The English reformation in History – an introduction

Why study the English reformation? In the opinion of the lecturer the English reformation is the most important historical event between the Norman invasion and the industrial revolution. However many question if religious change still affects us today?

What was the reformation?
- A European wide movement.
- A revolution which challenged the foundation of Christian belief and changed the relationship between church and state.

Broadly speaking, northern Europe was mostly protestant and southern Europe was mostly catholic.
Established a national church as opposed to an international church.

In England Protestantism replaced Catholicism but many historians ask questions such as:
Could we have the Church of England without Protestantism?
Would we have Protestantism in England without the reformation?

Debate:
- Act of state
- Religion
- Doctrinal act of state
- Post revisionist

Those who agree that the reformation was a doctrinal act of state argue that the people remained devout Catholics.
Post revisionists argue that there was an understanding and a conversation between the state and the people.

Conversion or coercion? The answer to this question is inconclusive and therefore relies purely on interpretation and is uncertain as a result. These ideas mean that the dates differ. Those who argue coercion believe that the time period starts with the opening of the reformation parliament in 1529 to the establishment of the Elizabethan settlement in 1559. However for those who argue conversion, it is more complex as they may argue that the time period might begin as early as 1510 or as late as 1547 with the accession of Edward VI or the creation of the doctrinal framework in the 1560s.

There are two central themes to consider:
- The inter-relationship between politics and religion in our understanding of reformation
- The living debate with no definitive answer and in which subjectivity is significant.