**To what extent did religion continue to divide the kingdom in the period 1640-60?**

**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 1640-60. 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. 1640-60 Divisions in the Church of England continued to divide the Kingdom in the period 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.

**Part 2. The evolution of religious radicalism continued to divide the Kingdom in the period 1640-60.**

Religious dissenters increased in the period 1640-60 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.

By September 1658 Cromwell's efforts to balance freedom in religion and stability in society had achieved mixed results. The Quakers remained a threat, freedom granted to Independents, Congregationalists and Baptists had allowed them to become ordered and established setting up national organisations and specific Confessions of Faith to apply to all their members. The significance of this enabled them to withstand renewed persecution after the Restoration of 1660. Presbyterians had also worked within the church setting up voluntary organisations, although suspicions of religious radicalism had not abated. The core of separatism before 1616 lay in three groups the Congregationalists, the Baptist and the Quakers all of whom were dwarfed by the Presbyterians whose aim remained a reformed National Church and indeed were hostile to the sects. Presbyterian ministers John Shaw and Edward Bowles liaised with Fairfax and Monck to clear the way for Moncks March to London to prepare the way for the Restoration of the Monarchy

**Part 3** **The fear of the influence of Catholicism continued to divide the Kingdom 1640-60.**

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 1640 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. the oath of abjuration was reissued with stricter terms in 1656 including closing down of Catholic chapels in foreign embassies. In 1654 Cromwell reasserted the anti-catholic laws enacted under Elizabeth and James. However Cromwell's anti-catholicism was contradictory and sometimes audiences were given and laws enforced only intermittently. 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**

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 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 English Civil wars that began in 1642.. 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 Even in the period 1646-67 when fear of Catholicism influence in government was not so pronounced there was still widespread anti-catholicism and persecution. 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 1640-60.