

## How to Write a Historical Document Study

### DOCUMENT STUDY GUIDELINES

*This resource provides a set of guidelines for writing a formal Historical Document study, with a sample Document Analysis by way of an illustration. The sample has itself been analyzed and annotated throughout to explain the procedures involved in the exercise.*

#### ELEMENTS OF A PRIMARY DOCUMENT STUDY

One aim of Church History study is to have students become competent in the use and analysis of primary historical documents. A Document Study is an analysis of a specific historical document with a view to interpreting it for its historical significance. The following elements are involved in such a formal analysis (of one document or a group of documents).

##### **1. Place the document in its historical context**

The analysis starts with a discussion of the historical forces which led to the writing of the document. This requires a knowledge of the general historical background and the main issues involved at the time. Such knowledge will be derived from secondary sources, which should be acknowledged in the essay in the same way as in other formal essays. In general, a document study will be relatively short, and so the number of secondary sources should be relatively few. The document itself is the main focus of the study.

##### **2. A brief summary of the major issue(s) in the document**

This summary should be concise, and should identify just what is the main point at issue in the document, and the particular perspective of the writer as expressed in it, especially in light of the foregoing discussion of the context.

##### **3. A statement of the immediate response to the main issue of the document**

This part also requires a consideration of secondary material. In effect, this re-situates the document in its ongoing historical context. Students should identify the main responses in support of or opposed to the main issue of the document, and should highlight any differences in the immediate history of the period that may be attributed to the issue or the document itself.

##### **4. A statement of the long-term historical impact of the main issue of the document**

Again, secondary material is required. The ongoing effect caused by the issue addressed in the document may be negligible, strong but relatively short-lived, or dramatic and permanent in its importance. The student needs to identify the major consequences of the issue, or the document itself, for the history of the church.

Students should note that this Document Study is a formal essay, and all the normal conventions of essay composition apply. However, when referring repeatedly to a particular document, in the second and subsequent references, abbreviated citations by way of page references (either in text or as footnotes) will suffice.

***In reviewing your essay, use the following as a checklist:***

- ✦ What is the key context noted?  
Is any other salient detail needed?
- ✦ What is the key issue identified in the document?  
Is it accurately stated?  
Is there any important aspect omitted?
- ✦ What is the major immediate consequence?  
Is there any other consequence that should be noted?
- ✦ How has this issue impacted the church in the long term?  
Is it of relevance to our own church situation?

***At times, you may be asked to apply the paper and the issue to your own situation.  
In that case, consider some or all of the following as appropriate:***

- ◆ Is there any evidence of this situation in your church or denomination?
- ◆ How did it happen?
- ◆ How should you deal with it?
- ◆ What is the future of this situation in your scene?
- ◆ What can be drawn from this study that is of importance to your personal ministry?

## A SAMPLE DOCUMENT STUDY ANALYSIS

**Note:** The Underlining and Bold Type are not a part of the exercise. They are included merely for later reference in the explanation. They should NOT be included in your writing.

### *The Submission of the Clergy, 1532*<sup>1</sup>

Henry VIII came to the English throne in 1509 in an atmosphere of emerging nationalism and growing international political tensions, especially among England, France, Spain and the Roman Papacy. His concern to establish the Tudor dynasty was frustrated by the failure of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon to produce a male heir.<sup>2</sup> Once Cardinal Wolsey's attempts to have the marriage annulled had failed, Henry became progressively more **determined to remove England from the dominance of Rome**. Accordingly, with the aid of the astute politician Thomas Cromwell,<sup>3</sup> he enacted a **series of Acts of Parliament which effectively established the independence of the Church in England from the Papacy, and substituted a dependence on the English Crown.**<sup>4</sup>

In 1531, he disciplined the church's Convocation for a breach of the old Act of Praemunire, a 14<sup>th</sup> century law which had forbidden appeals to foreign powers, particularly targeting the then French Papacy's appointment to benefices in England, but this law had been dormant for a long time.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the church was compelled to recognize **Henry as the Supreme Head of the Church of England** "as far as the Law of Christ allows."<sup>6</sup> The next year, in 1532, Convocation (the "Parliament" of the Church in England) was compelled to submit formally to the authority of the King. It is this statement which is known as the Submission of the Clergy, 1532.

The document records a formal statement of the "clergy of England" (line 2), expressed as a virtual oath (in *verbo sacerdotii*, line 8). It makes **two** basic and sweeping **concessions to the authority of the King**, namely, that **Convocation will never meet or enact any church legislation without first being summoned by the King** and being authorized by the King to make such legislation (paragraph 2), and that any **church legislation that is already in existence and is not acceptable to the King will be reviewed and repealed** (paragraph 3). The first concession is important, since it specifically agrees that Convocation will not even assemble without the written directive of the King ("Convocation ... must be assembled only by your highness' commandment of writ", paragraph 2, lines 6-7). It has the further guarantee that it will also never enact anything that does not have the royal assent (paragraph 2, lines 9-10).

The second concession (paragraph 3) goes even further, in agreeing to review any existing legislation that displeases the King. The review is to be undertaken by a committee of the King and 32 people, with 16 to be appointed from the clergy and 16 from the temporal houses of Parliament, but all to be appointed by the King (paragraph 3, lines 7-9). The legislation will be repealed if the King plus a majority of the 32 agree to do so. The combination of these two **concessions effectively gave the King total control of the legislative conduct of Convocation**, since he now had the power to call (or not to call) Convocation, and to endorse or repeal legislation as he saw fit. The surrender of the clergy was complete.

This statement can be seen as **the first formal stage of the establishment of the Royal Supremacy over the Church in England, a major issue in the English Reformation**. It was followed in 1533 by a Parliamentary Act in Restraint of Appeals, which repeated the ban on church appeals to a foreign power (ie Rome).<sup>7</sup> In 1533, the Act of Supremacy officially gave the King the formal title of Supreme Head of the Church of England.<sup>8</sup> In 1534, the submission of the clergy from 1532 was enshrined in legislation.<sup>9</sup> At that point, the established, national Church of England can be said to have been born.

The issue of **Royal Supremacy is one key element in the perennial question of Church-State relationships**. In England, there was a constant tension between the conservatives who wanted to retain the traditional Roman base of authority (and consequent political control of the Church of England with its lands and finances) and the emerging nationalists who wanted English self-determination in all such areas. The rest of Henry's reign and that of Edward VI saw a consolidation of the English Crown in all matters of church life, even extending to the liturgy composed by the King's appointee Thomas Cranmer.<sup>10</sup>

When the conservative Catholic Mary took over the throne in 1553, she immediately sought to repeal the Supremacy and Submission legislation, forcing the clergy to submit instead to the legatine authority of Cardinal Reginald Pole. She repealed all the acts of liturgical import in 1553, but significantly, Parliament refused to restore Papal supremacy to the Church of England. Although Convocation submitted to Pole in 1554, and was dissolved, **Mary's failure to restore Papal supremacy is a sign of the importance of the political dimension of the English Reformation, since it was Parliament, not the Church, which stood for English autonomy.**

Ultimately, under Elizabeth in 1559, the final Act of Supremacy was passed, which restated in unequivocal terms that the **Church in England was indeed the Church of England, with the monarch as the Supreme Governor of the Church.**<sup>11</sup> Ironically, it was the Pope who had given Henry VIII the title "Defender of the Faith" for his stand against Luther, but now the English monarch was to wear that same title as a defender of the English church against the foreign Roman domination. The issue remains alive today, with the current Queen of England being the Defender of the Faith, but with a recent Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, having expressed his preference for the disestablishment of the English Church, which would remove the Royal Supremacy.

## Footnotes

1. H Bettenson & C Maunder (eds), *Documents of the Christian Church* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed; Oxford: OUP, 1999), 241
2. O Chadwick, *The Reformation* (London: Penguin, 1972), 99
3. AG Dickens, *The English Reformation* (rev ed; Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1967), 159
4. AG Dickens, *The English Reformation*, 163
5. E Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 54, 282
6. H Bettenson & C Maunder (eds), *Documents of the Christian Church*, 253
7. H Hillerbrand (ed), *The Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Michigan: Baker, 1989), 300
8. GR Elton (ed), *The Tudor Constitution* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed; Cambridge: CUP, 1982), 341
9. H Bettenson & C Maunder (eds), *Documents of the Christian Church*, 241
10. O Chadwick, *The Reformation*, 116
11. Bruce L Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed; Dallas: Word, 1995), 270

## Bibliography

- Bettenson H & C Maunder (eds), *Documents of the Christian Church* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed; Oxford: OUP, 1999)
- Cameron E, *The European Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991)
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- Dickens AG, *The English Reformation* (rev ed; Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1967)
- Elton GR (ed), *The Tudor Constitution* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed; Cambridge: CUP, 1982)
- Hillerbrand H(ed), *The Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Michigan: Baker, 1989)
- Shelley Bruce L, *Church History in Plain Language* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed; Dallas: Word, 1995)

## NOTES ON THE SAMPLE DOCUMENT STUDY ANALYSIS

1. In the analysis, there needs to be a central organizing *theme* which controls the whole discussion. In this case, the central principle is that of the establishment of the Royal Supremacy in the Church of England (ie making the King also the Head of the Church in place of the Pope). The phrases in **Bold Type** above are the key phrases which keep this topic in mind all the way through the analysis.
2. There also needs to be a consistent reference to specific historical facts as *evidence* of what the main theme is about. The words and phrases underlined above are such evidential elements.
3. The comments in the margins below (on the next two pages) indicate where and how the required elements of the analysis have been treated. The approximate relative proportions of the elements are also indicated.
4. Constant reference needs to be made to the specific details in the document. The method of bracketing such references is quite acceptable.
5. Note how the footnotes are done.
6. Note also how the Bibliography is done. The number and nature of required books of reference are indicative of a typical document analysis.

<p><b>Section 1:</b> Place the document in its historical context. (230 words)</p> <p>[Major details leading up to the event treated in the document, focusing on the main issue of the document - here, the issue of Royal Supremacy.]</p>	<p>Henry VIII came to the English throne in 1509 in an atmosphere of emerging nationalism and growing international political tensions, especially among England, France, Spain and the Roman Papacy. His concern to establish the Tudor dynasty was frustrated by the failure of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon to produce a male heir. Once Cardinal Wolsey's attempts to have the marriage annulled had failed, Henry became progressively more determined to remove England from the dominance of Rome. Accordingly, with the aid of the astute politician Thomas Cromwell, he enacted a series of Acts of Parliament which effectively established the independence of the Church in England from the Papacy, and substituted a dependence on the English Crown. In 1531, he disciplined the church's Convocation for a breach of the old Act of Praemunire, a 14<sup>th</sup> century law which had forbidden appeals to foreign powers, particularly targeting the then French Papacy's appointment to benefices in England, but this law had been dormant for a long time. At the same time, the church was compelled to recognize Henry as the Supreme Head of the Church of England "as far as the Law of Christ allows." The next year, in 1532, Convocation (the "Parliament" of the Church in England) was compelled to submit formally to the authority of the King. It is this statement which is known as the Submission of the Clergy, 1532.</p>
<p><b>Section 2:</b> A brief summary of the major issues in the document. (279 words)</p> <p>[Analyze the main ideas actually expressed in the document; refer to specific words, phrases and terms of the document. Make it clear that you understand the meaning of the content of the document.]</p>	<p>The document records a formal statement of the "clergy of England" (line 2), expressed as a virtual oath (<i>in verbo sacerdotii</i>, line 8). It makes two basic and sweeping concessions to the authority of the King, namely, that Convocation will never meet or enact any church legislation without first being summoned by the King and being authorized by the King to make such legislation (paragraph 2), and that any church legislation that is already in existence and is not acceptable to the King will be reviewed and repealed (paragraph 3). The first concession is important, since it specifically agrees that Convocation will not even assemble without the written directive of the King ("Convocation ... must be assembled only by your highness' commandment of writ", paragraph 2, lines 6-7). It has the further guarantee that it will also never enact anything that does not have the royal assent (paragraph 2, lines 9-10). The second concession (paragraph 3) goes even further, in agreeing to review any existing legislation that displeases the King. The review is to be undertaken by a committee of the King and 32 people, with 16 to be appointed from the clergy and 16 from the temporal houses of Parliament, but all to be appointed by the King (paragraph 3, lines 7-9). The legislation will be repealed if the King plus a majority of the 32 agree to do so. The combination of these two concessions effectively gave the King total control of the legislative conduct of Convocation, since he now had the power to call (or not to call) Convocation, and to endorse or repeal legislation as he saw fit. The surrender of the clergy was complete.</p>
<p><b>Section 3:</b> A statement of the immediate response to the main issue of the document. (105 words)</p> <p>[The rendering official by parliamentary legislation of the Royal Supremacy.]</p>	<p>This statement can be seen as the first formal stage of the establishment of the Royal Supremacy over the Church in England, a major issue in the English Reformation. It was followed in 1533 by a Parliamentary Act in Restraint of Appeals, which repeated the ban on church appeals to a foreign power (ie Rome). In 1533, the Act of Supremacy officially gave the King the formal title of Supreme Head of the Church of England. In 1534, the submission of the clergy from 1532 was enshrined in legislation. At that point, the established, national Church of England can be said to have been born.</p>

**Section 4:**

A statement of the long-term historical impact of the main issue of the document.  
(323 words)

[The ongoing issue of Royal Supremacy in the English Church.]

The issue of Royal Supremacy is one key element in the perennial question of Church-State relationships. In England, there was a constant tension between the conservatives who wanted to retain the traditional Roman base of authority (and consequent political control of the Church of England with its lands and finances) and the emerging nationalists who wanted English self-determination in all such areas. The rest of Henry's reign and that of Edward VI saw a consolidation of the English Crown in all matters of church life, even extending to the liturgy composed by the King's appointee Thomas Cranmer. When the conservative Catholic Mary took over the throne in 1553, she immediately sought to repeal the Supremacy and Submission legislation, forcing the clergy to submit instead to the legatine authority of Cardinal Reginald Pole. She repealed all the acts of liturgical import in 1553, but significantly, Parliament refused to restore Papal supremacy to the Church of England. Although Convocation submitted to Pole in 1554, and was dissolved, Mary's failure to restore Papal supremacy is a sign of the importance of the political dimension of the English Reformation, since it was Parliament, not the Church, which stood for English autonomy. Ultimately, under Elizabeth in 1559, the final Act of Supremacy was passed, which restated in unequivocal terms that the Church *in* England was indeed the Church *of* England, with the monarch as the Supreme Governor of the Church. Ironically, it was the Pope who had given Henry VIII the title "Defender of the Faith" for his stand against Luther, but now the English monarch was to wear that same title as a defender of the English church against the foreign Roman domination. The issue remains alive today, with the current Queen of England being the Defender of the Faith, but with a recent Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, having expressed his preference for the disestablishment of the English Church, which would remove the Royal Supremacy.

Notes:  
Total length:  
937 words  
(including footnotes: 1055 words)  
  
No of footnotes:  
about 1 per 100 words.  
  
Books in Bibliography:  
limited