

# English Contact

*by Sophia*



## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial uncovers the religious turmoil and geopolitical rivalries that influenced the beginnings of English colonization in North America. Much like Spanish colonialism, English colonialism began in a historical context defined by religious turmoil and shifts in governmental power. In particular, this tutorial covers the role that changing views on Christianity played in the English Crown's decision to expand its colonial reach into the Americas.

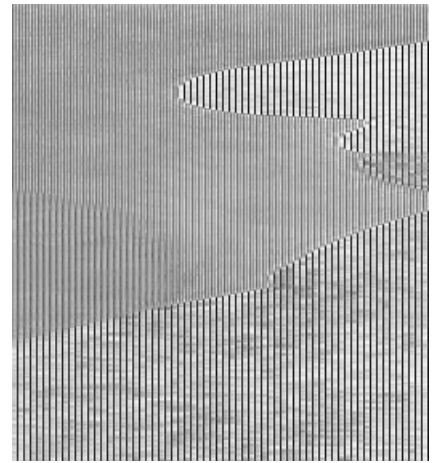
Our discussion will break down like this:

## 1. The Protestant Reformation

For Europeans, the discovery of the Americas meant newfound wealth in the form of gold and silver as well as valuable furs. The region also provided a new arena for intense imperial rivalry as different European monarchies and nations jockeyed for preeminence in the New World. Religion was a primary factor in these rivalries. As the Protestant Reformation gained ground in Europe beginning in the 1520s, competition and conflict between Catholic and Protestant Christians spilled over into the Americas. Perhaps no European nation exemplified this turmoil more than England.

In the early 1500s, the Catholic Church continued to provide a unifying religious structure for England and other monarchies in Europe. The Pope in Rome exercised great power over the lives of Europeans. The Church controlled not only learning and scholarship but also finances because it levied taxes on the faithful. Beginning with the reform efforts of Martin Luther in Germany and John Calvin in Switzerland, however, Catholic dominance in Europe came under attack as the Protestant Reformation, a split or schism among Christians, began.

**Martin Luther** was a German Catholic monk who took issue with the Catholic Church's practice of selling indulgences, or Church-sanctioned documents that members could purchase to be absolved of their sins. He also objected to the Catholic Church's taxation of ordinary Germans and the delivery of Mass in Latin, arguing that it failed to instruct German Catholics, who did not understand the language. In 1517, Luther compiled a list of Church reforms he viewed as necessary, a document that came to be known as *The Ninety-Five Theses*, and nailed it to the door of a church in Wittenberg, Germany, in 1517. He called for the publication of the Bible in everyday language, took issue with the Church's policy of imposing tithes (a required payment to the Church that appeared to enrich the clergy), and denounced the buying and selling of indulgences.



#### PEOPLE TO KNOW

##### **Martin Luther**

A German Catholic monk who called for reform to the Catholic Church. *The Ninety-Five Theses*, published in 1517, triggered a movement called the Protestant Reformation that divided the Church in two.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### ***The Ninety-Five Theses***

A document written by Martin Luther in 1517; it listed his views and criticisms on various Catholic Church practices and initiated the Protestant Reformation in Europe.

Like Luther, a French lawyer named **John Calvin** also advocated for making the Bible accessible to ordinary people. He argued that only by reading scripture and reflecting every day about their spiritual condition could humans begin to understand the power of God.



#### PEOPLE TO KNOW

##### **John Calvin**

A French lawyer who led the Protestant Reformation movement from Switzerland. Calvin advocated making the Bible accessible to ordinary people and stressed the idea of predestination, the belief that God selected a few chosen people for salvation while everyone else was predestined to damnation.

In what came to be known as **Calvinism**, Calvin emphasized human powerlessness before an all-knowing, all-powerful God, and he stressed the idea of predestination, or the belief that God selected a few chosen people for salvation (also known as the "elect") while everyone else was predestined to damnation. Calvin's followers, often known as Calvinists, believed that reading scripture could prepare humans to receive God's grace if they were fortunate enough to be among the elect.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### **Calvinism**

A branch of Protestantism started by John Calvin, emphasizing human powerlessness before an omniscient God and stressing the idea of predestination.

Luther originally hoped to reform the Catholic Church, but his actions, along with Calvin's, ultimately triggered a movement called the **Protestant Reformation**, which divided the Church and Europe in two. The Catholic Church condemned both men as heretics, but doctrines based on their reforms spread throughout Europe, including England.



#### TERM TO KNOW

### Protestant Reformation

The schism in Catholicism that began with Martin Luther and John Calvin in the early 16th century.

## 2. The Protestant Reformation in England

The Protestant Reformation in England, which began in the 1530s, showed how religious politics and state politics could be intertwined.

The English monarch at the time was **Henry VIII**. A devout Catholic, Henry had initially stood in opposition to the Reformation. Pope Leo X even awarded him the title “Defender of the Faith” for his support of the Catholic Church. The tides turned, however, when Henry desired a male heir to the English monarchy. When his Catholic wife, Catherine (the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain), did not give birth to a boy, the king sought an annulment of their marriage.



#### PEOPLE TO KNOW

### Henry VIII

King of England from 1509–1547. His schism with the Catholic Church in the 1530s led to the founding of the Protestant Church of England, otherwise known as the Anglican Church.

When the Pope refused his request, Henry created a new national Protestant church, the Church of England, with himself at its head. The political implications of this decision were profound. By naming himself head of a new Church of England (also known as the Anglican Church), Henry assumed the power to appoint bishops and other clergy. The English monarchy also gained enormous economic power that stemmed from the ability to tax or directly manage Church lands and resources within England, responsibilities that had previously rested with the Pope in Rome. In addition to strengthening the English monarchy, breaking with the Catholic Church allowed Henry to annul his own marriage to Catherine (which outraged Spain) and marry Anne Boleyn.

Anne Boleyn failed to produce a male heir, however, and Henry had her executed after accusing her of adultery. At long last, his third wife, Jane Seymour delivered a son, Edward, who ruled for only a short time before his death in 1553 at the age of 15. Mary, the daughter of Henry and his first wife Catherine, then assumed the throne. She was committed to restoring Catholicism in England. She earned the nickname “Bloody Mary” for her many executions of Protestants, often by burning them alive. Only the 1558 rise of Elizabeth, the Protestant daughter of Henry and Anne Boleyn, quieted religious turbulence within the English monarchy for a time.

Although Protestant in name, the Church of England retained the hierarchical structure and many of the rituals of the Catholic Church. For instance, Latin continued to be spoken in most church rituals. Thus, by the late 1500s, some English members of the Church began to agitate for more reform. Known as **Puritans**, they worked to erase all vestiges of Catholicism from the Church of England.



#### TERM TO KNOW

### Puritans

A group of religious reformers in the 16th and 17th centuries who wanted to “purify” the Church of England by ridding it of practices associated with the Catholic Church and advocating greater purity of doctrine and worship.

The Puritans were followers of John Calvin. They argued that all Church rituals, with the exception of baptism

and communion, were unnecessary. They also criticized the Church hierarchy. According to the Puritans, the Church should resemble a gathering of believers, in which the only authority was scripture itself, which all of the people could read for themselves in their own language. Indeed, the English scholar William Tyndale had translated the Bible into English as early as 1526. Puritans believed that only the reading of scripture could allow individuals to determine whether they were among God's elect and, therefore, predestined for salvation.

Under Elizabeth, whose long reign lasted from 1558 to 1603, Puritans grew steadily in number and influence. By the 1620s, however, when Charles I ascended the throne and started to implement church reforms that signaled a potential return to the Catholic Church, Puritans became increasingly frustrated and looked toward North America as a potential location to create a church and society more to their liking, one free of English and Catholic corruption.

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## 3. Religious War and English Exploration

The Protestant Reformation and the creation of the Church of England went on to disrupt international relations in Europe and the Atlantic. Spain was the preeminent Catholic power in Europe, and it did not tolerate any challenge to the Catholic Church. Over the course of the 16th century, it devoted vast amounts of treasure and labor, much of it derived from the New World, to leading an unsuccessful effort to eradicate Protestantism in Europe.

Spain's main enemies at this time were England and the runaway Spanish provinces of the North Netherlands. By 1581, these seven northern provinces had declared their independence from Spain and created the Dutch Republic, also called Holland, where Protestantism was tolerated. Determined to deal a death blow to Protestantism in England and Holland, King Philip of Spain assembled a massive force of 130 ships and more than 30,000 men and, in 1588, sent this navy, the Spanish Armada, north. But English sea power combined with a maritime storm destroyed the fleet.

The defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 was one part of a larger but undeclared war between Protestant England and Catholic Spain in the Atlantic. Between 1585 and 1604, the two rivals sparred repeatedly. England launched its own armada in 1589 in an effort to cripple the Spanish fleet and capture Spanish treasure. However, the foray ended in disaster for the English, with storms, disease, and the strength of the Spanish Armada combining to bring about defeat.

The conflict between Spain and England continued into the early 17th century, and the newly Protestant nations, especially England and the Dutch Republic, posed a significant challenge to Spain, as well as to Catholic France. These imperial rivalries, which were in many ways a product of the Protestant Reformation, played out on the Atlantic Ocean and in the Americas.



This portrait of Elizabeth I of England, painted by George Gower in about 1588, shows Elizabeth with her hand on a globe, signifying her power over the world. The pictures in the background show the English defeat of the Spanish Armada.

Queen Elizabeth in particular favored England's advance into the Atlantic, though her main concern was blocking Spain's effort to eliminate Protestantism in Europe. Religious tensions between Catholics and Protestants in England, as evidenced by Queen Mary's attempt to reinstate Catholicism and the restoration of the Church of England by Elizabeth, deprived the nation of significant finances and other resources that could be devoted to overseas colonization projects. Nonetheless, Elizabeth approved of English privateers, or sea captains who had permission to attack Spanish ships at will. These skilled mariners cruised the Caribbean, plundering Spanish ships whenever they could. Each year the English took more than £100,000 from Spain in this way; English privateer Francis Drake first made a name for himself when, in 1573, he looted silver, gold, and pearls worth £40,000.

Elizabeth did sanction an early attempt at colonization in 1584, when **Sir Walter Raleigh**, a favorite of the queen, attempted to establish a colony at **Roanoke**, an island off the coast of present-day North Carolina. England hoped to find gold or other forms of mineral wealth in the area. The island was also an ideal location for launching raids on Spanish ships sailing from the Caribbean. Unfortunately, Raleigh and Elizabeth did little to sustain the creation of a permanent settlement in the area.



#### PEOPLE TO KNOW

## Sir Walter Raleigh

English explorer who led the failed attempt to establish an English colony at Roanoke in 1584.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### Roanoke

Also known as the “Lost Colony,” this was the English monarchy’s first attempt at a permanent colonization project in North America.

Roanoke was a small colony, consisting of only 117 people. Colonists were ill-prepared to survive in their new land, and they suffered from a poor relationship with the local Native tribal group, the Croatan.

Roanoke’s governor, John White, returned to England in late 1587 to secure more people and supplies, but events conspired to keep him away from Roanoke for three years. By the time he returned in 1590, the entire colony had vanished. The only trace the colonists left behind was the word “Croatoan” carved into a fence surrounding the village. Governor White never knew whether the colonists had decamped for nearby Croatoan Island (now Hatteras) or whether some disaster had befallen them all.



### DID YOU KNOW

The fate of the colonists remains a mystery and, for these reasons, Roanoke is still called the “Lost Colony.”

One thing is clear, however. England’s first attempt to establish a permanent colony in North America ended in failure.



### SUMMARY

In this tutorial, we looked at England’s attempt to form a settlement in North America. Poor planning and lack of resources led to the failure of their first colony at Roanoke. Given the religious tensions in Europe and England’s rivalry with Spain, however, it remained to be seen whether England could devote the necessary attention toward colonization.

By 1600, Spain was the leading power in the New World, and other European nations, including England, struggled to catch up. In their efforts to do so, imperial rivalries soon reflected religious turmoil from Europe that was a product of the Protestant Reformation. The conflict between Catholics and Protestants would have a profound effect on the history of the Atlantic World, especially the history of English North America.

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### TERMS TO KNOW

#### Calvinism

A branch of Protestantism started by John Calvin, which emphasized human powerlessness before an omniscient God and stressed the idea of predestination.

## Protestant Reformation

The schism in Catholicism that began with Martin Luther and John Calvin in the early 16th century.

## Puritans

A group of religious reformers in the 16th and 17th centuries who wanted to “purify” the Church of England by ridding it of practices associated with the Catholic Church and advocating greater purity of doctrine and worship.

## Roanoke

Also known as the “Lost Colony,” this was the first attempt by the British monarchy to attempt a permanent colonization project in North America.

## The Ninety-Five Theses

A document written by Martin Luther in 1517; it listed his views and criticisms on various Catholic Church practices.



## PEOPLE TO KNOW

### Henry VIII

King of England from 1509–1547. His schism with the Catholic Church in the 1530s led to the founding of the Protestant Church of England, otherwise known as the Anglican Church.

### John Calvin

A French lawyer who led the Protestant Reformation movement from Switzerland. Calvin advocated making the Bible accessible to ordinary people and stressed the idea of predestination, or the belief that God selected a few chosen people for salvation while everyone else was predestined to damnation.

### Martin Luther

A German Catholic monk who called for the reformation of the Catholic Church. *The Ninety-Five Theses*, published in 1517, triggered a movement called the Protestant Reformation that divided the Church in two.

### Sir Walter Raleigh

English explorer who led the failed attempt to establish an English colony at Roanoke in 1584.



## DATES TO KNOW

### 1517

Martin Luther issues his *Ninety-Five Theses* and sparks the Protestant Reformation.

### 1526

English scholar William Tyndale translates the Bible into English to make it more widely accessible.

### 1527

King Henry VIII begins seeking an annulment from his Catholic wife, Catherine of Aragon.

### 1534

Henry VIII declares himself head of the newly established Church of England (aka the Anglican Church).

**1550–1600**

Puritanism emerges as a Protestant religious reform movement.

**1558–1603**

Queen Elizabeth I reigns for 44 years.

**1581**

The Dutch Republic (aka Holland) separates from Catholic Spain and begins Atlantic exploration.

**1584**

Sir Walter Raleigh establishes a short-lived English colony at Roanoke in present-day North Carolina.

**1588**

Spain's King Philip sends the Spanish Armada north to challenge Protestant England and Holland but is defeated by the English.

**1604**

The Anglo-Spanish War winds down after nearly 20 years of hostilities.