**The Church**

All English people belonged to the Catholic Church under the jurisdiction of the Pope. Their lives centred on the Church; the parish church (over 8000 of them in total) was the focus of religious experience.

The Church provided festivals linked to the agricultural year and guilds and confraternities (voluntary group of individuals promoting works of Christian charity and devotion) offered charity and a chance for ordinary people to contribute.

The Church made it easier for social and political elites to maintain social control through its messages. It also provided employment opportunities. For example, Cardinal Wolsey advanced himself socially through having high office in Church and State.

***Church on an international scale***

It was significant in international relations and domestic policies. Through the Pope, who not only wielded considerable spiritual power but was the head of a substantial state in northern Italy, Henry asked for a dispensation to marry Elizabeth of York.

In contrast, the relationship between Church and State was Erastian (view that the State should have authority over the Church) so the Pope did little to interfere with the Church of England.

The King was firmly in control and it was often the Pope who was eager to do favours for the King. Papacy had no objection to Henry spending the Church’s money on Churchmen of which whom had high political office under Henry.

***Administration of English Churches***

The Church of England was administered through two provinces: Canterbury and York which were each under control of an archbishop and 17 dioceses (area under pastoral care of a bishop).

Some of the dioceses like Winchester and Durham enjoyed considerable wealth and it was common for senior churchmen to have power and influence in the Kingdom too.

Often, senior clergy participated at a high level in the political process. It was common for the most senior figures in the Church of England to be drawn from the high ranks of the aristocracy. For example, Margaret Beaufort’s great uncle had been cardinal and bishop of Winchester. John Morton and Richard Fox were the two Churchmen who had most power under Henry.

Clergymen monopolised some offices of State, especially Chancellor. On the whole, the performed duties to both State and Church worked effectively.

Abbots (head of the wealthiest religious houses) and bishops shared membership of the House of Lords. They had to keep complex organisations running effectively whilst demonstrating the spirituality necessary to maintain the reputation of the Houses. Not all Heads of House lived up to this and criticisms of Monastic life were increasing.

***Parish Church***

According to Eamon Duffy, the age under Henry VII was of the parish church. People went to the parish church to pray together.

They offered various ways for an individual to receive grace (pure state needed to enter Heaven) meaning it affected behaviour and offered ways to minimise the state of purgatory.

To achieve Heaven, these 7 sacraments had to be observed:

1. Baptism
2. Confirmation (marked the transition of childhood to adulthood)
3. Marriage
4. Anointing (prepared dying for passage to the next world)
5. Penance
6. Holy orders (process where they could deliver sacraments to others)
7. Eucharist (received bread and wine symbolising Christ’s body and blood to be brought closer to God).

***Mass***

Mass was central to the religious experience which involved the Priest performing the Eucharist. The highlight of this was when the priest declared bread and wine to be sacred (consecrated). At this point it was believed that the bread and wine turned literally and figuratively into the body and blood of Christ. This transformation was known as transubstantiation.

The Priest consumed both bread and wine whereas the members of the congregation took bread only.

Why mass was important:

* Sacrifice was performed by the Priest on behalf of the Community.
* It was a sacred ritual which the whole community participated in.

The importance of consecrated bread was compounded at the Corpus Christi festival which was one of the most important festivals in the 15th Century.

It was largely lay people who paid for the refurbishment and the furniture of the Church.

***Death***

On death, the lay person would leave money to the Church for:

* Enhancing the beauty of worship.
* Ensuring remembrance of benefactor.
* Reducing time in purgatory.

Other benefactors would leave money for the foundation of chantries/chapels where there were masses for the souls of the dead.

According to Eamon Duffy, “the central function of a charity priest was intercession (priest would say a prayer on behalf of the individual) for the soul of his patron.”

This helped the community and benefactor which shows why the dissolution of chantries was badly reacted to.

Another communal religious influence was the confraternity (religious guild of lay brotherhood). The guild were groups of people who:

* Provided collectively for the funeral cost of members.
* Paid chaplains for Masses for their members.
* Helped maintain Church fabric.
* Made donations.

***Guilds***

Guilds were very popular: the small rural parish of Salle in Norfolk had 7.Wealthier guilds were often a source of local patronage and power. Some ran schools and almshouses, maintained local transport links and in Louth (Lincolnshire) they paid for the building of a spire at the Parish Church.

In the South and South Midlands, money was raised through Church-ale festivals.

***Pilgrimage***

Pilgrimage was important too. However, there’s evidence that the most popular pilgrimage site, the tomb of Thomas Becket at Canterbury was losing popularity. Some late medieval religious writers such as Thomas a Kempis were critical of pilgrimage.

However, the practice of pilgrimage was exuberant according to Eamon Duffy.

A simpler form of pilgrimage happened on Rogation Sunday when the whole community would walk around the parish boundaries to pray for its protection. This was known as “beating the bounds.” They’d carry banners and the Parish cross to ward off evil spirits.

The writings of mystic was also available who believed in personal communication between the individual and God.

Lady Margaret Beaufort gave large, widespread donations, especially to Cambridge, which demonstrated her piety.