**Anglican Reformation**

**Key Concepts**

* **Henry VIII, although Catholic, clashes with the Pope for personal and dynastic reasons, leading to the birth of the Anglican Church with the Act of Supremacy of 1534.**
* **The Act of Supremacy establishes that the king is the head of the Anglican Church, marking a schism without heresy, maintaining the ecclesiastical hierarchy but swearing loyalty to the king rather than the Pope.**
* **The dissolution of the monastic orders and the sale of their lands create new social strata in England, expanding the class of small and medium landowners.**
* **In Scotland and Ireland, the religious and political situation remains different; in particular, Ireland maintains a Catholic identity in opposition to the Anglican-English occupier.**
* **With the succession to Henry VIII, the Anglican Church evolves towards reformed theological inclinations, especially under Edward VI, consolidating the separation from Roman Catholicism.**

While the core of Lutheran thought is first and foremost theological, so that the first accusation a Catholic makes against it is that of heresy (the affirmation of theological principles contrary to orthodox doctrine), the political and social consequences of which come at a later stage, the case of England is different.

* **Henry VIII**

England was a Catholic country ruled by the Tudor dynasty, whose second sovereign, Henry VIII, was so Catholic that he had his courtiers write a text against Lutheran theses so effective that the Pope awarded him the title of Defensor fidei (Defender of the Faith).

From a theological point of view, Henry VIII had nothing to object to Catholic doctrine: he accepted the sale of indulgences, the existing ecclesiastical hierarchy and the monastic-religious orders. His problem was the lack of male children, which threatened the lack of guarantee to the throne of England. His wife Catherine of Aragon, who had not given him a male succession, was the aunt of Charles V: her marriage to Henry VIII had been part of the dynastic strategy conducted by the Habsburgs. Henry VIII wanted to divorce Catherine of Aragon and marry Anne Boleyn, a lady of the court. In 1529 he asked Pope Clement VII for a divorce, as others had done before him (for various reasons the popes could dissolve marriages), but he simply could not grant her the proposal: two years earlier he had suffered the Sack of Rome and could not allow himself to step on Charles V's toes again. Accepting the dissolution of Henry VIII's marriage would have meant worsening, precipitating relations with the emperor. Furthermore, Clement VII was one of the Medici: since 1527 in Florence there had been a Republic and he was negotiating with Charles V to bring the Medici back to government (which he did in 1530): in this political context, the Pope had his hands tied.

* **Act of Supremacy (1534)**

For dynastic and personal reasons, Henry VIII, with the support of Parliament, formally declared in 1534 that the Anglican Church recognizes the king as its head, not the pontiff: this declaration goes under the name of Act of Supremacy. In this first phase, what historians call the ‘schism without heresy’ takes place: from a doctrinal point of view, Henry VIII has nothing to complain about, it is a disciplinary issue. In the Church of England, the entire hierarchy is maintained (bishops, archbishops and cardinals), but they swear loyalty to the King and not to the Pope.

* **Social hierarchy**

As the years passed, however, even in England the Church began to take on traits closer to Protestantism than to Catholicism: while maintaining an ecclesiastical hierarchy, monastic orders were dissolved and their assets were confiscated (which became state assets). This is a fundamental element of English history, which will have repercussions at least throughout the 17th century and which strongly influenced the structure of English society. One of the functions of the Parliament of England, as well as the other representative assemblies of the modern age, is to allow the king's government through fiscal taxation: these are often the reasons for disputes with the assemblies. When Henry VIII needs money, instead of asking Parliament for it, to whom he would then have to make concessions, he sells the lands he has confiscated from the Church, placing them on the market in a rather consistent manner: the cost of land in England, in the second half of the 16th century, drops and social strata of small and medium-sized owners are created which exist in England and do not elsewhere. English society, while remaining hierarchical, narrows the steps of its hierarchy: there is the gentry (country nobility), composed of country gentlemen and not nobles in the strict sense, that is, they are knights but do not have great noble titles, who live in the countryside in contact with bourgeois, who sometimes touch the gentry and sometimes are just outside it, who are landowners but not nobles. The gradation of society, which becomes much broader, is formed in a century and a half and is linked to the fact that in English society, at a certain historical moment (that of the Anglican Reformation), many lands are put on the market at a low cost because they are numerous.

* **Scotland and Ireland**

The social change concerns England and Wales, that is, the southern part of the largest British island, while the Scottish and Irish events are different. Scotland is not part of the Kingdom of England, it is under the Stuart dynasty, while Ireland, subdued and conquered at the end of the 1400s, remains Catholic; indeed, when Henry VIII created the Anglican Church and broke away from the Catholic one, the Irish religious identity became a distinctive feature compared to the Anglican-English occupier: the pre-existing opposition between Irish and English subjects, who exploited Ireland as a colony, was also fueled by a religious difference.

* **Official religion**

From a doctrinal point of view, therefore, initially the Anglican Church is the same as the Catholic Church, apart from the fact that the spiritual head is the king, so much so that those who do not convert to Anglicanism are simply accused of papism. As the decades pass and with the succession to Henry VIII, however, the Anglican Church is increasingly characterized by theological nuances of a reformed type, with increasingly Calvinist inclinations. When Henry VIII dies, his son, Edward VI, ascends to the throne; at that point the religious choice becomes irremediable: he was illegitimate for the Church of Rome and would not have had the right to succeed to the throne of England, so when Edward VI ascends to the throne he had to be Anglican. Between 1553 and 1558 Mary Tudor, daughter of the first marriage, governs, who tries to bring England back to Catholicism and for this reason goes by the name of Bloody Mary.