**To what extent did religion divide the kingdom in the period 1625-49?**

**Introduction**

Divisions within the Church of England, the evolution of religious radicalism and dissent, along with the fear of Catholic influence served to divide the kingdom in the period 1625-49. Added to this was the complexity of managing such divisions in a largely Presbytarian Scotland, Catholic Ireland and the changing Church of England from Arminianism to Puritanism.

**Part 1. Divisions in the Church of England continued to divide the Kingdom in the period 1625-49.**

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.

During the period 1640-49 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.

**Part 2**. **The evolution of religious radicalism continued to divide the Kingdom in the period 1625-49.**

Religious dissenters increased in the period 1625-40 because of narrow definitions of uniformity of Laud and because dissenters were encouraged in the period 1640-60. In the 1620s there was at least five Baptist churches in England with the total membership of 150 which indicated a small but well established tradition of Puritanism led by John Smyth. Added to this were those that were ejected as a consequence of Laudian reforms during which clerical ejections increased as did the number of dissenters who met outside the Church because of Lauds imposition of Catechism. Charles and Lauds fear of puritans is evident in the extensive use of the Prerogative Courts to punish dissent. Bostwick, Barton and Prynne we're all imprisoned and it is no coincidence that the opposition to Charles that emerged in the Long Parliament of 1640 were of Puritan persuasion including Pym and Hampden.

Presbyterianism also grew in the period after 1616 under the leadership of Henry Jacob who had established a Congregational Church in London in 1616 which ad grown to 28 such churches because of the Laudian reforms. The excitement of the Long Parliament encouraged further development and by 1642 there were about 1,000 separatists in London. The course of the war saw further development because of the breakdown of normal constraints in the Church of England and those areas sympathetic to Parliament. The relative freedom of the press after 1640 further stimulated radical religious thinking through radical preachers and the role of the New Model army. By 1647 when the quarrel between parliament and the New Model Army intensified the arguments for religious freedom and social change will well publicised.

**Part 3. The fear of the influence of Catholicism continued to divide the Kingdom 1625-49.**

During the period there was a growing intensity of anti-Catholicism which became a significant cause of the civil war. Charles's marriage and policies of reforming the church along Armenian lines added fuel to anti-catholic sentiment, who feared the boldness of Catholics at Court and high profile Catholics living in London. Recusancy laws and restrictions on Catholic meetings were only being intermittently enforced throughout the Kingdom despite Charles' Anglicanism. Charles made no attempt to restrict Henrietta Maria and encouraged Laud with appointment and his reforming of the Church of England in the 1630 s. His closeness to Henrietta Maria after Buckingham's death in 1628 reinforced his natural tendency to be reserved and unwilling to explain his actions. In addition his authoritarian behaviour towards Parliament, the crisis over the forced loan and the Petition of Right suggested a desire to replicate the absolutist monarch model practiced in France. To this was added a style of court that elevated the monarchy to a semi religious mystic immortalized in Rubens ceilings, placing the monarchy at the shoulder of God. In 1633 the pomp and ceremony involved in his confirmation of the Scottish crown left the Scottish nobility and Parliament bemused. By the mid 1630's high-profile members of the Privy Council Windebank and Cottington had Catholic wives, courtiers and the King's children worshipped in the Queen's Chapel and the King's closest companion was the papal ambassador George Con.

Puritans were harassed in the 1630s whilst the Catholics will left largely undisturbed. The Soap monopoly was owned by Catholic courtiers, whilst the regional gentry and nobility were ordered to spend time in their localities and away from London. Those who protested were silenced and subjected to brutal punishments by bishops and privy councillors who staffed the Prerogative Courts and the Star Chamber which acted specifically in the king's name. Many loyal Anglicans and Puritans became deeply concerned at the direction of policy and practice of the King, but this unity of opposition quickly disappeared when there was a need to agree on the structures to replace personal rule in 1642. Charles was therefore still able to rally significant support against what was for him the emerging Great Rebellion. In England Catholics were a loyal minority and in both Ireland and western Scotland there were sizeable Catholic armies who supported the king in the civil war. All this was to come at a cost of uniting parliamentary puritan opposition to the King, particularly after the Irish Rebellion of 1641 and the plan to use Irish troops after Naseby in 1645. The period ended with the complete suppression of the catholic rebellion in Ireland and the execution of the King suspected of having sympathy toward catholics.

The 1640s was the key decade for the development of the Tolerationists grounded In radical puritanism. however many were concerned not to extend toleration to Catholicism. in the long Parliament a law of 1643 required all Catholics over the age of 21 to swear an oath of abjuration Denying basic beliefs. failure to do so resulted in estate being confiscated. The toleration act of 1650 offered by the Rump removed the requirement to attend Anglican church but excluded Catholics from practicing their own face. Persecution of Catholicism was however clearly widespread 1646-67, but the problem of Catholic influence was not the main focus of the political battles or religious tensions. As long as they remained discreet they could practice their religion but if they were considered a threat they were repressed by the authorities will subdued like the Irish in 1649.

**Conclusion**

Religious problems continued to divide the kingdom in the period 1625-49. 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. Religious dissent also survived because of the commitment of those who left the Church of England, the support given by sympathizers and the mistakes of those who sought to impose religious uniformity throughout the Stuart reigns. The result was increasing numbers of dissenters and especially presbyterianism, that provided a significant cause behind the Scottish Bishops Wars of 1638 and the English Civil wars that began in 1642. In addition fears of Catholicism’s influence in government increased during Charles I’s support for the Laudian reforms and his support for his catholic wife Henrietta Maria in the 1630’s The effects were to unify the opponents of Catholicism particularly amongst moderate Anglicans, Presbyterians and dissenters and play a significant part in the emergence of the civil war of the 1640’s. It is clear that developments in the Church of England, the evolution of religious radicalism and the fear of Catholicism continued to divide the nation in the period 1625-49.