Protestant Reformation And The Catholic Counter Reformation Essay, Research Paper

The period immediately following the Protestant reformation and the Catholic counter reformation, was full of conflict and war. The entire continent of Europe and all of it’s classes of society were affected by the destruction and flaring tempers of the period. In the Netherlands, the Protestants and the Catholics were at eachother?s throats. In France it was the Guise family versus the Bourbons. In Bohemia, the religious and political structures caused total havoc for over thirty years; and in England, the Presbyterians thought that the English Anglican Church too closely resembled the Roman Catholic Church. Religion was the major cause of the widespread turmoil that took place throughout Europe between 1560 and 1660.

One example of a battle in Europe that was caused by religious conflict took place in the Netherlands, between the Dutch citizens and their ruler Phillip II of Spain. When he tried to gain control of the catholic church there, the Dutch rebelled. The Protestants began to assault the Catholics, destroy their churches, and revolt against Phillip and his strict Catholic codes in 1572. The conflict ended in 1579 with a twelve year truce, when seven of the seventeen provinces united under Calvinism and William of Orange, and formed the United Provinces. The remaining ten remained under the rule of Spain.

Another example of religious turmoil was the thirty-six year civil war in France, where the Huguenots were increasing in number despite the power of their enemies, the Catholics. The French Catholics, led by the noble family, Guise, faced off with the leading family of the Huguenots, the Bourbons. “The feuds which separate the leading families of France are more bitter than the ones described in ancient tragedy; this is the state of feeling which exists between the Houses of Guise and Bourbon.? (de Busbeq) The conflict became an intense struggle, and an enormous amount of damage occurred. Everything was being destroyed, weather different houses, churches, businesses, and even schools. When the fighting subsided, the economy of France, especially it’s commerce, was shattered, leaving it vulnerable and extremely weak. Power was one of the most necessary ingredients towards the prosperity of their governments, and became more important to the country’s well being and future.

The thirty years war was yet another example of religious strife in Europe. Rudolf II the ruler of Bohemia tolerated Protestants in his country, but his successor Ferdinand II did not and pushed the work of the counter reformation. The Bohemians rebelled, and Ferdinand exiled and executed them. They were told to register and sell their property and leave within fourteen days to “prevent further trouble and embarrassment.” (Dietrich). When the truce between Spain and the Dutch ended, fighting in Germany and the Netherlands resumed. Ferdinand then issued the Edict of Nantes (which he would later suspend due to opposition by nobles), which gave Catholics back all their land that the Protestants had taken. France then entered the war, seizing the opportunity to attack their opposing Catholic power, the Hapsburgs. They also attacked Ferdinand. One third of Germany’s total population was killed, but this was not the end. “Even after peace was finally concluded in 1648, the religious controversies continued.” (Friedrich).

The last example of European disruption due to religious cause was the civil war in England. James I tried to unite Scotland and England under the some crown, but his idea was defeated. Then, when his successor Charles I tried to make the Scottish accept and adopt the Anglican church, they took up arms against him and the royalist English. In 1640 the Puritan Scots entered northern England and joined with a group of English who preferred the Scottish religion

over their own, due to what it was becoming (Russell). The Puritans split into two groups; the Independents (who wanted a congregational system with the freedom to choose religion), and the Presbyterians (who wanted a strict Calvinist system controlled by a strong central power). The Independents dominated the war with their New Model Army, and became an unstoppable force in England. They were led by the influential and militant Oliver Cromwell (whose nickname became “Lord Protector”)of the House of Commons, and captured Charles, removed the House of Lords and the Presbyterians from Parliament, and executed the “holy anointed.”

Although politics did play a major role in the conflicts that

occurred in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries; it was religion which was the major cause of the wars and devastation that occurred in this time period, and many times throughout history weather before or after the seventeenth century.

Bibliography

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