chronicles it is manifestly declared and expressed that this realm of England is an empire, and so hath been accepted in the world, governed by one supreme head and king having the dignity
and royal estate of the imperial crown of the same.”\footnote{9} The text of the Act declares the King to be the Supreme Head of his kingdom in all domains, which completely repudiates Papal authority as an encroachment on Henry’s right to rule over England by himself. The Act is also very specific that attempts by the Vatican to coerce or influence the allegiance of English subjects were hostile to Henry’s sovereignty, and therefore should be ignored. To this he says: “Final determination to all manner of folk resiants or subjects within this realm, in all causes, manners, debates and contentions happening to occur, insurge or begin within the limits thereof, without restraint or provocation to any foreign princes or potentates of the world.”\footnote{10} The text of the Act in Restraint of Appeals also gave Henry an opening at claiming the moral high ground, providing the King with a theory of divine right of imperial rule. “The body politic, compact of all sorts and degrees of people divided in terms and by names of spirituality and temporality, be bounden and owe to bear next to God a natural and humble obedience to the King; he being also institute and furnished by the goodness and sufferance of Almighty God with plenary, whole and entire power, pre-eminence, authority, prerogative and jurisdiction to render and yield justice…”\footnote{11}

Reading the first section of the Act, it is clear that Henry has clearly spelled out why he thinks he should be endowed with the Royal Supremacy, and why it would be beneficial to the kingdom, if his position as Supreme Head of the Church were to be universally accepted. The use of the word empire in the first line of the Act in Restraint of Appeals is interesting because Empire denotes that there is a specific ruler over a piece

\footnote{10} ibid.
\footnote{11} ibid.
of land that no one on Earth is superior to. In this case, he is seeking to equate his new position as Supreme Head of the English Church with that of the Pope where the King seeks to proclaim himself the religious head of the English people, the Pope was already recognized as the Head of the Christian community. He also claims that his position as the Supreme Head is recognized around the world, which is an indication to the Vatican and to conservatives in England to recognize him as such. To add further pressure to conservatives, Henry states that in fact, his ordination as Supreme Head of the Church has been “furnished by the goodness and sufferance of Almighty God with plenary, whole and entire power, pre-eminence, authority, prerogative, and jurisdiction”\textsuperscript{12}. While supplanting the Pope as Head of the English, this particular line in the Act equates his position with the Pontiff in that he is the Head of his Church, within England’s boundaries. He offers a subtle warning to those who do not recognize him as the spiritual father of the new Church. He also rejects the authority of any foreign prince or potentate over the English Church, which further underscores ‘imperial sovereignty’.

If one reads further on, Henry very adeptly invokes the actions of some of his predecessors. This particular addition to the overall argument laid out in this piece is the statute needed to argue against the claim that somehow the actions Henry was taking against Rome were somehow completely alien, and not tried before. The statute notes that “the King his most noble progenitors, and the nobility and commons of this said realm, at divers and sundry Parliaments as well in the time of King Edward I, Edward III, Richard II, Henry IV, and the other noble kings of the realm, made sundry ordinances,

\textsuperscript{12} ibid.
laws, statutes and provisions for the entire and sure conservation of the prerogatives…”13

He also seeks to point out he would continue to protect religious liberties, although they would not be the Catholic Church’s liberties. While previous monarchs had never declared the existence of a separate Church from Rome, English kings had always had a very large say over the governance of religious institutions within the realm. It is this particular point that Henry seeks to emphasize that English kings had always had a say in both the temporal and spiritual affairs of the Kingdom and therefore the steps he was taking by establishing the new Church should not be viewed as an outlandishly radical departure from that precedent. While Henry’s actions were radical to the extent that he named himself Supreme Head of the English Church, he tried to paint a picture that his actions were easy enough for the people of his kingdom to digest and would therefore not countenance rebellion. The arguments laid out in the Act of Restraint of Appeals lay out a vision how ‘imperial government’ that was sovereign, would be a better vehicle for stability than constant interference from Rome.

While the Act in Restraint of Appeals provided the intellectual construct by which Henry and his closest advisors thought he derived the authority to govern both the religious and temporal affairs of his Kingdom, the Act of Supremacy of 1534, was the mechanism by which his vision was implemented on the ground. This piece of legislation is crucial to understanding how the statutory goals laid out in legislation were carried out on the ground. What Henry did was brilliantly, albeit dangerously, alter the makeup of the English constitutional order, where he snatched power over ecclesiastical affairs from the Pope, through the passage of his Act of Supremacy of 1534. The implementation of

13 ibid.
this particular Act allowed the opponents of the Henrician Reformation to see first hand what the King’s alternative vision of the ‘constitution’ was in reality.

The Act of Supremacy gave statutory legal authority to the monarch to place himself as the symbolic and executive head of the Church. Henry was the spiritual head of the Church and proclaimed he was anointed by God to that role. Administratively, he would have the power to control Church revenues and the approval and dismissal of priests and bishops. The appointment of ecclesiastical officials is highly important because this was the means by which the monarch could get his religious doctrine to filter down to the grassroots. Conversely, if Henry had to deal with papally appointed bishops and priests running the English diocesan system, who were opposed to his doctrine, he would have potentially have to deal with a ‘fifth column’ trying to undermine his efforts at establishing the Royal Supremacy. Henry’s seizure over the levers of control of the English diocese was astonishing to many people across the social spectrum. The Pope, who was said to be the descendant of Saint Peter, and the messenger of God, was supposed to be the spiritual head of the Church, who was looked to for ultimate spiritual wisdom and authority by those all throughout Christendom, not just within England.

To conservatives, the monarchy controlling church appointments and finances was unfathomable, even though in the Act of Restraint of Appeals, Henry argues the opposite point. Nonetheless, this Act of Parliament would make England unique in Europe in that it established a national Church under the control of a sovereign monarch and as such, would upset the sensibilities of members of all social classes to varying degrees. However, to fully understand the magnitude of the legislation itself, it is
worthwhile coming to terms with the legislation’s force and unilateral pronouncement of
superiority over Papal decrees.

Albeit the king's Majesty justly and rightfully is and ought to be the supreme head
of the Church of England, and so is recognized by the clergy of this realm in their
convocations, yet nevertheless, for corroboration and confirmation thereof, and
for increase of virtue in Christ's religion within this realm of England, and to
repress and extirpate all errors, heresies, and other enormities and abuses
heretofore used in the same, be it enacted, by authority of this present Parliament,
that the king, our sovereign lord, his heirs and successors, kings of this realm,
shall be taken, accepted, and reputed the only supreme head in earth of the Church
of England, called Anglicans Ecclesia; and shall have and enjoy, annexed and
united to the imperial crown of this realm…

This section of the Act of Supremacy forcefully declares that the King of England
is the Supreme Head of his Church, and is thereby should be recognized as such by those
subordinate to him in the religious sphere, namely the clergy. This is very important
because of the Crown’s concern over divided loyalties amongst the clergy. The implicit
declaration located in the text is that religious officials who were once in the service of
the Pope, must now shift their allegiance to Henry. The text also stresses the importance
of maintaining an acceptance of the legitimacy of the new title “Supreme Head” for all
future monarchs, because only if the title were accepted by the wider population in due
course, would Henry’s goal of cementing his dynasty come to fruition. It is also
interesting to see that the Act also makes it clear that clergy now have an obligation to
cleanse the new Church of the old influences of the Catholic Church that Henry doesn’t
like, even though they are not specified above. Here, the Act of Supremacy clearly
evokes the merits of having an independent Church, but also highlights the importance of
having a mechanism to keep the Church structures from becoming a ‘fifth column’ of

14 Henry VIII, The Act of Supremacy (26 Hen. 8 c.1, 180), in Geoffrey Elton, The Tudor
Catholic dissidents wishing to use their position to either influence or even overturn religious policy.

The Act of Supremacy constituted a substantial alteration to the existing constitutional order at the time because of the unilateral expansion of the Royal prerogative and executive authority into religious affairs. As a result of embarking on this quest to establish a new identity for the kingdom, Henry VIII and the Crown set themselves up to be challenged by those vehemently opposed to the changes they were making to the constitutional order. As such, the Crown sought to try and insulate itself from opposition to the new Act of Supremacy by constructing a new set of treason statutes that differed profoundly from treason legislation that had existed since the Middle Ages. As Henry’s fundamental concern was the preservation of his family’s grip on the throne, opposition to his regime and the statutory changes he had enacted had to be stamped out from whatever medium it came from.

According to John Bellamy, in his *Tudor Law of Treason*, medieval treason legal definitions were divided into ordinary and high treason. High treason during the Middle Ages involved killing or attempting to harm or kill the monarch in person. When it came to legislation on high treason the definitions were expanded to varying degrees. Under Edward III in 1351, the penalties for such offences were codified and made permanent in the legal archives of the country. Under his successor, Richard II, a distinct penalty for imagining the King’s death was passed by Parliament and added to the increasingly sophisticated body of law. “Whereas divers opinions have been before this time in what case treason shall be said, and in what not; the King, at the request of the lords and of the commons, hath made a declaration in the manner as hereafter followeth, that is to say;
when a man doth compass or imagine the death of our lord the King, or of our lady his Queen or of their eldest son and heir…”\(^\text{15}\)

The Act of Treason of 1351 was a step forward towards proscribing what was deemed to be a threat to the safety of the monarch. Apart from committing a physical act to harm the monarch, imagining his death was added as another dimension of English treason law at the time. It also points out that not only is an assault on the King treasonous, but also harm done to justices, the chancellor, and the treasurer would be characterized as treason too. "And if a man slay the chancellor, treasurer, or the King’s justices of the one bench or the other, justices in eyre, or justices of assise, and all other justices assigned to hear and determine, being in their places, doing their offices: and it is to be understood, that in the cases above rehearsed, that ought to be judged treason which extends to our lord the King, and his royal majesty…”\(^\text{16}\)

This is an important element when discussing Henrician treason law because Henry’s conception of the Royal Supremacy was that all functions of the state were subordinate to him, and therefore the state itself belonged to him. By the same logic, an assault on a Crown official in 1534 would be equivalent to an assault on Henry, and thereby treasonous. Furthermore, this particular legislation provided the blueprint that the Crown used to further enhance treason legislation because of the advent of print media and the dissemination of rumors about the effect of Henry’s religious policies. Henry and Thomas Cromwell’s ability to pass the new 1534 Treason Act through Parliament shows that it could be ‘convinced’ of the merits of the legislation in that there was an emerging


consensus amongst certain MPs and lords that the dangers to the Crown had in fact changed from 1351.

While the 1351 Treason Act was deemed adequate in dealing with threats to the monarchy in the 14th century, the Crown thought the law on treason needed to be updated to meet the threats from the forces seeking to undermine the Royal Supremacy and the establishment of the new Church. One of the main challenges facing the Crown was that its opponents might harness the publicity power of the printing press, which neither Edward III nor Richard II had to deal with, to express their dissatisfaction with Crown policies. As such, it was crucial to control opinion that opposed the Royal Supremacy. That is why the Crown adopted more stringent and some might say preventative measures to silence those who sought to do the King physical or political damage through spoken or written words. The Treason statutes of 1534 sought to proscribe written or spoken acts that challenged the legitimacy of Henry, thus further widening the definition of treason from that of the Middle Ages. Interestingly enough, the Tudor era was known for passing 68 pieces of treason legislation, whereas in the period from 1352 to 1485, only 10 pieces of legislation were passed17. It seems from these statistics that the worry about subversion from all manner of opponents from courtiers to common folk, was very real.

The first part of the Treason Act of 1534 contains language that marks a radical departure from the legal precedent based on the 1351 Act. “Forasmuch as it is most necessary, both for common policy and duty of subjects, above all things to prohibit, provide, restrain, and extinct all manner of shameful slanders, perils, or imminent danger

or dangers, which might grow, happen, or rise to their sovereign lord the king, the queen, or their heirs, which when they be heard, seen or understood, cannot be but odible, and also abhorred of all those sorts that be true and loving subjects, if in any point they may do, or shall touch the king, his queen, their heirs or successors…”

The most important point here is that written slander is now considered treasonous, and therefore worthy of punishment under the new law. There is a notable emphasis on condemning attempts to indirectly or directly harm the monarch or his family, which are classified as odious by the Crown, and they argue that such thoughts violate every English person’s liberty and sense of self-respect. This is a clear departure from the 1351 Treason Act.

There are diverging opinions as to whether or not the legislation passed by Henry VIII was ‘tyrannical’ or whether the new laws were in accordance with the common law traditions that embodied the English legal system. The argument that the new laws passed by the Crown went against the liberties of the religious and temporal sensibilities of the people served as a rallying cry against Henry VIII. Geoffrey Elton argued that the legislation passed between 1530 and 1536 was not tyrannical as the opponents of Henry would suggest, but in fact in line with legal precedent. Elton argued that the scope of potential violations was not that different from the Medieval treason statutes because only legitimate trials would be sought against those who disobeyed the new laws, according to due process, and not based on the whims of the Crown. Leaving aside the historiographical debate on the degree to which the Henrician Treason laws adhered to precedent, in the Crown’s mind at least, the Royal Supremacy had to be protected at all

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19 Bellamy; *The Tudor Law of Treason*, p.6
costs because it was the vehicle by which Henry would firm up his grip on the throne and
entrench it deeply enough for his successors to carry on the family line.

The establishment of the Royal Supremacy was a provocative and in a sense revolutionary step undertaken by the Crown. The motivations for doing so were nakedly political on the one hand, but also principled as well. The Royal Supremacy was extolled and showcased to a wider academic and parochial audience in the Act of Restraint of Appeals to indicate the rationale for Henry’s actions. The Act of Supremacy was a means by which the intellectual construct highlighted in the Act of Restraint in Appeals could be implemented at the ground level and used as a skeleton to buttress the structure of the new political order. New treason laws were enacted vastly widening the scope of the legal definition of this particular offence, as a result of the Crown’s sense of the nature of the threat to the new order. Therefore, Henry and his associates like Thomas Cromwell could use the new treason legislation as a cudgel to prosecute those who advocated a return to the conservative order and papal supremacy in England. It will be clear in the following chapter why the Crown had good reason to be so concerned about the impact of the new religious structures put in place, because reaction in many quarters was hostile, and induced many to rebel against the constitutional order that had been recently established.
Chapter 2: The conservative reaction to the Royal Supremacy

As Henry VIII firmly established the Royal Supremacy as his political lodestar, it quickly became the main point of contention in English politics after 1534. The imposition of the Royal Supremacy was novel and provocative, and as such, it won support from certain quarters, but also provoked vehement opposition in others. The king argued that the actions he took in cutting off ties with Rome fell in line with precedent set by earlier medieval kings, but his opponents did not believe that severing ties with Rome could be equated with the earlier fights that took place between English monarchs and the Papacy. An uncomfortably large number of clergymen, members at Court, intellectuals and ordinary parishioners across the entire country protested at what they saw as a dangerous turn away from religious orthodoxy and towards something that was alarmingly close, in their eyes at least, to Continental Protestantism. While Henry’s actual beliefs did not come close to being in line with Lutheranism and Zwinglian teachings, his opponents said that severing ties with Rome represented a big step in that direction, which they did not want to risk.

The opposition to the Royal Supremacy came from many different locales, but while varied in terms of geography and social station, there was uniformity in its intensity. This particular chapter lays out the nature and scope of the opposition to the Royal Supremacy that was felt very soon after it became law in 1534. Not surprisingly, legions of clergy from parish priests, friars, all the way up to the bishops who ran England’s dioceses were the most irate about the changes Henry and his ministers were instituting. Many of these clergyman were concerned not only about what they saw as creeping heresy entering the English body politic, but also more pragmatic concerns
about what their own status as power brokers would be in the new constitutional settlement that was being established\textsuperscript{20}. Not all clergy were as vehemently opposed to the Royal Supremacy as others, however. As England was no longer subject to Papal control both spiritually and administratively, the Royal Supremacy by default cut off the Catholic Church’s bureaucracy from what was in effect a ‘security blanket’ from Rome. No longer could English dioceses count on the Vatican for financial assistance and also rhetorical support whenever they got into legal trouble with the Crown. Apart from the theological reasons for opposing the Royal Supremacy, the clergy had many temporal grievances towards the Crown namely involving issues over land and taxation.

While the clergy represented a large segment of the opposition towards the Royal Supremacy, another focal point of opposition to the new religious policy was from conservative courtiers and intellectuals. The grievances held by those who would rebel against the Crown in the Autumn of 1536 included the invocation of the Royal Supremacy in 1534 and the passing of new treason laws which were seen to be a violation of the liberties of the Kings’ subjects that had been engrained in the political culture of England. Another point of contention that existed was the very substantive issue of the dissolution of the monasteries, which will be discussed in much greater detail in the following chapter. However, all of these converging factors collided to produce the Lincolnshire Rising, which was the first large scale protest against the religious innovations being introduced by the Crown during the first half of the decade.

To gain a more complete understanding of how the Crown came to confront a mob of angry rebels in the autumn of 1536, it is important to comprehend the dynamics at

\textsuperscript{20} Geoffrey Elton, \textit{Policy and Police} (Cambridge, 1985), p.20
work in the pulpits and pews of the realm. The esteemed historian Geoffrey Elton is the preeminent authority on the nature of clerical opposition to Henry VIII’s religious policies. Geoffrey Elton writes that the 1530s were a difficult period for the Crown because, by its very nature, the kingdom was hard to govern, and the imposition of a new constitutional order on the kingdom, was going to be met with resistance, almost by default. It seems that the murmurings of dissension amongst the clergy had the potential to be especially problematic because of their unique status as ‘messengers of God’ amongst their parishioners and as a result of how they propagated their opposition to the invocation of the Royal Supremacy.

Clergymen had the unique advantage of being able to reach people across all sections of society through their command of the pulpit. Sermonizing to the common folk in churches and cathedrals all over England gave priests and bishops the ability to spread their conservative views about the old religious and constitutional order in a manner that made it harder for the authorities to charge them with treason. In many instances, much to the frustration of Thomas Cromwell, clergymen who opposed the Crown were able to exploit the loophole in the new treason law because their spoken words of opposition against the Crown could only be held valid if royal agents were spying on their congregations and recording their treasonous language for the courts to prosecute. Charging prominent clergymen with treason was much harder than confiscating a book or pamphlet from someone opposed to the Royal Supremacy because of the amount of manpower needed to eavesdrop on churches all over the country and snuff out treasonous language. Despite the unique challenges of policing the churches of the country,

\[21\] ibid, 83.
Cromwell’s agents were able to pick up seditious chatter and charge dissenting clergy with treason. However, the Crown’s ability to keep an eye on the nation’s churches was tenuous at best.

While the clergy did use their position in society to spread opposition to the Royal Supremacy, it has been said by Geoffrey Elton that in many instances, their audiences were not receptive to language excoriating the monarch over his actions. It is hard to know how accurate that assertion is, but that does not minimize the fact that there were members of the clergy who did use their positions as masters of their congregations to influence public opinion on questions of the Royal Supremacy and the King’s divorce to Catherine of Aragon. The zealotry of some of the clergymen who opposed the Crown’s actions was particularly alarming. There were some priests who tried to circumvent one of the central tenets of the Act of Supremacy by undermining the new role of the King as ‘Supreme Head’ of the English Church. Some of them took it upon themselves to advocate for the re-introduction of Papal rule, even though one of the main provisions highlighted in Act of Supremacy was the prohibition of any kind of foreign religious influence. There are a few examples of clergymen who railed against the new religious innovations, each using their own inflammatory and in some cases violent language that gave the Crown real worries. One John Ainsworth was noted to have said “Rome was the mother Holy Church” and he attacked the Acts of Supremacy and Succession with particular intensity.

This must have put him on the government’s radar as he directly undermined Henry’s position as Supreme Head of the Church. Another colorful diatribe against the

22 ibid, 134.
23 ibid, 21-22.
new religious order came in the form of one out burst from a Dr. Benger who said the “new learning would cause people to grab each other by the ears and cause broken heads”. In addition, a vicar in Newark-on-Trent, Nottinghamshire by the name of Henry Leatherhead was perhaps the most explicitly violent, where he railed against the religious innovations and advocated the use of daggers on the promoters of the new religious order. Amidst what seemed like a deep reservoir of hostility to the Royal Supremacy, the Crown had to stop more reformist preachers from spreading their own version of the Gospel because of the fear of spreading popular riots. One such example was when Hugh Latimer, one of the prominent reformers of the Henrician era tried to give a sermon in Bristol but was stopped by the authorities for the reason just mentioned.

While ordinary clergymen railing against the Royal Supremacy was bad enough for the Crown, having bishops doing it was even more dangerous to the royal cause. In the minds of the public, having bishops decrying the Royal Supremacy would have carried a lot more weight because of their position as hand picked appointees of the Pope and part of the legacy of apostolic succession that was central to Catholicism. Such was the danger with John Fisher, the Bishop of Rochester. Bishop Fisher was part of the conservative vanguard that opposed Henry’s actions as he thought a monarch did not have the right to take the place of the Pope as the Head of the English Church. Given his position as one of the most important ecclesiastical officials in the kingdom, his pronouncements rendered him highly dangerous to the Crown and he was accordingly charged with treason and put into the Tower of London. The official charge laid on him

24 id.
25 ibid, 86.
26 id.
by the Crown was that he “He falsely, maliciously, and traitorously wished, willed, and desired, and by craft imagined, invented, practised, and attempted to deprive the king of the dignity, title, and name of his royal estate, that is of his title and name of supreme head of the church of England…” Unrepentant, it was noted that while he was actually standing trial in Westminster Hall in London Fisher said: “And now to tell you plainly my mind, touching this matter of the king’s supremacy, I think indeed, and always have thought, and do now lastly affirm, that His Grace cannot justly claim any such supremacy over the Church of God as he now taketh upon him; neither hath (it) been seen or heard of that any temporal prince before his days hath presumed to that dignity…” As Bishop Fisher’s statement goes against the core tenets of the Act of Restraint of Appeals and the Act of Supremacy, it is no wonder Thomas Cromwell would have seen to his execution. Having such a prominent official espousing opinions violating Henry’s raison d’etre would not be tolerated by any means.

The changes Henry was instituting made many clergymen and the common folk of the realm angry. Opposition to the new legislation came from all parts of the country. While this thesis talks about the Lincolnshire Rising and the Pilgrimage of Grace in the context of the impact the new religious changes had in the North of England, it is important to recognize that while most strongly present in the North, conservative reaction to Henry VIII did not only come from that part of the country. There was also stiff opposition to Royal policies in many parts of Southern England, even though reformist tendencies were strongest there. In Somerset, there were a few episodes in 1534-5 where preachers would refuse to disavow Papal rule and would rail against the

27 ibid, 282.
28 ibid, 329.
invocation of the Act of Supremacy. What seemed to be of great concern to Thomas Cromwell in particular was what was happening at the University of Oxford. Oxford was a bastion of conservative thought and in many ways set the tone for conservative theological debate. Given the problems the Crown was having containing conservative opposition in the North, the presence of a major intellectual hub not allied to their cause had the potential to cause trouble.

Many Oxford dons disavowed the Royal Supremacy and extolled the virtues of the Papacy. Additionally, many dons condemned the new religious innovations as farcical and a subversion of the old order. The last thing the Crown wanted was for the University to train a legion of priests who would fan out across the country to proclaim the greatness of Papal rule, which would have violated the Acts of Supremacy and Treason, and it would have been extremely hard for the authorities to contain that level of sedition. There is another reason why Oxford dons were opposed to the Royal Supremacy. Cambridge University was gaining in prominence during the Reformation because it was home to a more reformist faculty, and as such the Oxford faculty was worried Cambridge’s clout would increase as a result of the Crown chipping away at the prevailing religious orthodoxy. They must have worried that their own position as the leading center of religious conservatism would have been in danger if the Crown continued to push what Oxford dons thought was a dangerous and subversive agenda, which would have empowered the reformists at Cambridge.

Conservative opposition to the Royal Supremacy came from the clergy, centers of higher learning, and also from prominent intellectuals. One such individual was the

29 ibid, 87.
renowned humanist Thomas More, who was a long time friend of the King. More is an important addition to the discussion about conservative opposition to the Royal Supremacy because theoretically humanists should have been allies of those seeking to distance themselves, or even undermine the Catholic Church. Thomas More, however, was no such ally to the King in that regard because his conservative instincts seemed to outweigh his reformist tendencies in the larger context of his life. While Henry VIII and Thomas More were on the same page regarding their theological views before 1534, but Thomas More’s principled advocacy for conservative principles culminated in his defending Papal Supremacy after the split with Rome came into effect. It is ironic that More’s attitude towards Continental Protestants were as negative as Henry VIII’s yet given Thomas More’s support for the royal prerogative, it would seem logical that as a humanist scholar of considerable stature, he might be compelled to extend his support of monarchical power to champion the King’s opposition to the Papacy. More’s severe but tightly concealed criticisms of the King’s attempted annulment to Catherine of Aragon and his subsequent marriage to Anne Boleyn drew both men apart ideologically, to a point where they could not reconcile one another’s views on the issue of the Royal Supremacy.

Despite their divergence by 1534, Henry and Thomas More did start out with aligning viewpoints on issues relating to the questions of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon and in relation to reformed thought regarding Church corruption and superstition. Prior to Henry’s passing the Act of Supremacy, Thomas More and Henry both shared a profound aversion to Lutheran and Zwinglian theology, as they were both of the view the two were heretical. After Cardinal Wolsey was brought down for failing to acquire a
marriage annulment from the Vatican, More replaced him as Lord Chancellor in 1529. For the next three years, he carried out Henry’s ‘orthodox’ religious policies, even though the King was plotting his break up with Rome. He was said to have carried out very harsh interrogations of supposed Protestant heretics, and had continued Wolsey’s work of banning imported ‘protestant’ material from Continental Europe. Furthermore, during the German Peasants revolt of 1524-1525, both Henry and Thomas More were at one in saying that Lutheran heresy was the cause of the rebellion. They also denounced any reasoning the peasants used to justify their revolt as invalid, and said it was not worthy of consideration.

Ultimately, by the middle of 1534, More could no longer reconcile himself to the inevitable split with the Vatican and became increasingly hostile, in his own mind at least, to Henry’s policies. In hindsight, Thomas More’s opposition to the Royal Supremacy seems so damning to Henry because More was not a clergyman or a religious conservative from Oxford. He believed strongly in the royal prerogative, which served as the cornerstone of Henry’s argument that ultimately developed into the concept of “imperial sovereignty” in the Act in Restraint of Appeals. Despite More’s vehement opposition to Continental European religious innovations along the lines of Lutheranism and Zwinglianism, he endorsed a core idea that European monarchs had long fought the Vatican over and that was increased monarchical power. Reformist thought during the 16th century built on earlier medieval notions of wresting power away from the Papacy to deposit into the hands of kings, and Thomas More was a firm believer in extending monarchical power in the temporal sphere. He could not however, countenance the Royal

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Supremacy because it removed the Catholic Church from what he saw as its rightful place\textsuperscript{31}.

The fact that More was not willing to take the extension of the royal prerogative to what Henry and Cromwell saw as its natural conclusion, must have been disappointing to the King. Not having one of his closest allies on board for the ultimate stage of his political journey must have cost him a lot in terms of political capital with other more conservative minded intellectuals. This was because Thomas More’s rejection of the Royal Supremacy in effect said that Henry’s bid to cut off ties with Rome seemed to be a cynical ploy to cement his own authority and was not in fact a principled move that stemmed from genuine intellectually grounded reasons for opposing Papal rule. As the two men did share many views before 1534, it is a logical conclusion to draw. While More said in his trial that he genuinely, in principle did not believe in replacing the Pope with a ‘temporal monarch’, his implicit suggestion that Henry was constructing the scheme to detach himself from Rome for pure political self interest does carry some weight in retrospect\textsuperscript{32}.

It is reasonable to imagine that the rejection of the Royal Supremacy by Thomas More must have alarmed people like Thomas Cromwell and even the King because having a distinguished intellectual like him completely reject the justifications the Crown presented as a rationale to part ways with Rome, would have sapped the whole effort of credibility. Credibility was an important factor in the Henrician effort to cement the Royal Supremacy because it was the ‘soft’ factor his government used to help stymie overt and subtler forms of opposition to the effort. It is likely that the public rejection that

\textsuperscript{31} ibid, 232.
\textsuperscript{32} ibid, 233.
More gave to the King’s effort would have in a sense given ammunition to more opponents in the pulpit and amongst common folk because in essence, More deemed the whole effort to be a sham and not backed up by truly legal and substantive reasoning. Reverting to More’s status as a philosopher and learned man, that would have given increased standing to conservative criticisms of the King because it would have negated the notion that the intellectual momentum was in the ‘reformist’ camp and therefore More’s rejection of the Supremacy seems to have questioned that assumption. To make the Crown’s life even more trying, More never put his complaints against the Royal Supremacy into writing so his sudden, public rejection added extra shock, and as such he was able to evade government surveillance of suspected treasonous individuals.

Thomas More gradually underwent a process of evolution to become an opponent of his old friend Henry VIII. As such, his conversion from a former ally into an adversary was hard for the Crown’s censors and agents to detect because he did not leave any sort of paper trail indicating he secretly harbored animosity towards the King’s policies or was planning to induce others to do the same. As stated previously, when he started working for the King as Lord Chancellor in sympathy with his views on Continental Protestantism and his more abstract theories on the merits of monarchical power. As Henry’s calls for invoking the Royal Supremacy and nullifying Papal authority in England grew more vociferous, More finally parted ways with the King and no longer stayed in his employment. The problem he had to contend with was that his opposition to Henry’s policy of making himself the Supreme Head of the English Church could not be made through written or spoken media, otherwise he would have been prosecuted for

33 ibid, 234.
violating the Treason Act 1534. As such, he had to stay quiet about his real views for fear of spending time in prison or even receiving the death penalty. Herein lies the dilemma that faced both the Crown and conservative opponents of the Royal Supremacy. For religious conservatives like More, they had to remain vigilant to stay clear of the legal regime deployed by the Crown lest they be found out and made to be trophies in their fight against what they would call a ‘conservative onslaught’. For the Crown though, aggressively pursuing outspoken conservatives could backfire by making them martyrs for the conservative cause.

One avenue the Crown went down to genuinely win over or at least silence conservative critics was to get them to take the Oath of Succession, which would have recognized Henry as the Supreme Head of the Church, but more importantly his successors in that same role. The practice of getting their opponents to recite an oath of allegiance would proscribe them from proclaiming fealty to the Pope and would recognize the Tudor dynastic succession in English religious affairs. Thomas More could not bring himself to take the Oath of Succession, because it would have forced him to renounce Papal control in England forever, and that violated his principles. When he was made to try and take the Oath during questioning in the Tower of London, and refused, his true ‘intentions’ were found out and he was subsequently executed for treason. The case of Thomas More highlights the tense standoff between conservatives and supporters of the King, where the former was indignant about the changes being made but was cautious about openly airing views due to strengthened treason laws. Lastly, Henry and
his followers saw the need to stamp out opposition for reasons of maintaining legitimacy but had qualms about doing so out of fear of creating an even greater backlash.\(^{34}\)

Another crucial factor that fueled the growing chorus of conservative dissatisfaction arose from the sweeping program of dissolving the monasteries and doctrinal reforms that came about during the first half of the decade. Thomas Cromwell’s sweeping effort at dissolving Northern monasteries and friaries caused great upheaval amongst Northern conservatives because it was perceived as an attack on what was considered a bulwark of ‘local’ or ‘regional’ religious tradition by a royal government that seemed to be deviating from the accepted orthodoxies. It did not help the government’s standing with Northern parishioners in that the Crown was perceived as an alien entity based in London that was confiscating local property and trying to undermine local traditions. While the authorities in London deemed Northern religious practices superstitious and therefore suspect, they were nonetheless a central tenet of parish life in the North and informed the religious identity and orientation of its people. The desire of Thomas Cromwell as well as the King to forcibly remove tangible manifestations of Catholicism like precious ornaments, the physical structures of monasteries and Abbeys, and the money that allowed religious life in the Northern counties to flourish. This put members of all social classes on a collision course with the Crown, which will be covered extensively in the following two chapters.

There are debates whether the conservative reaction to Royal incursion into Northern religious affairs was a defense of tradition or merely political. It seems the historical evidence points to both factors playing critical roles in the lead up and

\(^{34}\) Elton, \textit{Policy and Police}, p. 230
culmination of the Lincolnshire Rising and the Pilgrimage of Grace, and they would combine to cause the King and his ministers great cause for concern. In the next chapter, the reasons why the wellspring of conservative anger finally boiled over will be explained in much greater detail. The implications of the Dissolution of the Monasteries is very important in the larger sweep of conservative opposition because it underscores how the rebels saw themselves in the broader context of religious struggle. The confiscation of cherished assets like buildings, land, relics, and ornaments made many of the rebels who participated in either of the risings feel they were defending ‘traditional’ Catholicism from reformist and ‘heretical’ innovations emanating from a far off capital. In the following chapter, the conservative opposition will be placed in a geographical context, and it will seek to set out that while large swathes of England were deeply hostile to the new religious change, there were important reasons why the uprisings of 1536 took place in the North and not the South.

The conservative storm that resulted in the passage of the Royal Supremacy as well as the new treason statutes that came into effect in 1534 set the stage for the direct confrontation that came to pass in 1536. After Thomas More was executed in 1535, a year passed where all of the rancor that had been building up had a chance to gain critical mass. Finally, events came to a head in Lincolnshire, a shire country in the eastern part of the country. While, the Lincolnshire uprising ended up resembling a flash in the pan in the larger context of the Pilgrimage of Grace, which erupted some two weeks after the Lincolnshire Rising fizzled out, it caused great worry in the corridors of power in Westminster. It represented what seemed to be a coming avalanche of conservative opposition the Crown had worried so long about, so much so that they tried to
institutionalize mechanisms to try and stamp out dissent. The key point though is that the legislation passed during 1534 was meant to contain dissent that came from individuals or small groups of people either through the spoken or the written word. Thus Henry and his ministers had to act quickly to figure out what to do with the mob of angry commoners who descended upon Lincoln Cathedral on the 2\textsuperscript{nd} of October 1536, in what would begin the most serious threat to Henry VIII’s grip on the throne.
Chapter 3: The geography of discontent: the Dissolution of the Monasteries and the Lincolnshire Rising

By 1536, the Royal Supremacy was firmly entrenched in statute and the Crown was doing its best to project Henry VIII’s political vision of showcasing him as the head of his kingdom’s temporal and religious affairs. Henry and his chief minister Thomas Cromwell had gone to great lengths extolling the virtues of the Royal Supremacy by justifying his actions through new parliamentary statutes and resurrecting medieval philosophy to reassure those who were skeptical about its merits. The invocation of the Royal Supremacy was seen as a great blow to the standing of the Catholic Church, and many reformers welcomed its diminished position.

However, throughout the realm, many among the clergy, gentry, intellectuals and commoners were deeply upset and even hostile to the new actions the King was taking. The prominent bishop of Rochester John Fisher upbraided the Crown for its unorthodox actions, and he was subsequently charged with treason and executed for his outburst. Prominent figures like the great thinker, and onetime chancellor to the King, Thomas More would later become a prominent critic of the King, despite keeping a tight lid on openly expressing his views lest the Crown try him for treason. However, it was lower level parish clergy from all corners of the country who seemed to be most vehemently opposed to the Royal Supremacy. Opposition to the Reformation statutes seemed to be geographically widespread, but the most intense animosity to the new religious and political order came from the North of England. The reasons why the North as a region was able to foster a climate of resentment towards the Crown are both a result of and also wholly separate from the introduction of the new religious policies. Yet there were
specific actions the Crown took between 1535 and 1536 that helped exacerbate the existing tensions would eventually lead to the uprisings of 1536.

The Lincolnshire Rising and the Pilgrimage of Grace would change the political landscape of the kingdom for the coming years. These two highly consequential uprisings were ultimately triggered by the policy of dissolving the monasteries and friaries of Northern England. The Dissolution of the Monasteries was in many respects one of the fuses that lit the powder keg because the attack on the monasteries was seen by the rebels as an attack on Northern customs and their relationship with the Crown by a ‘southern’ administration that was supposedly heretical and untrue to their idea of Catholicism. The Crown on the other hand thought monasteries had to be abolished because they went against the King’s conception of what Catholicism should be and they were a potential financial and political rival to the Crown because of the value of land and valuable religious ornamentation in their possession and their ties to the Vatican. As such, the Crown thought the monastic houses and abbeys would undermine the principles of the Royal Supremacy as they had the money and political backing to oppose them. In addition, the Crown thought the monasteries represented the essence of what they stood against because they housed friars and abbots who espoused traditional religious orthodoxy. Henry VIII disliked the monasteries and abbeys of the North because they represented what he saw as the corruption and excesses of Catholicism, and therefore as part of his political project, wanted to extinguish the influence they had on Northern religious life. In hindsight, the uprisings of late 1536 seem almost inevitable as both sides seemed to be on opposite ends of an unbridgeable divide.
The Dissolution of the Monasteries began in 1535 under the guise of a ‘visitation’ program, where royal officials would come and examine monasteries’ assets and look into their practices to see if they were in compliance with the new Reformation statutes that had been recently passed. Over the course of the following year, however, the ‘visitation’ phase ended and thus began the actual process of dissolving the monasteries and stripping them bare of all assets. In hindsight, the ‘visitation’ scheme was simply a pretense to take stock of monasteries’ assets so royal officials could get a clearer picture of what assets were available for seizure and more importantly, what the treasury coffers would gain. It was also about the Crown sending a signal to monasteries to reform their corrupt practices, which will be discussed in greater detail. Everything from relics, jewels, furniture, stained glass, images of Christ, and gold ornaments like orbs and candles were confiscated by the Crown. This assault on a centerpiece of Northern communities spurred on the populace to take a forceful stand against the Crown’s actions by the autumn of 1536.³⁵

The Dissolution of the monasteries also accentuated popular fears about heresy that had been building since 1534. Even though the King shunned Lutheranism and Zwinglianism, the combination of the imposition of the Royal Supremacy along with the Crown’s assault on the monasteries, made Northerners believe there was an assault on the collective religious identity of the North. Many northern conservatives thought Henry’s distaste for ‘superstitious’ religious houses was the result of ministers like Thomas Cromwell and Archbishop Thomas Cranmer being in the government, and inculcating the

King with heretical ideas. As they thought the King was being unduly influenced by two individuals they loathed, and therefore conservatives felt they had to act.

The King on the other hand did not believe he was doing anything heretical by dissolving monasteries and friaries. He believed the old religion had to reform, because in his mind at least, it had deviated from what he saw as the “real religion”\(^\text{36}\). The King had little time for the mythology of relics and ornaments that were descended from saints of the past, and dismissed it as fraudulent propagandizing on the part of the local Church establishments. The Crown’s sentiments are best captured in the preamble of the Act of Suppression for Religious Houses of 1535 which alleged that “manifest sin, vicious, carnal and abominable living is daily used and committed among the little and small abbeys, priories and other religious houses of monks, canons, and nuns where the congregation of such religious persons is under the number of twelve persons\(^\text{37}\)…” The first sentence of the Act of Suppression underscores how the King felt about the supposedly deviant ways of the monks and other officials who staffed the religious houses. He proclaims the righteousness of his actions and the purity of his Christianity by calling the keepers of the monasteries sinful and abominable, words that are particularly poignant in the Catholic lexicon. His effort to delegitimize the standing of the abbots and monks throughout the parishes of England had a particular knock on effect in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire.

The King believed he was a godly reformer who had the right to expunge sin from his kingdom. He was able to do that by making his intentions seem relatively benign at

\(^{36}\) Bernard, *The Kings Reformation*, p. 238

first when he ordered the visitations. This was only cover for later actions that would reinforce his antipathy towards superstition that was evident in the actual process of Dissolution, where assets were stripped from religious houses in a manner that was deeply offensive to Northerners. “And albeit that many continual visitations hath been heretofore had, by the space of two hundred years and more, for an honest and charitable reformation of such unthrifty, carnal, and abominable living, yet nevertheless little or none amendment is hitherto had, but their vicious living shamelessly increases and augments, and by a cursed custom so rooted and infected, that a great multitude of the religious persons in such small houses do rather choose to rove abroad in apostasy…”

The Crown sought to contrast itself with past efforts at controlling the monasteries by clamping down even more firmly because unlike past ‘visitations’ where monasteries were given the chance to reform, they had not actually done so. As such, it provided the king with an excuse to crush them for good because he viewed the institutions and those who ran them as carnal and abominable who could not accept his idea of the “true faith”. “The governors of such religious houses, and their convent, spoil, destroy, consume, and utterly waste, as well their churches, monasteries, priories, principal houses, farms, granges, lands, tenements, and hereditaments, as the ornaments of their churches, and their goods and chattels, to the high displeasure of Almighty God, slander of good religion, and to the great infamy of the king’s highness and the realm, if redress should not be had thereof”. In the eyes of those Northerners who would take part in the Pilgrimage, this passage would have made it abundantly clear that the while the King and his ministers saw their efforts as reforming, the North saw the Dissolution of the

38 id.
39 id.
Monasteries an attack on its very identity.

Monasteries and friaries also presented a threat to the Crown when it came to their financial independence. The finances of individual monasteries and abbeys were of great interest and a source of great concern to the authorities because the monetary value of their lands, church ornaments, libraries, and furniture had a role in enabling the Catholic Church to operate as a “state within a state” for many centuries. Henry and his ministers did not look kindly on the fact that Papal authority was buttressed by great wealth that was on full display in these religious houses, and as such viewed their presence as a ‘fifth column’ along with the monks and abbots who ran them. While the Crown’s calculations about the monasteries’ intentions rested on speculation, there was serious concern that the monks and friars who inhabited these religious houses would use their wealth and position to sponsor an armed invasion of the realm, with the Catholic armies of Spain or France at its head.

To enhance the Royal Supremacy financially and counter the perceived threat from abroad, the Crown set up the Court of Augmentation, a body that developed into a powerful office under the Chancellor’s purview responsible for managing the assets of the dissolved monasteries, friaries, and nunnerys, and using the proceeds at the Crown’s behest. The establishment of the Court of Augmentation in a sense completed the circle in Henry’s mind, that he could control the levers of financial, political, and social power throughout all spheres of his kingdom because it was his destiny to do so. With the passage of the Act of Supremacy, the king was able to establish his authority in law sanctioned by parliament, and elevate himself to a position where he could reign supreme.

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until his last days. However, the confiscation of what future rebels saw as their collective property would play a large part in triggering the rebellions of 1536.

The dissolution of the monasteries seemed to confirm many Northern conservatives’ worst fears about the King’s designs for his kingdom, in that he would bring about radical religious change that would leave many in the realm feeling dispossessed, insecure, and with a yearning to restore the old order. Surely enough, the very strong yearning to restore the old order did come about in the form of two very significant, but different rebellions that was the first of several religiously motivated rebellions that would bedevil the English monarchy for decades to come.

This begs the question, what was so unique about the North of England that led that particular region to take their grievances further than any other region of the country, to actually mount a revolt that came perilously close to challenging the very legitimacy of Henry VIII’s reign? The vehement opposition to the Royal Supremacy could be found across the length and breadth of the land, so on that basis alone, one can conclude that the opportunities for rebellion could have come from anywhere. One of the principle reasons the North of England was more susceptible to a more intense backlash against the new religious and political innovations was because the North did not experience the same level of exposure to reformist political, intellectual, and theological currents that were emanating from Continental Europe, and even in England itself\footnote{Mervyn James; \textit{Obedience and Dissent in Henrician England: The Lincolnshire Rebellion of 1536} (Oxford, 1970), p.4}. The inability of reformist thought to gain a foothold in political and religious discourse in this region allowed traditional religious values to hold sway and made the population more antagonistic to ideas they perceived as threatening to their way of life. The North’s
antagonism to religious innovations was first seen in the opposition to the Act of Supremacy, but it was inflamed even further when the Crown started dissolving many of the North’s cherished monasteries and abbeys, institutions that had been central to Northern religious life for centuries.

Geography had an important role to play in explaining the reasons why the North was more susceptible to rebellion. The counties of Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, where the rebellions of 1536 erupted, are farther away from mainland Europe than the area around London, where traders, intellectuals, and even common folk had the most contact with Europeans importing reformist thought from Luther’s Germany and from Zurich, where Ulrich Zwingli resided. It was also true that the North had fewer trading links with the European mainland than the Southeast of the country. As such, members of the merchant classes made London their base and as a result, the most lucrative and dense trade networks existed from there to the Continent, mainly bypassing the North. The comparative lack of casual human contact between merchants, intellectuals, and other individuals who imported reformist ideas strongly influenced by humanism or evangelical theology with everyday people in the Northern counties allowed religious orthodoxy to maintain its grip there, thus producing greater hostility to the Royal Supremacy and the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

The institutions that were most essential to propagating reformist ideas were universities. One fundamental reason why reformist ideas did not take hold in the North was because England’s two great universities were located in the South. To fully underscore how the South became more sympathetic to reformist ideas than the North, it

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is worth examining how universities successfully propagated new ideas. Cambridge was home to a group of reformist clergy, including Thomas Cranmer, who would go on to become Archbishop of Canterbury. Reformist dons were able to disseminate their ideas into the surrounding vicinity, thus fostering a new intellectual climate that challenged the orthodoxies of the period. Due to the university’s position at the heart of East Anglia, the region would become increasingly important in the overall process of Protestantization in England and would later become home to the Puritan movement. The lack of institutions of higher learning in Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and the North in general resulted in that region of England being unable to foster an environment for scholars to debate and subsequently legitimize reformist ideas.

A distinguishing characteristic of religious life in Northern England was the presence of very old and well-established friaries and monasteries that formed a critical part of local religious life. It is important to remember that most commoners did not live in areas where many of the more prominent Cathedrals like York or Lincoln were located, and thus the only contact they had with religious officials were in smaller villages that played host to these smaller institutions. While the bishops and vicars who ran the larger dioceses had a more removed relationship with their congregations due to their elevated positions, the officials who ran the abbeys, monasteries, and friaries embodied the pastoral care system that the Catholic Church had developed through the centuries. Abbeys and monasteries also served an important purpose in Northern counties in that they served as resting places for travelers making long road journeys. Officials in monasteries and abbeys allowed travelers to stay within their confines and they gave them food and drink. It is also worth noting that many monasteries, abbeys, and friaries
had existed in certain communities since Anglo-Saxon times, further underscoring how central they were to Northern life.43

The common folk of all English counties, not just in the North, relied on these priests and abbots to provide for them in relation to marriage, baptisms, death and spiritual guidance in general. It wasn’t just the pastoral system that Northerners held on to dearly, despite all of the corruption that took place at the local parish level. By and large people were very attached to their local religious houses. The divide that existed between reformist intellectuals and commoners over the importance of relics is an important one as the former thought they were unnecessary and deviating from what Catholicism really required whereas the common folk thought the opposite and that relics were holy and whose value could not be questioned44. The Catholic hierarchy effectively propagated the notion that many of the holy relics displayed prominently in churches throughout the North of England were originally the property of saints, martyrs, and even Jesus Christ himself. Catholic priests did nothing to dispute engrained ideas local people had about ancient relics, like the belief that physical remains such as bones were tangible manifestations of Christ’s presence in their communities. What ultimately caused the rebellions of 1536 was a visceral reaction to what was perceived as being a radical transformation to a religious identity that people held on to. The Crown’s seizure of what was considered church property and the seizure of sacred ornaments and relics was seen to be a treacherous breach of tradition that had held sway for the preceding centuries, and further reinforced concerns that the King was usurping this constitutional role by interfering in Church affairs.

43 Bernard, The Kings Reformation, p. 249
44 ibid.
Opposition finally exploded on the 2nd of October 1536 in Lincolnshire. The festering grievances boiled over first in the town of Louth when a band of men assembled to demand an end to the religious policies Henry and his ministers were instituting and the restoration of what they saw as the “true faith”\(^{45}\). The events in Lincolnshire were triggered by reports that Crown representatives had come to Lincolnshire to confiscate ornaments, relics, jewels, and to ferret out tax money that parish churches had failed to pay up.\(^{46}\) These unsubstantiated rumors began circulating around the county and finally by the time the Crown commissioners reached Lincoln Cathedral on the 2nd of October, a band of nearly 10,000 upstart rebels who had clearly been visibly disturbed by the series of religious changes taking place met the commissioners at the Cathedral and sought to have them reverse the unjust taxation and religious policies\(^ {47}\). The presence of so many incensed and concerned religious conservatives at Lincoln Cathedral does seem quite dramatic but given the hostility to the religious policies taking place, it is feasible that such a large band of disaffected individuals felt compelled to make their complaints heard to the commissioners, and by extension, the Crown.

The Lincolnshire Rising was the first stage in the succession of religiously motivated uprisings that took place in 1536-37, and the Rising’s grievances were similar to many of the demands later put forward in the Pilgrimage of Grace. This shows that Northern grievances against the Crown tended to be read from the same hymn sheet. While both represented a ferocious backlash against what was perceived to be an assault on the political and religious identity of Northern England, by the Crown and a cabal of

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\(^{45}\) Andy Wood, _Riot, Rebellion and Popular Politics in Early Modern England_ (Basingstoke, 2002), p.50

\(^{46}\) ibid, 51.

\(^{47}\) ibid, 52.
Southern reformist ministers, there are important structural differences between the two that will be discussed in greater detail.

The rebels, under the leadership of a cobbler, Nicholas Melton accused the commissioners of being agents of the Crown out to do the region harm and that the Crown was imposing illegal taxes, which had not been levied by Parliament\textsuperscript{48}. The rebels in Lincoln accused the royal commissioners of trying to levy illegal taxes because they were not approved in Parliament, and thus it was an abuse of power on the King’s part. Unlike previous instances of conservative opposition to Royal policies, common folk who happened to be conservatives were physically making their anger at the consolidation of power and its abuse directly known to royal representatives. The Lincolnshire Rising was an interesting contrast to the previous examples of dissent coming from universities, clergymen, and philosophers like Thomas More. The rebel army gathered at Lincoln in October 1536 also accused the commissioners who came into the town of being aiders and abettors of a suspect Royal Court and endorsing the policies of Thomas Cromwell and Thomas Cranmer, who were using their undue influence on the king to pursue ‘heretical’ policies\textsuperscript{49}.

As an initial show of force, all but one of the tax commissioners were beaten and hanged and their remains were left out in public for all to see. The site of Lincoln as the first act of rebellion against the Crown is interesting considering its Bishop, John Longland was seen as a conservative and was trying to ferret out evangelical preachers from his diocese. As the rebels sought to rid the kingdom of the same malign presence, it

\textsuperscript{48} Anthony Fletcher \& Diarmaid MacCulloch, \textit{Tudor Rebellions}, (London, 2008), pp.29-31

\textsuperscript{49} ibid.
is appropriate that the opening shot of the 1536 rebellion happened there. Furthermore, it may be that the image of a conservative rebel army guarding a medieval cathedral played perfectly into the notion that the rebels were guarding religious tradition from a Crown looking to reverse religious ancient and still revered religious traditions. It is also important to note that the Lincolnshire rebels called for the restoration of the monasteries and an end to extra-legislative taxation in front of the Cathedral where Bishop Longland sat. How appropriate that the rebels sought to rally support for a conservative cause in front of a Cathedral that was the base for another of the Crown’s conservative opponents.

Another important feature about the Lincolnshire Rising is the issue of social class. Despite the fact that the uprising consisted of ordinary people from shoemakers, butchers, and all manner of people doing menial jobs, the gentry sought to jump on to the uprising bandwagon, if one can call it that, because it also presented a medium by which their own grievances could be conveyed to the Crown. While it is accepted that the gentry did have a role to play in the Lincolnshire Rising, historians disagree about what that role was, and whether any of two groups was truly in control of events. One secondary account written by Michael Bush in his piece on the Lincolnshire Rising, do seem to point to the commoners holding sway in the proceedings\(^{50}\). As this was the first outbreak of such magnitude during Henry’s reign many members of the gentry were worried about rebelling too fervently because there seemed to be some apprehension as to what the Crown’s response might be. That sentiment was reflected in the calculations of the gentry as there was general apprehension in giving their backing to the commons because of concerns of violating the new treason laws passed in 1534.

\(^{50}\) ibid, 41.
Even though there was concern amongst the gentry of being prosecuted for treason for taking part in the Lincolnshire Rising, many of these gentry folk were on the same side as ordinary commoners against the imposition of the new legislation because it violated their interpretations of the English “constitution”. This was the view taken by Robert Aske, the leader of the Pilgrimage of Grace who claimed to be speaking for both the Lincolnshire rebels and the Pilgrims in his exposition on maintaining the ‘commonwealth’. It is also ironic that while the Crown was concerned about new media by which their opponents might be committing treason or sedition, the example of the Lincolnshire rebellion provided an example where its subjects, both commoner and gentry were committing treason the old fashioned way, and would have been violating the old medieval definitions of the offence. As will be explored in the next chapter, the rebels did not see themselves as committing treason because their “aim” was to remove the malign influence of heretical ministers and therefore return Henry back to his original principles of supporting traditional Roman Catholicism.

While the Lincolnshire Rising did seem potent when it first broke out early in October 1536, the reason it disintegrated within two weeks of breaking out was because of a lack of cohesiveness and trust between the gentry and the common folk. The gentry were concerned that their association with rebellious commoners might cost them influence at court or worse their heads, and commoners thought that the gentry would try and sell them short for exactly the same reasons. Compared with the Pilgrimage of Grace which will soon be covered expansively, this particular rebellion’s climax seemed to be the march on Lincoln Cathedral, but within days people started to leave the rebel gathering and go back to their respective towns and villages. The threat of armed
intervention by the King, who threatened to send the Duke of Suffolk’s regular troops to disperse the rebels was met with seriousness and as such, many of those who participated fled or captured were forced to pay the ultimate price with death by hanging for taking up arms against the monarch. By the 14th of October, the Lincolnshire Rising had fizzled out51.

While the Lincolnshire Rising was but the opening salvo in a longer campaign against the Crown that would last into the winter of 1537, its suppression did not in any way dampen the red-hot anger that many throughout the Northeastern quadrant of the kingdom felt towards the religious policies being implemented over the previous two years. As such, the failure of Lincolnshire helped usher in the principal uprising of King Henry VIII’s reign: the Pilgrimage of Grace. The Pilgrimage was in many respects more dangerous than the Lincolnshire Rising because it was better organized, its numbers were larger, and it seemed to have more committed aristocratic support. Additionally, the sophisticated use of oaths, badges, the reciting of ballads, and signing declarations seemed to be a much more overt rebuke to the Crown, because the Pilgrims seemed to be using methods that mimicked what Henry sought to do with his own subjects: getting them to profess their loyalty to the cause. The shrewd tactics used by the Pilgrims along with the symbolism they used to underpin their cause made it the most dangerous rebellion of Henry VIII’s reign.

Chapter 4: The Pilgrimage of Grace

The Crown under Henry VIII faced its greatest challenge of legitimacy in the Pilgrimage of Grace. An uprising of thousands of people angry at the course its rulers were taking began a months long uprising that sought to redress grievances that had begun with the divorce from Catherine of Aragon and the invocation of the Act of Supremacy in 1534. The increasing concentration of power in the Crown had unnerved many throughout Northern England. The severing of ties with the Catholic Church and the steady erosion of Papal influence made disaffected individuals from all social backgrounds in that region feel especially under assault. The usurpation of religious power by the king made religious conservatives feel especially aggrieved because the monarch had unilaterally seized the authority delegated to the Roman Pontiff by God.

As the religious and temporal head of the kingdom, Henry VIII used his self created, yet newfound authority to take an additional series of decisions that prompted him to extirpate his kingdom of the remaining vestiges of Papal rule. This culminated in a sweeping program of dissolving monasteries that Henry saw as being representative of the superstition associated with the corrupted nature of Roman Catholicism. In addition, the King also saw monasteries as an ‘enemy within’ because of their financial wealth that could be used to undermine the pillars of Royal Supremacy. Henry thought this body of religious institutions would use its close spiritual links with the Vatican to stealthily undermine his rule by spreading an ideology contrary to his own. Religious conservatives through the North, but especially in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire saw the Dissolution of the Monasteries as the last straw in a lengthening list of breaches the Crown had committed against the ancient “constitution”. The idea of the traditional English
“constitution” was important to religious conservatives because it protected traditional religion from outside influence, or ‘heresy’ and it kept the monarch, while an important figure, from treading too heavily on the traditional role of the Church.

There were many sparks that eventually led to the outbreak of the Pilgrimage of Grace, but besides the passage of the Reformation statutes of 1534 and the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the emergence of the Ten Articles as the theological framework of the new Church of England also provoked intense anger from conservatives who would later go on to rebel. The significance of the Ten Articles as a trigger of the Pilgrimage is interesting because many of the items listed in the document are conservative by nature and adhere strongly to the traditions of the Catholic Church.52 However, the more conservative aspects of the Ten Articles have to do with what Henry and his ministers believed were core tenets of the Christian faith: baptism, the Eucharist, justification by faith, works, and penance. The more reformist articles that the Pilgrims objected to dealt with the usage and importance of images, saint worship, holidays, and soul pardoning.

The conservative nature of the Ten Articles is all the more ironic given that the Ten Articles were thought to have been compiled by Thomas Cranmer, not one known for his conservative theological views. The effect the Ten Articles had in setting the wheels of rebellion in motion is all the more surprising considering that this was in many ways a compromise document that came out of a Convocation in 1536, which was presided over by Cromwell to try and move away from the orthodoxy of the Church, but temper the liturgy in such a way as to not provoke too much of a backlash that would

threaten the King’s position as the pre-eminent ruler. Unfortunately for both Henry and Cromwell, this seemingly ‘moderate’ document, while not evangelical in substance, was still met with profound hostility from conservatives.

The first three articles of the document closely resemble traditional Catholic doctrine. The first article says: “The faithful shall be instructed by clergy by the Gospel and ye must abide by the whole Body of the Bible and the Council of Nicea. All things necessary for salvation must be done and all opinions contrary to the said articles must be condemned”\(^{53}\). How the rebels could have rebelled at seeing this particular article is astounding because it says to accept the rulings of the Council of Nicea, the conference that established the first liturgical and administrative structures in Roman Catholicism. The article also says to accept the role of the clergy in disseminating theology, and to not advocate for self-study of the Bible, which was a central tenet of evangelical thought.

Furthermore, it endorses all of the traditional means at achieving salvation, and makes no reference to attaining salvation purely by ‘justification by faith alone’. The second and third articles, while still relatively orthodox, do leave more gray area for interpretation. “The Holy Sacrament of baptism must be that ordained in the New Testament. Children need be baptized because they are born with original sin. Refute the Anabaptists.\(^{54}\)” The second article upholds the belief in traditional baptism and also rejects adhering to more radical opinions on the subject that were being propagated by Anabaptists. The part refuting Anabaptists is important because it is proof that Henry and his ministers did not approve of the more radical evangelicals because they thought their views went against what they saw as the core tenets of the faith. Even though this article negates the

\(^{53}\) id.
\(^{54}\) id.
principles of the Anabaptists, the Crown’s disavowal of what was a widely hated and very radical evangelical group did not suffice for those conservatives angry with the Crown’s policies.

However, the reference towards adherence to a literal interpretation of scripture, in this case the New Testament, does provide tacit support of a ‘protestant’ concept because Protestants on the Continent used the New Testament as their guide for what should influence liturgical practice. Yet, the Third Article reverts back to a conservative tone where it says “penance is necessary for salvation”\(^{55}\), an orthodox principle. The Fourth Article says that the “Altar be presented in the orthodox way in that bread and wine turn into body and blood.”\(^{56}\) This item is perhaps the most important in underscoring the document’s conservative nature because the Mass was considered the cornerstone of Catholic liturgy. This particular requirement is very much in line with traditional theology because it does not depart from the traditional Catholic view on the Eucharist, and does not even tacitly endorse the Lutheran idea of Consubstantiation, which says that Christ is already present at the Altar, but has not been transformed in front of the congregation. The King’s endorsement of traditional Mass alone gives the Ten Articles a conservative bent. The Fifth Article is the embodiment of a compromise between more evangelically minded clergy and conservatives. “Justification by faith is a tenet, but this must be coupled with charity which is equally important.”\(^{57}\) The issue of justification by faith alone is central to Lutheran theology, but here it mentions that faith

\(^{55}\) id.  
\(^{56}\) id.  
\(^{57}\) id.
in God is vital to being a true Christian, but good works are important as well, a notion central to traditional Catholicism which would have been seen as anathema to Lutherans.

While the first five of Ten Articles were mostly conservative items that did leave some room for reformist interpretation, the last five articles do have more of a reformed air to them because they reflected the King’s views and also Cromwell and Cranmer’s reservations on the more ‘superstitious’ aspects of traditional Catholicism. The sixth article says “that images are useful as remembrances, but are not objects of worship”\(^{58}\). This item would have been regarded as a provocative statement by conservatives because image worship was engrained in liturgical practice and it was sanctioned by the Vatican, which in their eyes was the Supreme religious authority, not the King. The seventh and eighth articles have to do with saints. The articles allow remembrance of saints for what they did when they were alive and permit the celebration of holidays commemorating them. However, these articles make no mention of worshipping the saints themselves, which makes it reasonable to assume the Ten Articles did not permit the practice.

Henry and his principal ministers disliked saint worship because it was perceived to be a theological innovation and was excessively superstitious. As a potential compromise position, they inserted the eighth article stating that observing certain holidays commemorating saints was permissible in the new Church. The ninth article states that ceremonies “are to be observed for their mystical signification, and as conducive to devotion”\(^{59}\). This article can be interpreted as being either reformist or conservative because it all depends on what ceremony the worshipper was interested in performing. However, the final article delivers the most vocal critique of all to the

\(^{58}\) id.  
\(^{59}\) id.
superstition of the ‘old religion’. “That prayers for the dead are good and useful, but the efficacy of papal pardon, and of soul-masses offered at certain localities, is negative”.  

This particular item would have caused a furore with conservatives because it is written as an attack on a tradition that existed in English liturgical practice for a long time. The fact that Convocation, presided over by the King and his ministers could thereby nullify the practice and declare it unworthy, caused great offence.

The Ten Articles provide a blueprint as to how the Crown wanted to conceive the new Church of England, a body that would remain relatively conservative in its theology, but would also infuse more reformist ideas that had the blessing of the King. In a broader context, the effort to infuse the Ten Articles with reformist language in certain places was perhaps an attempt to try and reach out to Protestant principalities on the Continent in the aftermath of England severing ties with Rome. The Ten Articles were in effect used as a geopolitical tool for the new English Church so the Crown could test the waters for allies.

While not endorsing evangelical Protestantism, the Ten Articles was used to ‘advertise’ Henry’s reformist credentials with German princes to ally against England’s new adversary, the Pope. Even though the Ten Articles was a conservative document and was nowhere close to resembling Lutheran or Zwinglian theology, it was used intelligently to try and carve out a theological/political niche for the Crown so it could gain maximum room for maneuver in the new European political environment. Despite the fact that the Ten Articles was a conservative document, it gave King’s conservative opponents an opening to attack them as being deviant and heretical because they did not conform to the letter with the practices of the Roman Catholic Church.

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60 id.
To provide context as to why many English conservatives in the 1530’s took such offence at the introduction of the Ten Articles, it is important to examine the esteemed historian Eamon Duffy’s work *The Stripping of the Altars*. This work presents a Catholic perspective on the importance of liturgical practices in the 14th to 16th centuries. For late medieval Christians, the traditional liturgy provided guidance by way of spectacle, instruction, and communal context. As the liturgy was so fundamental and embedded in the collective psyche of faithful Christians, any perceived alteration or disruption to carefully choreographed and practiced ceremonies was deemed highly destabilizing. This was most true of the Mass.

Understanding the importance of the mass is crucial to coming to terms with how and why conservatives reacted so adversely to the introduction of the Ten Articles. Even though the text in the Ten Articles supports the practice of Mass, and Henry himself remained thoroughly committed to the Mass, other Catholic rites were altered to varying degrees, which is what caused most of the anger over the Ten Articles. For example, conservatives were angered about traditions that were altered like saint worship and others that were abolished like worshipping souls. To the Crown, these changes were deemed necessary because these were the first steps in the longer journey of purifying religion from the corruption and bad practices of previous centuries. For those who would partake in the Pilgrimage of Grace, the changes both large and small that were made in Ten the Articles were deemed a step too far.

The grievances over the Ten Articles, the Royal Supremacy, the divorce to Catherine of Aragon, and the Dissolution of the Monasteries, among other issues helped

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produce a coalition of rebels form all social spheres that would come forward to rise
against the Crown. Their grievances were of course religious, but they were also secular.
Non-religious grievances mainly stemmed from issues over taxation and changes to law,
and one particular tax a group of rebels hated was the Statute of Uses, which hampered
their ability to use legal loopholes to reduce their inheritance tax dues. Those who
participated in the Pilgrimage of Grace wished to strongly air all manner of grievances by
marching against the Crown, and the coalition of aristocrats, gentlemen, and commoners
were able to show, on the surface at least, that they were rebelling in common cause at
what they saw as a religious and political regression taking place in the Kingdom. They
saw the Pilgrimage of Grace as their chance to try and get the King and his ministers to
fix ‘injustices’ so that they could remain loyal subjects and live harmoniously. To
accomplish that goal, however, they had no choice but to rebel.

As discussed previously, the first step in the months-long rebellion of 1536 began
with an uprising in Lincolnshire, where the first set of overt demands by religious
conservatives were made to the Crown to reverse the religious policies recently
implemented. The aftermath of the Lincolnshire Rising made it clear that the grievances
that had been festering since the early 1530s had reached a breaking point, and the new
religious innovations would no longer be tolerated. For Northern religious conservatives,
the struggle against what they saw as an encroachment on traditional religion was quite
clearly a struggle over identity. The stakes were so high for both sides that the very future
of what it meant to be English was at a crossroads: would England remain another
country in Western Europe that had a monarch manage its temporal affairs, with all the
trappings of authority and blessings that came from the Vatican, but still subservient to it
in the matter of religion? Or, would the country begin to see itself as purely a shadow of
the monarch’s secular and religious convictions, and lose all sense of its dual identity as
faithful subjects to their King and Pope?

As discussed previously, Henry’s motives for instituting these changes were
nakedly political in that he wanted to tighten his grip on power and firmly establish the
Tudors as a long running dynasty. Many reform minded people were able to live with this
as they too wanted to see Papal rule end. Yet, those who took part in the Pilgrimage of
Grace did not want to witness the erosion in the dual nature of English government and
identity. To them, the monarch and the Pope filled important spheres that had to stay
independently powerful, but distinct. The King’s moves to usurp the latter’s position
were a huge affront to the Pilgrim’s idea of governance because the monarch was
bestowed with his authority by the Pope, and therefore Henry’s attempts to push the Pope
out of English governance completely was a line not to be crossed.

Those participating in the Pilgrimage of Grace had very similar demands to those
participating in the Lincolnshire rebellion, but the former was much larger in scale, more
sophisticated in organization, and made more potent use of symbolism like oath taking
and signing declarations. In effect, the Pilgrimage of Grace challenged the very
foundations of the King’s grip on the throne though it is also very important to note that
while the Pilgrims sought to challenge the Crown, they did not want to abolish the
monarchy or overthrow the king and replace him with someone else. This rationale
stemmed from the perception that the King was being made to commit heretical acts
under the malign influence of Thomas Cromwell, and not out of his own volition.
Legislation that they viewed as the creation, not of the King, but of Thomas Cromwell, the Pilgrims *bête noir*, had to be reversed.

The Pilgrims loathed Cromwell because he was “low-born” and was strongly suspected of inculcating the King with evangelical ideas. As such, the strength of feeling against the King’s chief minister was so intense that they felt compelled to rebel against the highest authority, defying morality and their loyalty to the King himself and the institution of the monarchy to try and reverse the legislation they thought was a threat to their interests. The person who was able to rally the Pilgrims and outline an agenda for pushing back against what they saw as ‘heresy’ was Robert Aske, a Yorkshire lawyer who used his political skills to present what seemed like a united Northern front against a series of southern-inspired policies aimed at undermining northerners’ traditional religion.

To reinforce the idea that the Pilgrims were taking part in a struggle for identity, Robert Aske and his followers made very effective use of articles, oaths, pledges, and ballads. Unlike the Lincolnshire Rising, which by comparison seemed like a large mob shouting demands, the Pilgrims made their demands more targeted and in writing. The first set of demands made in writing by the Pilgrims to the Crown were made in York on the 15th of October 1536, only a day or two after the Lincolnshire Rising disintegrated. Robert Aske compiled a list of demands that he gave to the Mayor of York to gauge the reaction of an official who was in effect subordinate to the Crown. After the Pilgrimage was set in motion, the rebels were able to articulate their grievances in a further series of written demands, pledges, and oaths.
The York Articles of 1536 embodied the manifold grievances that people from all social stations across the North had been holding towards the Crown for the previous two years. The demand to reverse the Dissolution of the Monasteries was the very first demand made of the Crown, probably because it was the most recent infraction the Crown committed, and was condemned by all sections of society participating in the Pilgrimage. The York Articles state that “The Suppression of so many religious houses as are at this instant tyme suppressed, whereby the service of our God is not well maintained but also the commons of yor realme be unrelyved, the which as we think is a gret hurt to the common welthe and many sisters be put from their levyings and left at large”.62

This first demand underscores the depth of animosity the North felt towards the Crown with regards to dissolving the monasteries because it went against their notions of traditional piety, because without the monasteries, “the service to their God would not be well maintained”63 In addition, the rebels felt that the attack on the charitable role the monasteries played was dangerous. Robert Aske portrays the King and his government as being out of touch with the lives of his subjects in Yorkshire. Aske also believed that the Crown had no regard for the Northern religious tradition of monasteries providing a secular role in the administration of care within their communities. The implicit message to the Crown is that it is a mistake to think that monasteries are purely an embodiment of superstition and religious backwardness. In fact, Aske states that monasteries and nunneries along with the people who run them provide real stability and a degree of security for people. Aske’s endorsement of religious houses in Northern England

62 The York Articles, Letters and Papers of Henry VIII, xi, 705 (1)
63 id.
performing this secular function also serves as a rebuke to the arrogant Royal position of looking down on Northern religious tradition.

The second demand raised the issue of the Statute of Uses, where the King used parliamentary statute to clamp down on the number of exemptions a small number of wealthy landowners from the nobility and gentry could use to limit paying taxes on inheritances. The aim of the Statute of Uses, like the Dissolution of the Monasteries to a large extent, was to raise as much revenue for the Crown, which would help cement the King’s position as the pre-eminent political power in England. Robert Aske included this as item two in the York Articles because he seems to think that this was an affront to English liberties in that it was unjust for a king to levy such high taxes that would penalize his subjects. “The second article is that we humbly beseeche your grace that the acte of use may be suppressed because we think by the said act we your true subjects be clearly restrayned of your liberties in the declaration of our wylles, concernying our lands, as well as for payment on dettes, for doing of your grace service, as for helping and alevying of our children…the which as we think is a gret hurt to the commonwealth.”

The invocation of the word commonwealth is important because Aske feels the Pilgrims are doing a service to the entire English nation’s financial well being by protesting the Statute of Uses. There is a tension in his claim to be representing the welfare of the entire kingdom, because he seeks the repeal of a tax that actually hurt very few people. This gives one the impression that maybe Aske was trying to use the genuinely felt religious grievances of the common folk, to advance the economic and political interests of gentlemen and aristocrats. The truth is that the dynamic was more complicated than that,

64 id.
but the tensions between Pilgrims of different social classes plays an important role in the broader narrative of the rebellion.

The fourth demand raised in the York Articles also provides fascinating insight into the mindset of the rebels. Their aversion to the King taking counsel from those who were deemed to be “low born” such as Thomas Cromwell is noticeable in this particular section. The rebels’ antipathy to Cromwell did not stem from their dislike of his suspected evangelical theological views alone. Many of the rebels, whose sentiments were embodied by Aske, seemed to be against any violation of the hierarchical construct that defined the class structure of English society. They also had strong suspicions that officials like Thomas Cromwell were using their influence to secure financial advantage from the policies the Crown was enacting, like the Dissolution of Monasteries because they did not have money of their own, and sought to pocket the revenue gained from them. “The IVth article is that we yor true subjects thinke that yor grace takes of yor counsel and being a boute you such persons as be of low byrth and small reputation which hath procuryed the profits most especially for theyr own advantage, the which we suspect to be the Lord Cromwell and Sir Richard Riche Chancellor of the Augmentations.” The rebels’ criticisms of Henry taking his counsel from people who came from outside noble family lines and who worked their way into government by merit only underscores the nature of their conservatism.

Not only do the rebels’ initial demands further substantiate the true depth of their religious conservatism, it seems that this particular demand and the overall sentiment about the presence of talented ministers like Cromwell and Rich also give voice to the

65 id.
66 id.
depth of their social conservatism as well. While Henry VIII believed in a social order where everyone, religious or temporal was subordinate to him, that mindset did allow him to promote people in his government who did not come from a similar pedigree to him because he knew that as long as they were loyal to him and the idea of the Royal Supremacy, they would not do anything to undermine his own authority. The rebels, led by Robert Aske, seemed to worry about the people in government who came from more modest backgrounds because of their desire to use government as a means of promoting themselves at the expense of more established figures.

It is ironic that Robert Aske would have concerned himself with the socioeconomic status of Cromwell and Rich because he himself was of relatively modest background himself, as a country lawyer from Yorkshire. Reading this particular section of the York Articles gives one the impression that Aske was perhaps being made to do the aristocracy’s bidding in pushing for more “liberties” simply because Henry was not making room for disaffected landowners and gentry at Court. If the King had included those nobles in his government, perhaps ‘heresy’ would not have been used as a vehicle to protest, and the rebellion would not have gathered as much momentum and potency as it did.

The Pilgrimage of Grace was therefore not only a rebellion over religious identity, but also one that had all the hallmarks of a class-inspired uprising. The Crown’s, and more specifically Cromwell’s fears that the uprising was instigated and financed by aristocratic opponents of the King will be covered in full in the following chapter. We will see how Thomas Cromwell’s interrogations of Robert Aske in the Tower of London

67 id.
sought evidence of a conspiracy to force changes on the Crown that would advance the aristocracy’s interests. As Chief Minister to the King, Cromwell had the duty of maintaining stability in the realm. He needed to figure out if the wealthier and better connected figures participating in the rebellion were doing so out of purely religious fervor, or were also using religious language as cover for political reasons, factional ambition, or pure resentment, labeling Cromwell a religious heretic in order to force him out of power. Hatred for Cromwell stemmed from the fact that he was of suspect religious orientation to say the least, and that he had risen so rapidly through the Court that he made religious and political enemies.

The leaders Pilgrimage of Grace made very notable use of oaths and symbols to give legitimacy to their cause. To solidify the perception that the Pilgrims were carrying forward a serious alternative vision of English society, the use of symbols and oaths seemed necessary to compete with the state apparatus that gave legitimacy by default to the Crowns efforts at imposing the Royal Supremacy. The utilization of the Five Wounds of Christ badge and the Oath of Honourable Men to highlight the rebels ideological bent, suggests some of the emotional, symbolic, as well as intellectual grievances and identities of the rebels. The use of the badge and the Oath gave the rebels cause an air of seriousness and righteousness that gave them the psychological courage to take on the power of the King. The willingness to confront the monarch is apparent, as the Oath completely rejects the notion that monarchical power can usurp the role the Catholic Church had in the lives of Englishmen. The text of the Oath along with the image of the Five Wounds makes it clear that the Pilgrims had to embark on an obligatory mission to

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purify the Church and restore it to its former glory and independence from monarchical control, and restore the ‘separation’ of Church and the State.

“Ye shall not enter into this our Pilgrimage of Grace for the Commonwealth, but only for the love that ye bear into almighty God his faith, and to Holy Church militant and the maintenance thereof…”69, the oath begins. This line is a confirmation of the Pilgrims willingness to agitate to force the King to restore the old religion. Importantly as well, Aske says that even though they were fighting for the rights and liberties of all people of the realm (The Commonwealth), the Pilgrims should act out of love of God, and not just for their individual fellow countrymen. This is a fitting example of how emotive Aske’s language could be to rally his followers. He had to invoke the phrase “doing god’s work” to inspire them and instill in them the courage to follow through with their stated aims.

The following few lines reinforce this sentiment that the rebels act out of a sense of altruism to restore the dignity of the Church. “And that ye shall not enter into our said Pilgrimage for no particular profit to yourself, nor do any displeasure to any private person, but by counsel of the commonwealth…and in your hearts His faith, the Restitution of the Church, the suppression of there heretics and their opinions, by all the holy contents of this book.”70 This line also serves as an extra dig at Cromwell, whose pursuit of private gain is contrasted to the Pilgrim’s commitment to the public good. In another swipe at Cromwell, Robert Aske’s oath conveys the idea that being a true Christian requires selfless service to God and it is an obligation for followers of the ‘true religion’ to uproot heretics and expose their ideas as fallacy. Aske uses the

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69 The Oath of Honorable Men, *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII, xi, 705 (4)*
70 id.
‘Commonwealth’ to frame the argument because yet again he needs to convince his troops of the rebellion’s merits by convincing them that they are advancing the best interests, or common ‘weal’, or welfare of the people.

Additionally, the image of the Five Wounds of Christ is potent because it evokes the memory of Christ’s crucifixion and the rebels hoped to utilize that evocative image to convey the impression they were carrying on a divine task of resisting Crown sponsored heresy and the willful destruction of ‘traditional religion’ much to the effect Jesus was resisting Roman persecution. Wearing the Five Wounds badge would give an observer, whether sympathetic or hostile to the Pilgrimage, the impression that one was trying to carry themselves as spiritually uncorrupted disciples of Christ. Wearing the Five Wounds of Christ on their clothes was another message by the rebels to say that they were “true” Christians and the Crown was pushing a heretical agenda.

The Ballad on the Pilgrimage of Grace\textsuperscript{71} also elaborates the objectives the Pilgrims hoped to achieve and how they envisaged English society. From the stanzas throughout the ballad, it is clear the rebels envisioned a society that adhered to the Catholic Church and a society in which the King did not abuse his ‘constitutional’ powers. The demands made of the King in the ballad mimic those made in the York Articles and the Oath of Honourable Men, which reveal that the rebels’ demands were constant but that they came up with different means to disseminate their propaganda to as wide an audience as possible. This would have created the conditions for the rebel cause to garner as much conservative public support as possible to force the Crown to revert to the pre-1534 status

\textsuperscript{71} The Ballad on the Pilgrimage of Grace, 1536, in Mary Bateson (ed.), “The Pilgrimage of Grace” and “Aske’s Examination”, \textit{English Historical Review}, vol. 5 (1890), pp.330-45, 550-73
quo, where the King as an equal partner with the Pope in running the affairs of the Kingdom. “Christ crucified/, for thy woundes wide/, us commons guide!/ Which Pilgrimmes be/, through gods grace/, for to purchase/, old wealth and peace./ of the spiritulaitie.” This particular stanza re-iterates up the desire by the Pilgrims to restore the old religion to the body politics of the kingdom, and they convince themselves of their righteousness because their mission was ordained by God. “Crim, Crame, and Rich, with ere ell and the liche as sum men teache. God them amend! And that Aske may, without delay, here make a stay and well to end!” The implicit message in this verse of the ballad says that Cromwell, Cranmer, and Richard Rich are responsible for spreading a false heresy and sooner or later they will be forced to change their ways to return to the true faith by divine intervention, and the persistence of the rebel cause.

While the York Articles, the Oath of Honourable Men, and the Ballad on the Pilgrimage of Grace serve as examples of the initial series of demands made by Aske and his men, the Pontefract Articles exemplify the changing nature of the rebels’ demands during the later course of the rebellion. In late October and November 1536, while meeting little to no resistance from the Crown, the Pilgrims capitalized on their advances through Yorkshire and sought to use their newly acquired leverage by pushing a lengthened series of demands on the Crown. The Pilgrims captured Pontefract Castle during that period and were able to bide their time because the threatened military assault by the Duke of Norfolk to crush the uprising did not materialize. This was because of a shortage of manpower in Yorkshire that was partly the result of a wave of support for the rebel cause in the county. The Pontefract Articles raise further suspicion about the limited

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72 id.
73 id.
extent of popular participation in the rebellion because there were nearly 300 representatives drafting these articles at the castle, and not one of whom was a commoner.

Like the earlier documents, the Pontefract Articles listed various demands like restoring the monasteries, expelling heretics from government, repealing the Statute of Uses, and restoring Papal rule. What distinguishes this document from others is that it expands on these earlier demands to produce a more comprehensive wish-list for the upper classes to regain their temporal as well as religious autonomy from the Crown. One such demand was that “we humbly beseche our most dread sovereign lord that the Lady Mary may be made legitimate and the former statute therin annulled, for the danger of the title that might incurre to the Crown of Scotland, that to be by Parliament.” Here, the Pilgrims insist on legitimizing Mary Tudor’s claim to the throne because she was a fervent Catholic who would eventually restore Papal supremacy over the English Church. It also helped that Henry did not have a firm successor in 1536, so it was an opportune moment for the Pilgrims to push for a fellow Catholic to be made the heir to the throne, in the hope that in the future their religious and political sensibilities would be respected under a Catholic monarch.

The greater sophistication exhibited by the rebels shows that by the winter of 1536-37, they had moved beyond making hollow requests of the Crown and were willing to back them up with political ploys to advance their interests. Other additions that widened the scope of the Pontefract Articles compared with the previous demands pertained to the requests that the Crown abolish restrictions on crossbows and handguns,

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74 The Pontefract Articles, *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII, xi*, 1246
reform the elections of knights of the shire, and establish a Parliament at York\textsuperscript{75}. These demands are unique in the wider context of the Pilgrimage of Grace because they show that many of the demands had to do with purely temporal grudges the upper classes in Yorkshire bore against the Crown.

The rebellion thus represented an uneasy coalition between commoners and elites. In part, the Pilgrimage was an upper-class revolt where increased monarchical power was deemed to be a threat to the elite’s secular liberties, while the religious changes were also genuinely confrontational. However, the commoners’ resentments stemmed almost entirely from the passage of the Reformation Statutes, and the annulment of the King’s marriage to Catherine of Aragon. This raises the possibility that while the aristocracy and gentry did resent the religious changes, they only invoked them in order to secure popular support for their principal goal of securing greater autonomy from an increasingly powerful Royal Court. Ultimately, the reasons the commons and the aristocracy/gentry took part in the Pilgrimage of Grace was because both saw their identities being assaulted in different ways. Therefore, Aske’s invocation of the Commonwealth was possibly an attempt to combine the grievances of the Pilgrims in order to marshal the willpower and resources of all social groups to try and pushback on what they saw as a frontal assault on different elements of their identities. The commoners reacted very adversely to the revocation of the Papal Supremacy, the dissolution of the monasteries, and the introduction of the Ten Articles because they were central pillars to their perception of English identity, and the huge changes taking place in their spiritual lives left a great sense of confusion. While certain wealthy landowners would have shared the same

\textsuperscript{75} id.
sentiments about the attack on religion, they would have wanted to protect their financial and political interests.

In the following chapter, the role social rank played in the machinations that preceded the Pilgrimage of Grace along with its outcome will be examined forensically through the prism of Thomas Cromwell’s interrogations of Robert Aske. These interrogations tried to prove that the rebellion was a criminal conspiracy by the aristocracy to undermine Henry’s religious policies and to regain their influence at Court. Even though Aske himself had always said in his written demands that he only wished for the King to reverse his policies and did not wish for the King to be deposed, those sentiments are less clear in the minds of the King’s other opponents closer to him at Court. The examinations will shed more light on the question being raised whether the demands by both the commons and the upper classes were fundamentally different because both groups viewed their identities in relation to the Crown differently.
Chapter 5: The Interrogations of Robert Aske: Altruism or a Conspiracy?

While the Pilgrimage of Grace ended in the winter of 1537, the climate of suspicion and mutual opposition that had built up in the preceding few years continued to pervade the English body politic. In the aftermath of the rebellion and the larger furore over the religious and temporal changes introduced by the Crown, neither side was left pacified. The changes that were demanded by the rebels were put forward to the King, but the Crown did not show any signs of compromising on its policies. The motivations for doing so most likely lay in the rationale that conceding to those who had committed treason by rebelling against the King would have been a sign of weakness and would have emboldened the King’s enemies even more. In the aftermath of the most well organized and hostile ‘rebellion’ against the Crown, giving ground to Henry’s enemies would not have been a shrewd move on the Crown’s part. As such, to gain the upper hand, and stamp out remaining vestiges of support for the rebellion, Henry had many of the participants killed or imprisoned under the new treason laws passed in 1534 and made full use of the revitalized judicial system that was overseen by his chief minister Thomas Cromwell.

By February 1537, the immediate threat to the Crown had been mostly put down and the antagonists largely dispersed back to their original domains throughout Yorkshire and other parts of Northern England. However, the reasons why the Pilgrimage of Grace happened when it did and why it emerged as such a potent show of force by conservatives across the social spectrum vexed royal officials. The one person who was more concerned than any one else in the Royal Court was Thomas Cromwell, who took the lead in investigating the causes and motivations for the Pilgrimage of Grace. He had
suspicions about how the Pilgrimage of Grace was able to gain such firm traction and sweep up an entire region. Cromwell believed that while people might have been opposed to the religious changes in principle and that there was clear evidence of popular opposition, the mass of the rebels had been manipulated to protest against the Crown to satisfy the ambitions of the disaffected conservative aristocracy. He tried to confirm these suspicions in a series of interrogations of the ringleader of the Pilgrimage, Robert Aske, along with the interrogations of Lord Darcy, Lord Hussey, and Sir Marmaduke Constable, who were three captured members of the nobility who had prominent roles in the rebel hierarchy.\textsuperscript{76}

During the interrogations that took place in the Tower of London in 1537, Robert Aske made it clear to Cromwell that opposition to Henrician religious policies was shared between commoners and the upper classes, an admission that could have further deepened Cromwell’s suspicions about whether the latter exacerbated the former’s feelings on the subject. Contrary to Cromwell’s views about the Pilgrimage being a top-down movement, the York Articles and the Oath of Honourable Men indicate that Robert Aske’s conception of the ‘Commonwealth’ is one of genuinely broad social participation. Yet, this did nothing to mitigate Cromwell’s implicit feeling of suspicion. He could not bring himself to believe that the rapid disintegration of the Lincolnshire Rising and the subsequent explosion in support for the Pilgrimage of Grace were mere coincidences. As such, Cromwell used his interrogations of Aske to try and reconstruct the chronology of the uprisings to see how, and if, the upper classes were influencing the direction of the

\textsuperscript{76} The Examinations of Robert Aske in Mary Bateson (ed.), “The Pilgrimage of Grace” and “Aske’s Examination”, \textit{English Historical Review}, vol. 5 (1890), pp.330-45, 550-73
rebellion. Answering this question would allow the Crown to craft the appropriate response to stem the tide of rebellion and shore up the position of the monarchy as the dominant force in the kingdom.

To unearth the uprisings roots as speedily and efficiently as possible, the Crown had the ringleaders imprisoned and kept in the Tower of London so they could be mined for information regarding the causes of the rebellion, the intentions of its leaders, and the concessions it wished to extract to satisfy their grievances that were publicly expressed in the previous months. Cromwell, as chief minister wasted no time in questioning Robert Aske and trying dig deep into the inner workings of the Pilgrimage to try and determine what the rebels’ motivations were and if there was a wider conspiracy being hatched by those who were opposed to Henry’s religious policies in principle or were looking to exact revenge for an ‘injustice’ that was wrought upon them by the Crown. Cromwell’s first question to Aske involved the spreading of rumors about how the Crown was confiscating valuable ornaments and relics from churches and monasteries because it was well understood by both parties that such rumors had been a primary trigger for both the Lincolnshire uprising and the Pilgrimage of Grace. “Furst, how long afore the insurrection in Lincolnshire and also the insurrection of Yorkshire brutes were spread abrode in those countries, that the church goodes shoulde be takyn awaye and that there should be but one churche within seven myles?”

Cromwell’s question makes clear that he assumed these rumors about confiscations had been deliberately spread to provoke popular outrage. Aske’s answer to Cromwell’s question is surprising in that he said he heard about the rumors about

77 id.
confiscations from Lord Huddeswell who saw valuable items being seized in Louth for himself\textsuperscript{78}. While Aske’s account of the confiscations is second hand, Aske’s reference to a member of the aristocracy having witnessed the event would have likely given Cromwell greater reason to suspect the elite origins of these dangerous rumors.

To gain a clearer understanding as to whether Aske was the chief manufacturer of the false rumors, Cromwell asked him what role he actually played in the initial phase of their dissemination. “What personne was attached for telling or spreading abrode of the false brutes, or compelled to seeke out the author, that reported those brutes unto hym?”\textsuperscript{79} “With what personnes have ye commoned of the said brutes either afore the said insurrection, or sithens and what ye saide to them and they to you thereof?\textsuperscript{80}” With this line of questioning, Cromwell was trying to determine whether Aske was a ‘benign’ conservative caught up in a haze of ideological fervor against the Crown or whether he was somehow complicit with the powers behind organizing the rebellion (the aristocracy) and decided to turn a blind eye to the rumor mills spreading propaganda.

If, as Cromwell believed, there was an aristocratic conspiracy behind the rebellion, Aske might have had an incentive to turn a blind eye to the spreading of rumors because that would raise his stature amongst those that were pulling the strings of the rebellion. However, Cromwell’s suspicions don’t seem to be satisfied because in the interrogation, Aske’s answers are evasive, to put it mildly. To the first question Aske responded: “That every man spoke at his libertie what he woulde without any repression

\textsuperscript{78} id.
\textsuperscript{79} id.
\textsuperscript{80} id.
This non-descript response would have been highly frustrating to Cromwell because Aske said that the reasons for rebelling were agreed by a wide cross section of society, and he is clever not to mention what segments of society was involved in the articulation of rumors grievances.

The next answer he provides is similarly evasive, where he mentions his associate Huddeswell, but all he says he was guilty of doing was re-publishing previously drafted articles that were written during the Lincolnshire Rising in York, at the beginning of the Pilgrimage. “That he comened with no man of the said brutes but with Huddeswell, to whom he made no answere touching the said brutes to his remembrance. But he saith, that afterward he published to the commonalytie in Yorkshire at Kaxby Manore the articles sent from Lincolnshire to Yorke which as he remembreth were concernying the suppression of the abbeys, the seconde touching the Statute of Uses, the third for the remission of the quindene.” Yet again, Aske does not fall into Cromwell’s trap of accidentally incriminating an associate of his who was a member of the aristocracy.

Aske’s deftness at answering Cromwell’s questions put him at an advantage by allowing the Crown to confirm what they already knew; that the Pilgrimage of Grace was an outward manifestation of popular grievances. The mention of transferring the articles from Lincolnshire to York containing the issue to revoke the Statute of Uses and the dissolution of the monasteries seeks to put aside the notion that somehow the rumors were concocted by a cabal of aristocrats deliberately seeking to draw the King into a conflict with them. In addition, when Cromwell asked Aske “why did you not make

\[81\] id.
\[82\] id.
diligent inquisition to finde out the authors and spreaders of such brutes, and why did you
not punish them? Aske gave an answer consistent to what he had been saying already
in that he did not need to punish anyone because the uprising had already been sparked
by Lincolnshire and the commons were responsible. Cromwell was trying to force Aske
to admit that he failed to do his duty as a gentleman and stop the spread of the false
rumors. Yet again, Cromwell did not get the answer he was looking for from Aske, who
throughout the interrogation presented himself as a passive figure unable to control or
tame popular anger. When Cromwell inquired as to why Aske decided that an
insurrection would be the most effective means of achieving the repeal of the
Reformation statutes as well as reversing what he called ‘infringements on liberty’, he
said rebelling would be the most effective way of getting the King to punish those who
deviated from “the true religion” inside his Court and subsequently revert back to the old
ways.

In addition to the question of finding out who was responsible for propagating the
rumors that stoked the flames of rebellion, Cromwell sought to find out Aske’s thoughts
on how the rebels viewed the Royal Supremacy. “Whether it was not concerning the
Kinges title of Supreme hedde of the churche, thinking that if ye shoulde still consent
thereto, ye shoulde be one heretique therby?” This question was crucial because the
issue of the Royal Supremacy set the sequence in motion that led to the rebellion, and if
Cromwell got an answer from Aske affirming that obeying the Royal Supremacy made
people heretics in the eyes of the rebels, that would have allowed the Crown to further
marginalize its opponents.

83 id.
84 id.
Furthermore, the opposition to Royal councilors was a very important topic of interest to Cromwell because he believed verbal attacks on the king’s councilors represented an attack on the King himself. From the time the Royal Supremacy was established in law, maintaining the monarch’s position as the dominant power was the over-riding goal of Henry’s ministers, and to maintain the legitimacy of the institution during the turbulence of the 1530s, the Crown made sure that those advising the King could not be attacked with impunity by their opponents. Cromwell asked Aske “whether you have spoken of the king’s counsill and spokyn evill of them, affirming by their evill counsill the faith of Chryst is decayed, and the commonwelthe of the realm is destroyed?” Here, Cromwell tries to trap Aske into saying that he thinks the King’s heretical ministers, of which Cromwell was seen to be one, were responsible for eroding traditional religion in the Kingdom and leading to the crisis of identity the kingdom was grappling with. If he fell for Cromwell’s line of argument, he could have been charged with treason and killed.

Cromwell’s suspicions are borne out upon examining Aske’s own narrative of the Pilgrimage. In it he says he was approached by Lord Huddeswell while riding through Yorkshire and made to take an oath to be true to God, the King and the Commonwealth. “To whom the said Aske answered that he was sworn to the Kinges highness and issue and that he wold not be sworn agayn to any other intent, unless he was inforced by the same, and demanded the manner of ther oath. To whom the said Huddeswell declared, which was to this intent: Ye shal be trew to God, and the King and the common welth. To

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85 id.
whom the said Aske answered and said in this oath is ther no treason, but standing with his first oath. To whom he said, ye shall take this oath or else not pas undangered.”

This is as close Robert Aske comes to making a confession about his role in the rebellion, where he affirms a member of the aristocracy’s role in forcing him to take an oath of allegiance to the rebel cause in contravention of his own wish to stay loyal to the Crown by not committing treason. It is possible that Aske did not want to incriminate the ringleaders of the rebellion for fear of potentially threatening his own life or those of his siblings, who also participated in the rebellion. Aske’s admission here also makes clear that in fact, he does show himself to be relatively moderate on the issue of the Royal Supremacy because while being requested to join in the rebellion by Huddeswell, he stresses his loyalty to the King and states that he does not want to commit treason.

Lord Darcy’s presence in the Tower of London provided Cromwell with another suspect he could use to extract information about the nature of the rebellion in terms of its scope and its overall dynamics. The presence of more than one individual atop the rebel chain of command must have been a cause of huge concern for Cromwell, as that is why he was so interested in questioning Lord Darcy along with Robert Aske. Cromwell was suspicious about the circumstances in which Lord Darcy surrendered his castle at Pontefract to the Pilgrims. In theory it seems possible Lord Darcy’s forces could not hold the superior rebel forces from overrunning his castle, and Darcy’s response was that he was forced to surrender. Cromwell thought it was also a possibility that Darcy deliberately put up minimal resistance so it would seem he was being genuinely opposed.

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to the rebels, when in actuality he was working hand-in-glove with them. “For what cause did ye yele this castell at Pontefract seeing the rebels had no artillery to besiege the same and the King’s army was not far off to come to the rescue under the of my Lord Stuard?” Just as he had with Aske before him, Cromwell is trying to get Darcy to admit he joined the rebels not because he was forced to, but as part of a pre-mediated plan to gather rebel forces in Yorkshire march towards London.

Thomas Cromwell further questioned Lord Darcy about the badges bearing the Five Wounds of Christ that were displayed by all members participating in the Pilgrimage. As discussed previously, the Five Wounds of Christ gave the rebellion an air of legitimacy as it recreated the image of a band of devoted followers combatting what they saw as a force seeking to undermine true Christianity. Cromwell believed the badges were tools used to convince the less well-informed rebels believe they were fighting for a holy cause. To Cromwell, it also seemed possible that the badges were evidence of a foreign role in the rebellion. Cromwell believed Lord Darcy brought the design of the badges to England from Spain where he participated in another campaign there. “Was that not that badge of V wounds your badge Lord Darcy, when ye were in Spayne?”

“Whether were those badges newe made or were the same which ye gave in Spayne, or the remayne of them?” But Cromwell’s key suspicion was that Darcy had warehoused the badges in advance of the rebellion because he knew that a rebellion was about to take place. The rapid production of such a large number of badges being worn on peoples’ clothing suggests that they were stored in advance, and then distributed prior to the start

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88 id.
89 id.
of the rebellion. It didn’t seem possible to Cromwell that such a large number of identical badges could have been produced within a short span of time, and as such they reinforced his suspicions that the badges were manufactured in advance, quietly distributed around the county, and when the time for the rebellion came, the participants snapped them on to their cloaks and carried on with their mission. Hence, more clues that the Pilgrimage was orchestrated for a while and logistically planned.

The differences between the York and Pontefract Articles are very important in the larger context of the interrogations conducted by Cromwell as there is evidence that the latter was a written declaration heavily influenced by the aristocracy while the York Articles were drafted in consultation with the commoners. The chronology of the declarations is an important consideration in the larger context of the rebellion because it underscores the influence the commons and the aristocracy seemed to reflect at various stages of the rebellion.

This is not to say that the battle for demands among the commons and the elite was mutually exclusive, because it was not. However, the commons seemed to have relatively more influence in the autumn of 1536 because upon examination of the York Articles all of the demands raised seem to be religiously oriented, with the exception being the insistence on removing the Statute of Uses, which applied only to a small number of elite landowners who wished to cut their inheritance taxes. There is special emphasis placed on reversing the Dissolution of the Monasteries, undermining the influence of Cromwell, who was anathema to the commons because of his suspected heretical views, and also restoring Papal Rule. While the elite shared these goals as well, the insertion of the repeal of the Statute of Uses shows that aristocratic influence did exist
at the beginning of the conflict where the aristocracy realized that this religiously inspired
rebellion could very well be used as a vehicle to lodge their own grievances and win
concessions that would satisfy their particular needs. Yet the influence of the nobility and
gentry becomes even more pronounced with the drafting of the Pontefract Articles not
only because of the content, but also due to the circumstances in which they were drafted.
The commons were excluded from the proceedings that took place behind the Pontefract
castle walls and as such the nobles were able to insert a good number of their parochial
grievances into the text that could be submitted to the Crown for consideration.

The inclusion of items 10, 12, and 15 in the Pontefract Articles must have been of
particular interest to Thomas Cromwell in the stages before he began his series of
interrogations of rebel leaders.\(^{90}\) They were the most explicit expression of intent from
the rebel leaders when it came to articulating their demands for autonomy from the
Crown. Item 10 pushed for a repeal of the ban on handguns and crossbows which would
have allowed the elite to hold weapons that could have posed a threat to the stability of
the Crown because as England did not have a standing army, and with those weapons,
disgruntled elites could raise an army with the firepower to challenge the Crown in battle.
The push for a Parliament in York seems to have all the hallmarks of an aristocratic
agenda because with regional autonomy, the nobility and gentry could have carved out an
‘autonomous zone’ in the North of England. If the Crown submitted to this demand, it is
possible the North could have gradually extricated itself from Royal control through
raising its own taxes, funding its own defenses, and potentially producing legislation to
undercut the Henrician Reformation Statutes.

\(^{90}\) The Pontefract Articles, *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, xi, 1246, Items 10, 12, 15
It is therefore reasonable to conclude from these three demands alone, which were unique to the Pontefract Articles, that there was compelling evidence that the elites of Henry’s kingdom were conspiring to revert back to the days before the Royal Supremacy became the guiding principle by which the sovereign and his subjects abided. It seems the section of the aristocracy that participated in the rebellion wanted to use the Crown as the boogeyman for conservative grievances both temporal and religious so they could return to orthodox Catholicism under control of the Vatican, along with a monarchy confined to its correct ‘sphere’ of jurisdiction, which was the secular executive administration of the realm. Cromwell was fundamentally opposed to these ideas because it went against his political and philosophical beliefs and threatened to undermine the project he had worked to bring to fruition, namely the promotion of Henry VIII as the pre-eminent power in England in all areas of peoples lives.

The Pilgrimage of Grace was most certainly an insurrection that had at its heart a popularly endorsed narrative that was able to galvanize a large cross section of conservative opinion in Northern England. The Dissolution of the Monasteries, the Royal Supremacy, the presence of Thomas Cromwell in Court, and the annulment of the King’s marriage brought out commoners and members of the elite in protest. These grievances were articulated in written declarations at various stages in the rebellion through the autumn of 1536. The York and Pontefract Articles contain many demands that are similar to those that were initially raised in Lincolnshire at the very outset of the rebellion. However, the number of demands raised at Pontefract such as the request to restore the legalization of crossbows and handguns, gives one the impression that the elites were biding their time to raise their exclusive demands when the time was right and they had
the leverage over the Crown to put forward their particular demands. Additionally, Thomas Cromwell’s high-profile interrogations of rebel leaders, three of whom were of aristocratic background, only makes one conclude that the Pilgrimage of Grace was a coalition of people who had convergent and diverging interests that were joined as a result of circumstance.

People further down the social ladder seemed to have more altruistic reasons for partaking in the rebellion, whilst more well-heeled individuals used the rebellion to advance their own parochial needs. The divide that existed between those occupying different social stations gives credence to the narrative that the Pilgrimage was a popular uprising against the Royal Supremacy and overall religious policy, but it is also true that it provided an opportunity for the aristocracy to air long held temporal grievances as well. In effect, Cromwell was half right that the Pilgrimage of Grace was a conspiracy orchestrated by the aristocracy. This is evident from the way in which the badges bearing the Five Wounds of Christ were used, and Aske’s later admission he was ‘forced’ into the uprising by Lord Huddeswell, and the circumstances in which Lord Darcy allowed rebel forces into his castle without a fight. Still, the Pilgrimage of Grace also bore the hallmarks of an organic revolt as well in that much of what the common folk rebelled against was a direct result of what they saw as a direct assault on their religious sensibilities and way of life.
Chapter 6: Richard Morrison and Royally sanctioned counter-propaganda

The Pilgrimage of Grace severely challenged the ability of the Crown to control the political agenda. The policies that the Crown had pursued by way of changing the religious and political orientation of the realm deeply antagonized large swathes of the population. This antagonism was brought on by what was perceived by members of all social classes who supported the rebel cause as an assault on the ‘ancient constitutional structure’ and traditional way of life in Northern England. The usurpation of religious affairs by the King that had been under the purview of the Catholic Church was the largest spark that triggered the rebellion. The creation of the Royal Supremacy along with the policy of dissolving monasteries did profound damage to the relationship between the Crown and its subjects.

The threat of the Pilgrimage of Grace and the wider period of rebellion in the autumn of 1536 lay in its challenge to the Crown’s legitimacy. This constituted a breach of convention because never before had a king’s subjects questioned the position of a monarch as an authority figure. Even though the King was asking for his religious, not just temporal authority to be accepted, the amount of open resistance it engendered was worrying. In the last four chapters, the focus was mainly on how the Crown reacted to events and was forced to cope with the environment they found themselves in. However, this chapter attempts to turn the analysis the other way around, to examine how the Crown attempted to push back against the barrage of criticism it was facing from religious conservatives. To seize the initiative, the Crown had to make clever use of resources and personnel to try and seize the initiative and turn the political tide in its favor.
The two major rebellions of late 1536 were so dangerous because of the spread of propaganda hostile to the Crown’s policies. The spread of this material worried the King and his ministers because of conservative propaganda’s ability to arouse a large swathe of the population to rebel against royally sanctioned policy, threatening the King’s grip on the throne. As Henry VIII’s overarching aim was to entrench the monarch as the dominant political power in the land, the ability of a group of disaffected people to publicly criticize and undermine Crown policy could not be tolerated as a matter of principle. The spread of rumor in the run up to the Lincolnshire Rising and the Pilgrimage of Grace lowered the Crown’s authority, casting the King as a prisoner of his wicked heretical counselors. Despite firm opposition to Royal policy, it must be noted again that the rebels in the Lincolnshire Rising and the Pilgrimage of Grace did not seek the deposition of Henry VIII.

To counter ferocious conservative messaging, the Crown had to develop its own sophisticated propaganda machine that could effectively rebut the disinformation feeding an already tense atmosphere. To counteract the active threat to the validity of the policies the Crown was seeking to implement and by extension the Crown’s resilience and legitimacy as an institution, Thomas Cromwell developed the regime’s own propaganda apparatus to question the motives, ideology, and actions by the rebels it considered treasonous. The Crown’s propaganda effort was led by Richard Morrison, an accomplished man of letters who rose from humble origins to attend school at Eton College and Christ Church, Oxford. Throughout his life, Richard Morrison showed a knack for seeking out adventure and by the time he left England after his days at Oxford, he sought out new learning experiences on the Continent. He acquired a thirst for
learning which he showcased while he was a resident at Padua, Italy in 1534 as a guest of Cardinal Reginald Pole. Morrison sought out residence with someone who could help fund his studies and Pole fulfilled that role for him. Even though in 1534, he was not being employed by the Crown as its ‘chief propagandist’, Morrison already had an association with the Court dating back a few years and was a beneficiary of Henry VIII as the King had actually been funding Morrison’s studies since 1521. As an individual lucky to receive funding from the most powerful office in England, Morrison studied Ancient Greek and theology because he wished to return to his home country as a learned man in order to accomplish big goals. And Morrison did achieve quite remarkable feats, eventually being selected by Cromwell to become his point man at countering rebel propaganda efforts during the crisis period of the Lincolnshire Rising and the Pilgrimage of Grace.

However, before he became deeply ensconced in the bowels of the Cromwellian machine, Morrison had to prove himself completely loyal to the Royal cause. Suspicions were raised about his allegiances because of his association with Cardinal Pole in Padua. Some elements in the government were deeply concerned about his links with a man still affiliated with the Catholic Church hierarchy. Morrison’s views on the pressing political issues of the day do seem to have been in tune with those of the regime. As the Henrician regime was faced with an unprecedented barrage of propaganda as a result of the religious policy they were introducing from 1534 onwards, Cromwell summoned Morrison back to England in order to help him confront the threat from conservatives.

92 id.
Morrison’s journey back to England to join the Royal cause made sense as he had been exposed to reformist thinking and had the scholarly and rhetorical skills of a professed humanist, and unlike Thomas More, his views on the Royal Supremacy agreed with the King’s. In 1536, Morrison published two tracts against the Lincolnshire and Yorkshire rebellions, pushing back against the attacks on the Royal Supremacy in ways both passive and aggressive.

The two pieces Morrison wrote in response to the rebellions of 1536 were supposed to dismantle the intellectual basis on which the rebels based their cause, and sought to buttress the policies the Crown had been implementing over the previous two years. While they did not stop the rebels dead in their track, they did send out a signal that the Crown could in fact persuasively respond to serious threats to its legitimacy. The fascinating aspect of Morrison’s work is that his two tracts were not stiff, scholarly works that could only be understood by learned people, but were very distilled propaganda pieces that sought to explain very complex ideas on the nature of kingship, the relations between subject and monarch, and what comprised sedition, all in an understandable manner. While the works were very learned, they contained emotional language and sought to rouse his readers to take up the royal cause because it was in their self-interest to do so.

The first piece that Morrison wrote to undercut the momentum of the rebellion was *A Lamentation in Which Is Showed What Ruin and Destruction Cometh of Seditious Rebellion*. *A Lamentation* was written in the aftermath of the Lincolnshire Rising and Morrison used his tract to rationally put forward the case that what the rebels did was very unfortunate but at the same time very dangerous. He says he is saddened by how
fellow Englishmen would feel the need to take action to revolt against their own sovereign. “If study had gotten me as much eloquence as true and unfeigned love of my country giveth me cause to lament, the durst I boldly say that there is none so wicked, none so unnatural, none so far under all the senses of humanity but I could fully persuade him nothing so much to be eschewed as sedition…” In the first line of the tract, Morrison set out the broad parameters of why he thinks the Lincolnshire Rising is wrong. He says that he feels sorry about the rebellion because of the grave nature of the crime the rebels were committing. He says sedition is the worst crime for a subject to commit against his country and that out of a sense of duty, Morrison felt he had an obligation to lament the state of disunity and conflict that was pervasive around England during the autumn of 1536. “But seeing mine eloquence, which I must needs grant to be very small, cannot serve me as I desire in so weighty a matter, I will see what love, sorrow and pity can do.” It seems that at the beginning of this tract, Morrison is being strategic about not being overly confrontational with the rebels and is actually trying to appeal to some of the more malleable rebels by appealing to their better instincts to lay down their arms and understand the wretched nature of the crime they were committing against their king.

While Morrison is careful not to impugn ordinary, individual members of the rebellion because they would one day return to being loyal subjects who would support their King, he attacked the ideology of the movement in how it sought to denigrate the monarchy as an institution. “What is he that can say he is an Englishman and that he careth not, though the wealth of England be trodden under the foot? A beast he is a man

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94 id.
he can never be judged, that passeth but on his own wealth and pleasure!"  
Morrison invokes the concept of being loyal to England, and not Rome. Morrison seeks to reinforce the Royal Supremacy to equate being a loyal Englishman and patriotic subject with recognizing the King as the supreme ruler in the kingdom, and only through complete fealty to him can one be considered a true member of the English nation. He also implicitly suggests that the monarchy is the wealth of the nation because it is the most powerful political and religious office, but is also responsible for the collective welfare of the Kingdom.

Morrison artfully pillories the Lincolnshire rebels’ attempts to organize themselves into a hierarchy, especially by installing a cobbler as leader. Morrison uses this diatribe as another attempt to defend the merits of monarchical rule where he laments the fact that a lowly cobbler attempted to take place of the King as the rebels’ ‘leader’. “Sorry I must needs be to see monks, friars, and priests who so long stood doubting whether they might acknowledge our sovereign lord the King to be their head, so without any staggering to have made a cobber their head. Sorry I am to see that much seditious traitors should cumber so honest a purpose, so godly an intent.”

Furthermore, Morrison articulates that the King did not deserve the wave of sedition being committed against him. “If our most gracious prince had given you some great occasion to have gone from him, yet you go against him and his true subjects good cause. How can ye say you fight in a good cause which in one act offend so many of God’s commandments?” This last sentence completely undermines the rebels’ rationale

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95 ibid, 86.
96 ibid, 98.
97 ibid, 99.
that their actions were an act of religious altruism and were actually adherent to the true principles of ‘Christ’s religion’. Morrison’s counterargument to the one the rebels were making thus far was that the rebels were not following God’s commandments because God would not support a rebellion against one’s sovereign. Here again, is a deft use of language on Morrison’s part where he says that God himself recognizes the King as the supreme authority in his kingdom, thereby undercutting the rebels’ narrative that the Royal Supremacy was invalid. He reinforces the importance that should be placed on obeying the King by saying: “obedience is the badge of a true Christian man.”

Morrison also sought to invoke biblical analogies to try and further undercut the religious justification the rebels were trying to use. “David cut the tip of the skirt of Saul’s cloak and by and by he repented him that he had cut the King’s vesture and began to cry: our Lord be merciful unto me that I never lay hands on him because God hath anointed him.” No other sentence can probably better sum up what Morrison thought the rebels were doing to the King by rebelling against him as a result of their religious grievances. In Morrison’s eyes, the rebels had “cut the King’s cloth” but they now had the chance to repent. Morrison also alludes to how the rebels would pay a heavy price if they attempted to seize the Crown or in any way seriously undermine its standing. “Thou shalt see that he who said he killed Saul and brought the Crown unto David was slain by David’s commandment.” This serves as another admonishment against the motives of the rebels, saying that those who attempt to usurp the Crown will meet a bad end, and

98 ibid, 100.
99 ibid, 87.
100 ibid, 87.
those who feel religiously justified in nullifying the King’s authority both spiritual and temporal, that religious justification is misplaced.

Morrison also sought to tell his fellow countrymen in Lincolnshire that they should follow his example as a loyal Englishman in not rebelling against the Crown because he is doing what he knows is just and patriotic. “Ye are all mine; how can any of you, where none ought to do so, seek the destruction of me, my most noble and prudent prince, King Henry VIII, and his true subjects?101 In essence, Morrison is telling his fellow countrymen already taking part in the rebellion or seriously thinking of doing so that partaking in the revolt would be the equivalent of fighting against themselves. He is trying to impart the notion that the King, while the supreme authority in the land, is a fellow member of the “English family”.

In the Lamentation, Morrison also seeks to impugn the reputation of the monasteries when he says “wherefore I cannot think that the putting down of abbeys, that is to say the putting away of maintained lechery, buggery, and hypocrisy should be the cause of rebellious insurrection.”102 As Morrison was a humanist, he endorses the reformist view that monasteries were “houses of sin” that had to be eliminated in order to reclaim the purity and stature of the Church. By smearing the monasteries, he legitimates the dissolution and thus undercuts a central plank of the rebels’ grievances against the Crown.

The Lamentation has an almost despondent tone to it because Morrison is engaging in a rhetorical exercise of thinking out aloud as to why the rebels felt so compelled to rise up against the King and his ministers. Morrison’s tone is almost that of

101 ibid, 86.
102 ibid, 95.
a parent lamenting a deviant child’s errant ways and openly trying to pick off what sort of error could have produced such antagonistic behavior by the Lincolnshire rebels. The responses by the Crown to the demands that were drawn up during the Lincolnshire rebellion are made in a firm, at times scolding manner trying to persuade what it saw as deviants (rebels) to try and return to the right side of the divide. It could also be that the slightly less belligerent piece was gauged to not alienate the Lincolnshire rebels in the wake of its disintegration because the rebellion was less organized and displayed a more amateurish quality than the Pilgrimage would. Perhaps Cromwell did not want to make Morrison rub salt in the Lincolnshire rebels’ wounds that resulted from their failure at launching a successful rebellion.

_A Remedy for Sedition Wherein Are Contained Many Things concerning the True and Loyal Obeisance That Commons Owe unto Their Prince and Sovereign Lord the King_ has a harder edge than the _Lamentation_. In this particular tract, it seems the Crown’s focus is making the rebels think about real and lasting consequences to their actions. The previous tract talked about the errors and falsehoods of the rebels, but it did not do much to mention what the consequences for taking rebellious action against the Crown would be. As both of Morrison’s principle pieces of propaganda were written after the initial outbursts they were meant to condemn, the altered tone by Morrison in the latter tract is most likely the result of comprehending the much greater level of apprehension in Westminster about the greater sophistication and organization of the Pilgrimage of Grace.

In the very first paragraph of the _Remedy_, Morrison mentions that confronting the Pilgrims was a matter of preserving law and order. “On the other side he that well pondereth the damages that of necessity must follow where either none be that can rule or
few that will obey shall think as I do all realms, regions, cities, and towns that are not
governed by laws to be forests of wild beasts and not places for men.” Here Morrison
escalates the rhetoric by saying what the rebels in Yorkshire are doing is challenging the
foundation of stable and civilized life, that without obedience there would only be
anarchy, which would lead to a brutish, animalistic existence.

Perhaps the most direct attack aired thus far against the goals of the rebels is the
one where Morrison defends the Royal Supremacy and the principle of divine right of
monarchy and says the aim of the rebels to restore papal rule is morally and legally
flawed. “God maketh kings, especially where they reign by succession. Will we be wiser
than God? Will we take on us to know who ought to govern us better than God. God
made him King; and made this law. Obey your king.” The not so subtle message here
is that if one were to attack the King, it would constitute an attack on God himself. This
particular command sums up the Remedy. Due to the scale of the rebellion, the overall
tone of the second of Morrison’s principle pieces is much more pointed and declarative in
its statements than the previous one. While critical of the rebels, the Lamentation does
seem to be not as aggressive when juxtaposed with this particular tract because the
Remedy questions the legality of the rebels’ actions much more directly, and there are
subtle hints that Morrison, on orders from his boss Cromwell is questioning the rebels’
intelligence in pursuing the course of action they were taking.

The rebellions of 1536 were launched on the back of a wellspring of popular
grievances that were also shared by members of the upper classes. The uprisings in

103 Richard Morrison, A Remedy, [in Berkowitz, Humanist Scholarship and Public Order,
104 ibid, 117.
Yorkshire and Lincolnshire were also the result of an effort to build an intellectual case against the agenda Henry VIII had in store for his Kingdom from 1534 onwards. To counteract what the Crown saw as a sophisticated effort at splashing rumors around about the regime’s sinister intentions, Thomas Cromwell decided to respond with its own propaganda campaign spearheaded by Richard Morrison to stem the rebels’ “media campaign” and maybe even stem the tide of the intellectual current that was feeding the antagonism towards Henry and his government. While Morrison’s two tracts did not put an immediate stop to the rebellions, they did convey the feeling that the Crown was not in fact powerless in the tumult that erupted in the mid-1530s and could possibly regain the initiative to embark on its program of religious reform with a degree of confidence.
Conclusion

The rebellions of 1536 were the product of nearly two years of conflict over the question of whether or not Henry VIII could legally proclaim himself to be the Supreme Head of the Church of England. The justifications Henry and his ministers used to legitimize the King’s new title were not sufficient for his conservative opponents. Religious conservatives in England could not countenance a political dynamic where their own sovereign could serve as the temporal/executive head of the Kingdom responsible for the administration of relatively mundane functions like civil justice and tax collection but also with complete control over religious affairs. Attachment to traditional religious sentiment has been shown throughout this paper to have been very strong and that feeling was directed towards loyalty to the Pope and various aspects of parochial life. As the Pope was said to be a descendant of St. Peter, pious Christians in Early Modern England thought that the Pope could be the peoples’ only interlocutor with God.

As Henry sought to usurp that title for questionable reasons, many around the country, but from Northern England especially, took great offence at the King’s actions. Even though, as institutions the monarchy and the Papacy had long been shown deference, the new political dynamic that Henry had created forced conflicted individuals to choose sides. This was because there was a deep feeling amongst religious conservatives especially, that the two spheres of life (temporal and religious) had to stay separate. In effect, the passage of the Act of Supremacy created an identity crisis in Henrician England, where royalists and conservatives advocated for a political construct that was diametrically opposed to the other. At the outset, the conservatives seemed to
have the momentum on their side because they were able to attack all the changes the Crown was making and labeled them as heretical.

The religious and to a somewhat lesser extent, secular changes that were brought in to effect rallied a very broad cross section of Northern England to protest against the Crown’s actions. It is clear the rebels wished to reverse all of the changes made by Henry since 1534 including the Royal Supremacy, the Dissolution of the Monasteries, and the rise of low born royal councilors like Cromwell, and the promulgation of the Ten Articles. As Henry and his ministers viewed these changes as essential to cementing his authority, he disavowed conservatives’ grievances and that put them on an unavoidable collision course. Whether the howls of protest came from ordinary commoners, gentry, aristocrats, or clergymen, the King did not budge in the face of their demands. Even during the Lincolnshire Rising and the Pilgrimage of Grace itself, Henry still did not accede to their demands despite the threat of an invasion by the rebels from the north into southern England.

Henry’s resoluteness in the face of unparalleled opposition prompts the question whether Henry was stubbornly following through with his agenda or simply being reckless. I tend to take the former view as Henry’s policy changes before the outbreak of the 1536 rebellions indicate that he intended to change the terms of political debate in England. His own reservations about traditional Roman Catholicism had been growing in the years immediately preceding the period in which he began his policy changes and the marital troubles that resulted from his inability to conceive a male heir gave him the opening to cement his absolute rule. In effect, Henry VIII put England on a new course politically and religiously because he established the precedent where with one exception,
Mary Tudor, all future English monarchs who followed him ran the ecclesiastical affairs of the country.

While Henry’s individual impact on the history and culture of England is not in doubt, it would not have been possible to bring about the changes he did if he did not have a chief minister like Thomas Cromwell, who revolutionized the effectiveness of English central government and made it not only a vehicle for managing the affairs of the country, but also a sophisticated political machine. The wit and resourcefulness of Cromwell was manifold and it was perhaps most visible in his hiring of Richard Morrison to counter rebel propaganda, in his interrogating of rebel leaders, and in his shepherding of Reformation statutes like the Act of Supremacy through parliament and into law.

Henry’s act of severing ties from Rome helped usher in a new religious culture that would add new tensions into English society in later years. Yet, Henry’s legacy at the end of the day is unique in that he managed to accomplish something that might have seemed impossible during medieval times. He managed to establish an independent church and pass on this legacy to his successors. The rebellions he faced down in 1536 were the first of several revolts that would protest changes to the status quo and seek to harken back to a period where there was more certainty, but the fact that Henry VIII and his government survived the rebellion showed that monarchs could radically alter the governing structure of their countries and live to tell the tale. Henry VIII showed that after a period of weak rule during the Wars of the Roses in the 15th century, monarchs did not have to resign themselves to be figureheads who were at the mercy of powerful forces propping them up. It’s no wonder Henry’s central tenet of governance was establishing the Royal Supremacy.
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