**How effectively did the Church of England evolve in conditions of conflict 1625-88?**

**Introduction**

In 1625 England was a Confessional State in which the beliefs of the Church of England set down in the Book of Common Prayer and maintained by the government, a single National Church established and failure to attend it services on a regular basis treated as a crime. In 1688 England was no longer a Confessional State because toleration had been granted to most Christian groups including a range of dissenters outside of the Church of England. This transformation was born as a consequence of religious tensions that grew within the Church of England from the Elizabethan middle way and continued to evolve during the reigns of the Stuart monarchs through conflict and persecution.

**1625-40**

During the period 1625-40 the Church of England was to evolve with a narrow sense of uniformity that resulted in the rise of dissenters. In 1625 the Church of England covered several strands of religious and political opinion existing in a largely accepted framework although not always in harmony. buy 16-25 there was the growth of Arminianism amongst a section of the clergy and their rejection of Calvinism and Predestination. The King favoured this faction has he found the anti-catholicism of calvinist to be an irritating restriction on his domestic and foreign policies. A conference at York House in 16 26 between Armenians and their opponents resulted in no official change in policy but Charles issued a proclamation which forbade public discussion of sensitive religious doctrine that was interpreted as a restriction on calvinist rather than Armenians. This was followed by the appointment of a succession of Armenian clergy to the role of Royal Chaplain, William Laud as Bishop of London in 1628 and a member of the Privy Council. Charles and Laud now embarked on a programme of reform in the Church of England that would antagonize Puritan opposition and alienate a large section of the population against the background of Catholic aggression in Europe, the appointment of Catholics too important offices in government and the activity of the Catholic Queen Henrietta Maria. Lauds appointment as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1633 gave him the power and Influence to impose Arminianism and uniformity in every diocese and dissenting ministers was summoned before church courts. Puritan opposition found it's voice in the Long Parliament of 1640, where the most serious attacks were directed against the Laudian Bishops. The flourishing of Armenian influence within the Church of England, and in government appointments was to promote conflict with Puritan opposition which would accentuate divisions within the Church of England and be a key Factor in the emergence of civil war.

**1640-60**

During this period the narrow definitions of uniformity imposed by Laud were undone and this was to lead to a more flexible and tolerant National Church, with exception to policies towards Armenians and Quakers. In 1640 opposition to Charles within parliament was able to organise a successful attack on Armenian influence and against the bishop's. The abolition of the Prerogative Courts removed the oppressive apparatus used to control the Church. In December 1640 The Commons received the Root and Branch Petition which is listed religious grievances related to the period of Armenian control and calling for the abolition of the episcopacy which the Covenanters had done in Scotland in 1638. The Commons was able to force the King to remove the Bishop's from the Privy Council and exclude them from the House of Lords, but the attempt to abolish the episcopacy failed and the signing of the covenant with the Scots in 1643 only resulting in Pym agreeing to set up an assembly of clergy to meet in Westminster and consider a model to be established for Church governance rather than to accept the Scottish Presbyterian version. In 1645 parliament officially resolved that the Church should be Presbyterian in form and in 1646 passed a resolution confirming the collapse of the episcopacy and the commitment to a form of presbyterianism. However before this could be imposed effectively the attention of Parliament was distracted by a growing quarrel between Presbyterian and Independents that were played out in the rejection by the former of the Apologetically Narration in January 1644 calling for the right to establish independent churches outside of the National established Church of England.

Such developments illustrated growing division between parliament and the new Model Army and it was within the new Model Army that religious radicalism flourished. The new Model Army was particularly dangerous to presbyterian plans for a new disciplined national Church by 1645 because it's presence across the country stimulated and encouraged existing religious dissenters and encouraged further conversions. The reaction of presbyterian leaders in parliament and the church was both hostile and ultimately counter productive and the attempt to disband the army in 1647 led to its politicisation and the collapse of presbyterian hopes. The renewal of the Civil War in 1648 and Charles execution in 1649 witnessed the gradual disappearance of presbyterian hopes within the Church of England and stimulated a further wave of religious radicalism, different from Independent and Baptists in rejecting any external authority over the conscience of individuals and demanding complete religious toleration for all. This provoked a conservative reaction that was intense and widespread after the Rump Parliament passed a Blasphemy Act in 1650, and when the fighting in Ireland and Scotland ceased many of the more extreme were forced to resign in a series of purges carried out by the Council of Offices, although many of the army leaders and Independents in the Rump sympathized with the desire of the godly for toleration of their own churches.

When Cromwell took power after the dissolution of the Rump and failure of the Barebones Parliament, his preference was for a sensible compromise. The Church of England had continued to function during the years of the Commonwealth using a variety of practices based on the preferences of individual ministers and their communities. Now the Church of England was placed under the control of the committee of ministers the triers and Ejectors who would tolerate presbyterian, moderate Anglican and a number of Independents, but Catholicism, Arminianism and the Quakers were considered a national risk for trying to impose and/or spread their views. The period of the Commonwealth witnessed the flourishing of religious radicalism, the Rise and Fall of presbyterian hopes and the search for a sensible compromise under Cromwell whilst persecuting those considered a danger to the established state. The result was a more diverse Church of England that evolved to reflect a variety of interpretations and the Ministers and communities that they represented.

**1660-88**

During this period the Church again pursued the path of a more narrow definition of uniformity and set about rigorously enforcing this vision through the Clarendon Code that was to result in further expulsions and recruitment for those who chose to dissent. Under Charles II, the Convention Parliament of 1660 reinstated the Church of England and restored the Bishops in the Worcester House Declaration leaving the details to be worked out in the Savoy House Conference of 1661 to create a broad and flexible National Church. However the election of a conservative Parliament of Cavaliers bent on revenge spelt disaster the Puritans and moderates. A combination of High Church Armenians and anti puritan Members of Parliament resulted in an Act of Uniformity in 1662, and in 1663 Sheldon who favoured Laudian episcopal governance was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury. In places where Anglican ministers had been rejected for a Puritan one after 1640 there was a complete reversal of the process. The Church Court were recreated, the power of the Bishops reinstated and presbyterianism renounced along with the demand to accept every element of the Common Prayer Book.In all 1,800 ministers lost their living. Anglicanism now came to mean defence of Church of England developed by Laud between the corruptions of Catholicism and Anarchy of Puritanism.

The Anglican church was socially dominant and politically significant in the Restoration .The Corporation act of 1661 laid down the requirement of conformity to cover a range of institutions afterwards. Charles II attempt to suspend the Act of Uniformity and issue a First Declaration of Indulgence offering religious toleration was defeated by a combination of Bishop's and Cavaliers in parliament and he was powerless to prevent the persecution that followed. The Clarendon Code and the Second Act of Indulgence and Test Act of 1672 increased the requirement for conformity. Charles appointed the Earl of Danby Thomas Osborne as Lord Treasurer in 1673 and allowed him to renew persecution of religious dissenters and use royal patronage to establish majorities in both Houses of Parliament. After the problems posed by the Popish Plot and the exclusion crisis 1678-82, Charles returned to this strategy with a vengeance in the hottest period of persecution for protestant dissenters, combined with remodeling borough charters to ensure Tory and Anglican control. By 1685 the Anglican establishment was truly the Church of England but it had failed to achieve the level of uniformity desired by it's leaders and required by a Confessional State. In 1688 Anglican supremacy was demonstrated in the trial of 7 Bishops who opposed James II Declaration of Indulgence offering toleration to both nonconformists and Catholics. The period had witnessed the restoration of Anglicanism and its dominant position in religious and social life along with being a significant political voice and force. However persecution of dissent was to encourage a strong opposition to monarchy which would result in the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

**Conclusion**

The Anglican Church certainly evolved in the period although at times this was certainly not in harmony, provoking serious conflict in the periods when those in charge of the Church sought narrow definitions of uniformity. Thus the series rift with dissenters was to cause civil war in the 1640’s that resulted in the evolution of a broader Church in the 1650’s. However this was not to last and was largely undone during the reigns of Charles II and James II who also presided over periods when definitions of Church uniformity were again to lead to expulsions and promote dissent from the Church of England. The Act of Toleration 1689 was designed to accommodate such factionalism within the Church and support a more flexible and accommodating organisation able to co-exist with by now established dissenters and non-denominational Churches of Presbyterians, Baptists, Congregationalists and Quakers..