Religion and Great Chain of Being

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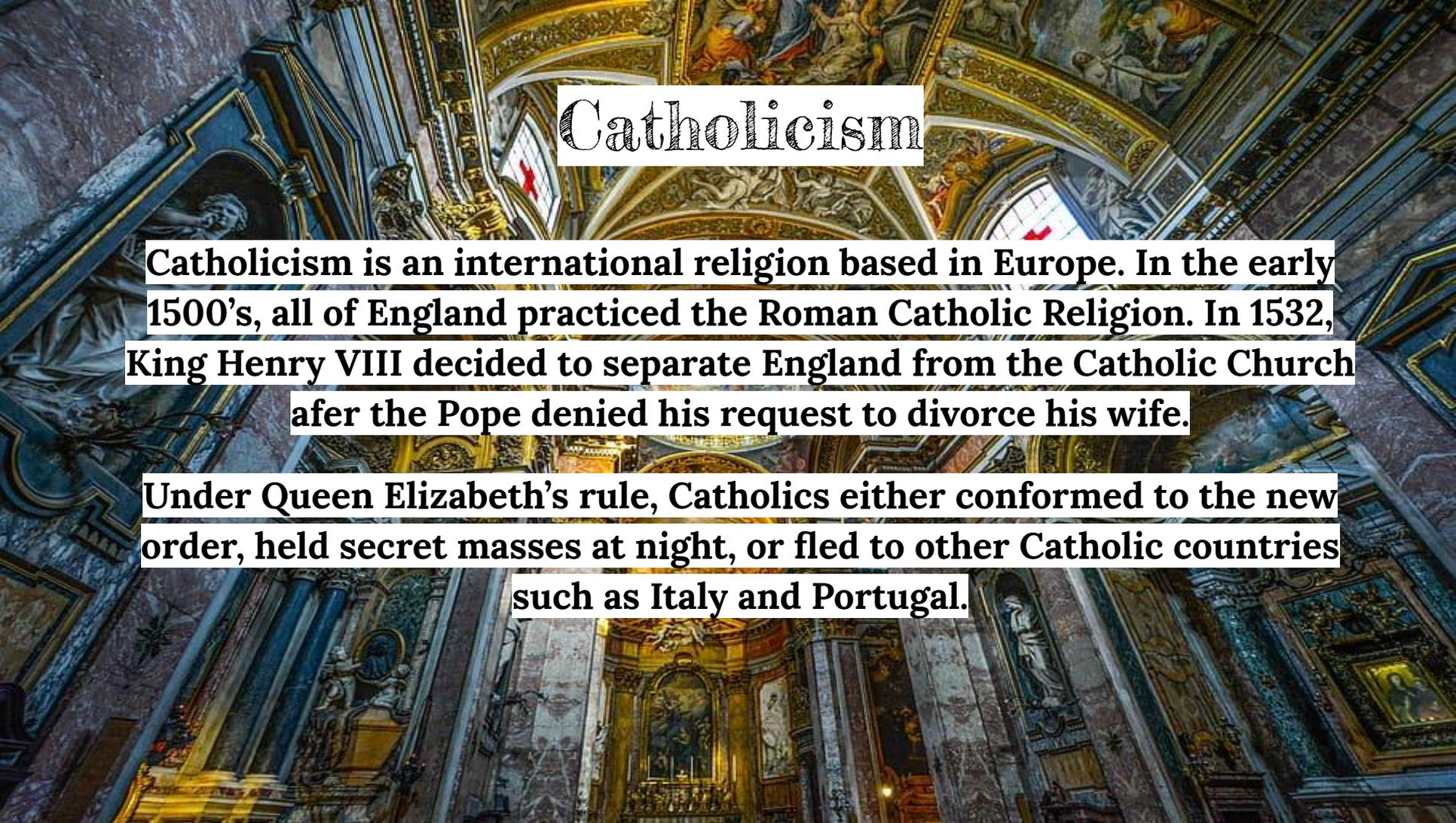
Catholicism

Catholicism is an international religion based in Europe. In the early 1500's, all of England practiced the Roman Catholic Religion. In 1532, King Henry VIII decided to separate England from the Catholic Church afer the Pope denied his request to divorce his wife.

Under Queen Elizabeth's rule, Catholics either conformed to the new order, held secret masses at night, or fled to other Catholic countries such as Italy and Portugal.

Protestantism
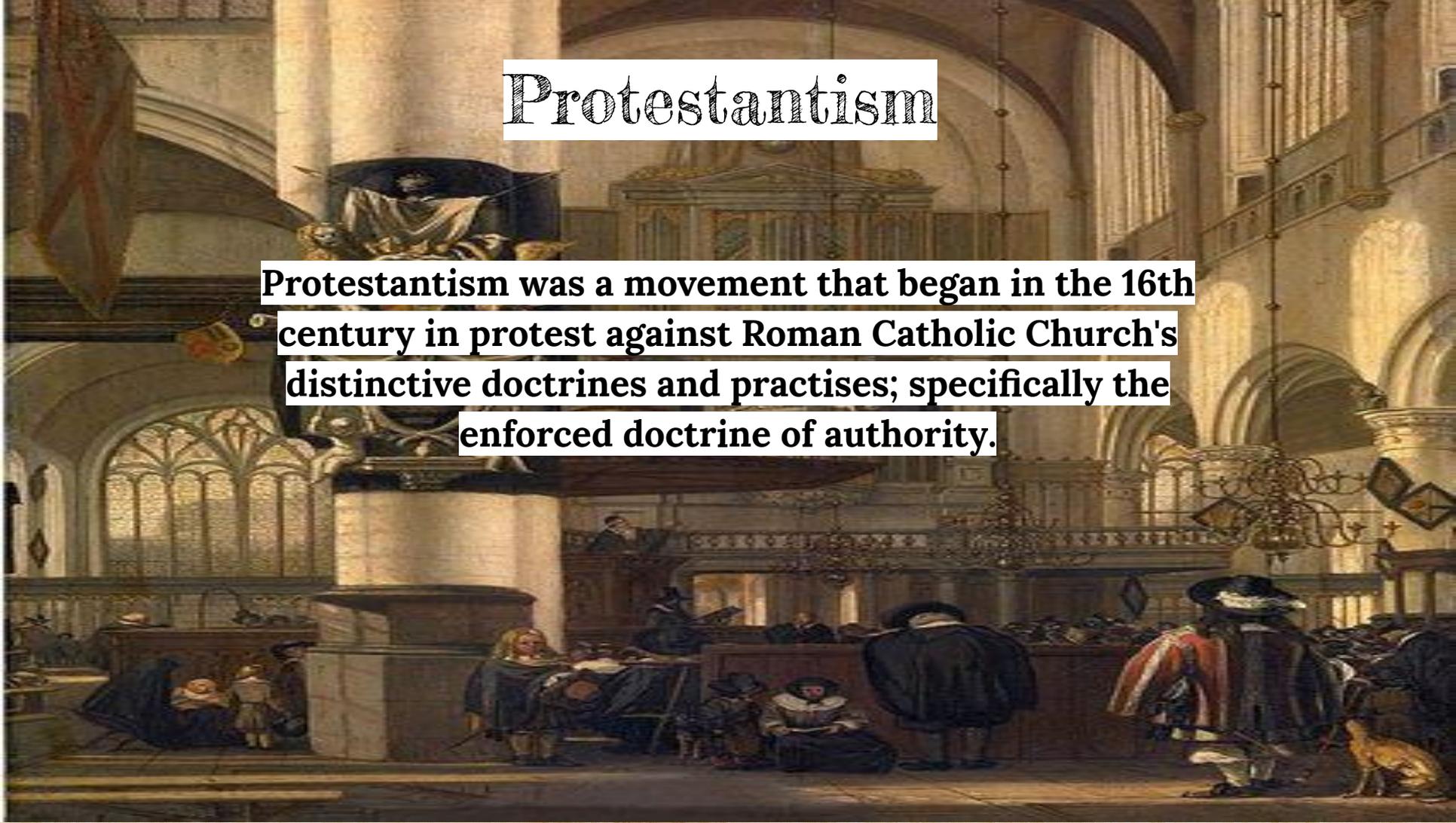
Protestantism was a movement that began in the 16th century in protest against Roman Catholic Church's distinctive doctrines and practises; specifically the enforced doctrine of authority.

The Protestant/English Reformation

Henry VIII

- Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon annulment
- The Act of Supremacy in November 1534

Mary I

- Mary ascended to throne in 1553
- Desired to reunite England with the Roman Church Sentenced about 300 Protestants to death

Elizabeth I

- Reigned from 1558-1603
- Brought to power by Protestants
- The Religious Settlement: The Church of England Act of Supremacy Act of Uniformity

James VI and I

- Puritans
- More restrictions against Catholics
- James' Bible
- Gunpowder Plot

Royalty in the Order of the World

- James I, successor to Elizabeth I, developed the theory of the "**Divine Right of Kings**" after he ascended to the throne.
- According to James I, "The **state of monarchy** is the **most supreme thing upon earth**: for kings are not only **God's Lieutenants** upon earth, and sit upon God's **throne**, but even by God himself they are called Gods."
- This idea solidified the authority of the king, as it was believed God bestowed him with semi-divine powers
- With this idea in mind, it would not only be against the law to rebel against the monarchy, it would be a sin against God Himself.

Shakespeare & Royalty

- Elizabeth I was a **patron of the arts** and theater and "actively protected it from the Puritans who wanted it banned"
- Shakespeare's theater troupe, **Lord Chamberlain's Men**, performed two comedies to court at Christmastime 1594, and become a favorite of the Queen.
- According to published documents, the Queen was confirmed to have seen *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Love's Labor's Lost*.
- Elizabeth was known to have many suitors, as whoever she married would be King, which may have inspired the romantic hijinks in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, written in 1595.

- At the height of Shakespeare's fame and success, Elizabeth died in **1603**.
- Shakespeare was publicly chastised for not properly eulogizing her, but would later include a tribute to her in the final monologue of *Henry VIII*.
- James VI of Scotland became James I of England, and continued the "**Golden Age**" of literature that started with Elizabeth I.
- Shakespeare's theater troupe was awarded a royal patent by James I after he was crowned, and they were re-named to the **King's Men** in honor of their patron.
- The troupe would perform several plays before court between 1604 and 1605, including two performances of *The Merchant of Venice*.

Great Chain of Being

Integræ Naturæ   Speculum,Artisque imago

The **Great Chain of Being** is a hierarchical structure of all matter and life, thought in medieval Christianity to have been decreed by God. The chain starts with God and progresses downward to angels, humans, animals, plants, and minerals.

It is a concept derived from Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus and Proclus. Further developed during the Middle Ages, it reached full expression in early modern Neoplatonism.
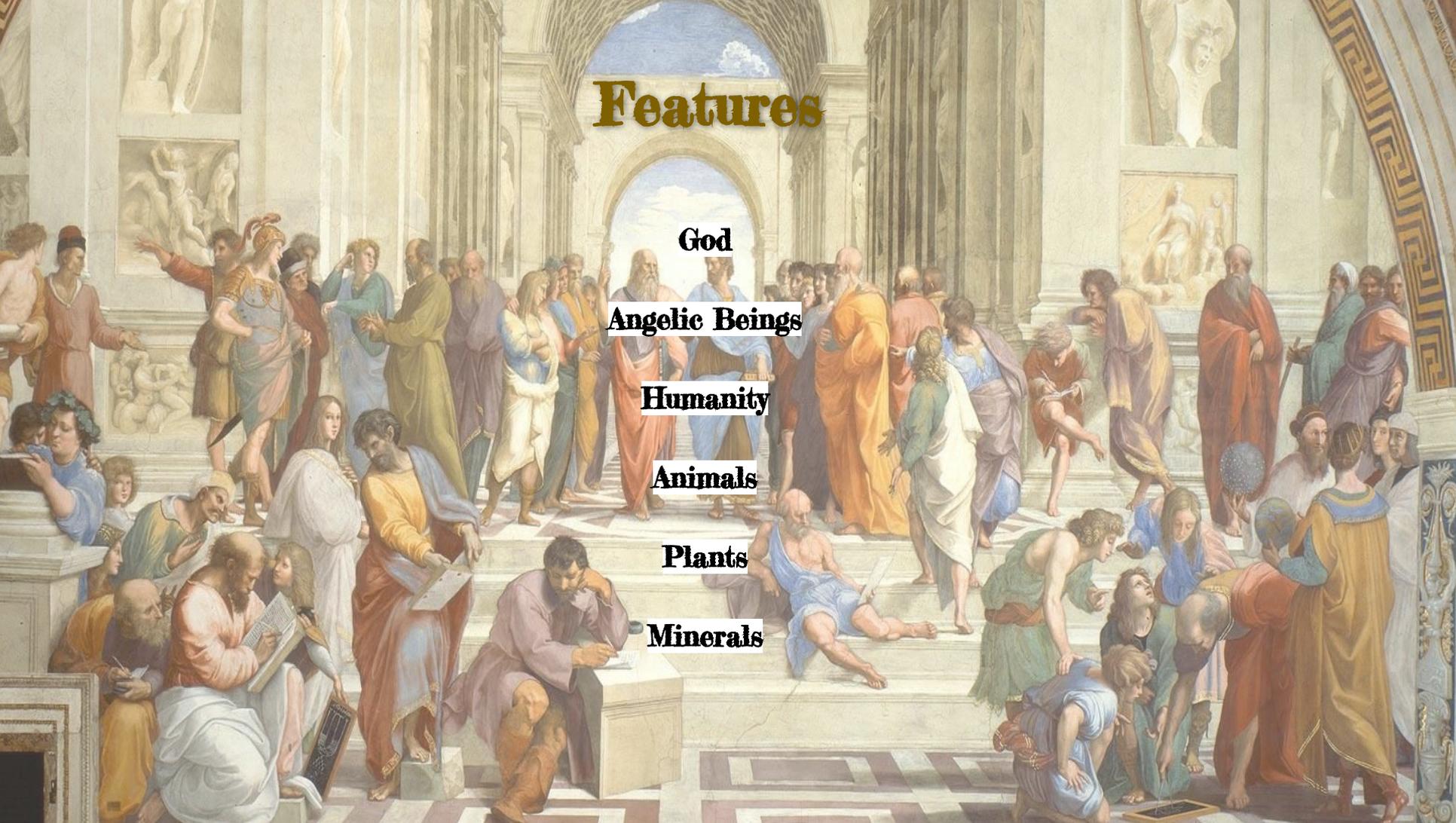
Features

God

Angelic Beings

Humanity

Animals

Plants

Minerals

Moral Ramifications

It becomes a moral imperative for each creature to know its place in the Chain of Being and fulfill its own function without striving to rise above its station or debasing itself by behavior proper to the lower links in the chain.

Political Implications

The proscription against trying to rise beyond one's place was of course useful to political rulers, for it helped to reinforce their authority. The implication was that civil rebellion caused the chain to be broken, and according to the doctrine of correspondences, this would have dire consequences in other realms. It was a sin against God, at least wherever rulers claimed to rule by "Divine Right."

Shakespeare : The Theme of Order
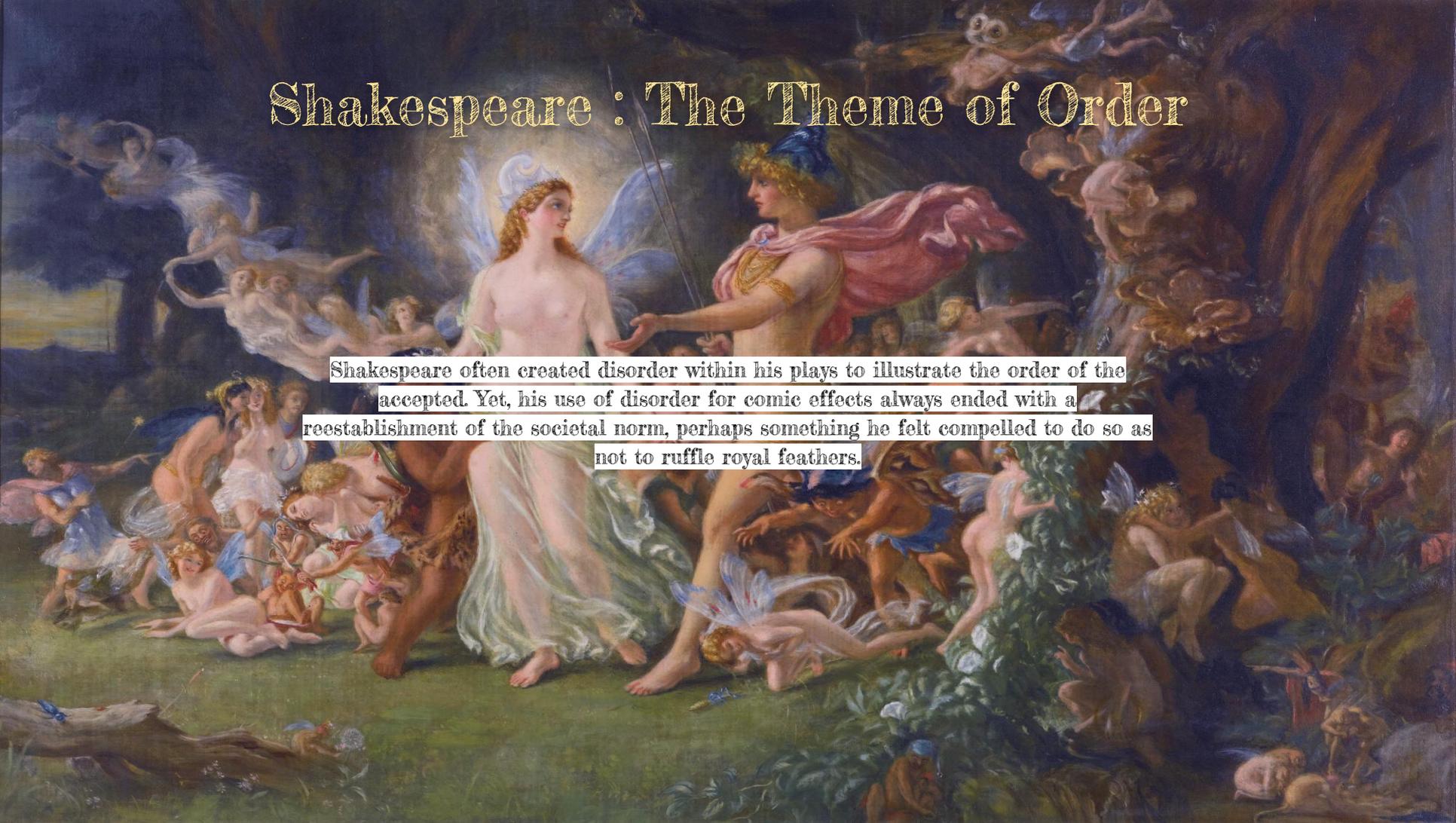
Shakespeare often created disorder within his plays to illustrate the order of the accepted. Yet, his use of disorder for comic effects always ended with a reestablishment of the societal norm, perhaps something he felt compelled to do so as not to ruffle royal feathers.

A Midsummer Night's Dream: Religion

- One outright reference to religion: Bottom's quote (p.135 Act 4 Scene 1)

"The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was."
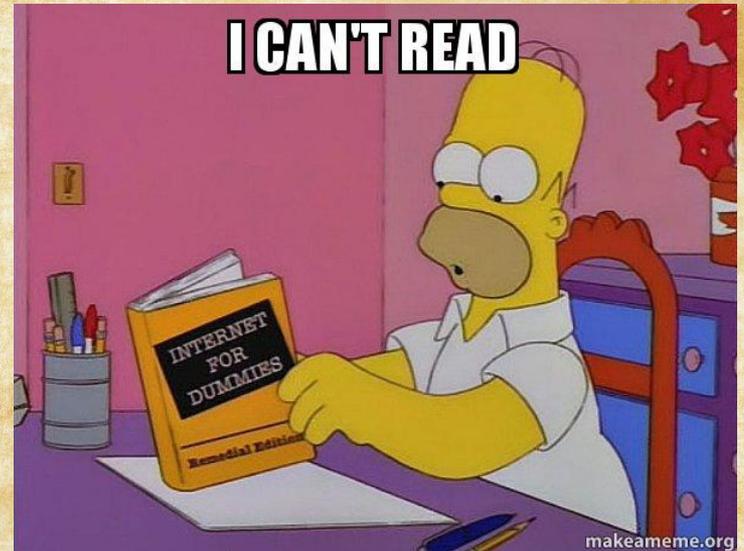
A Midsummer Night's Dream: Monarch

- One passage dedicated to Elizabeth I:
  Oberon's quote (p. 45 Act 2 Scene 1)

"But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
Quenched in the chaste beams of the wat'ry moon,
And the imperial vot'ress passèd on
In maiden meditation, fancy-free."

- Also, colonialism

Now we don't have time
to unpack all of that.

"I consider becoming the Queen
to be my crowning achievement"
- *Queen Elizabeth I*

A Midsummer Night's Dream: Setting

- Symbolically divided worlds: Athenian court vs. the woods
- Athens represents rationality and social institutions
- The woods represent passion and anarchy
- Hermia runs away from a role society expects of her
- Helena actively pursues her love

A Midsummer Night's Dream: Romance

- Expressions of love had certain conventional structures (ex: grand declarations, descriptions of beauty, descriptions of emotions)
- Ideas of how "love" should be expressed

"Because of love's power to idealize, the object of desire seems unique, even though in the event it turns out that Hermia and Helena are interchangeable. But the ways of idealizing, of investing the other person with the special beauty or magnetism that justifies desire, are drawn in the first place from the culture in which people learn about love." (p.185)

A Midsummer Night's Dream: Romance

- Religion is a shared belief system that affects how people act (ex: democracy, capitalism, etc.)
- Romantic love is a concept shared and believed by people
- Romantic love has conventional forms of expression
- Conclusion: Romance is a religion
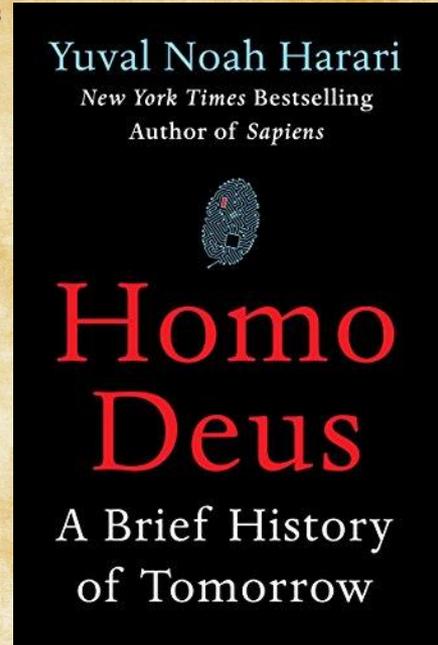
Quiz

- Why did Henry VIII seek annulment from Catherine of Aragon ?
- What was Mary I nickname ?
- According to the Great Chain of Being, do Humans come before or after Animals?
- How did Catholics cope with the new order?
- How does Catholicism differ from other religions?
- Who developed the concept of the "Divine Right of Kings"?
- Which two plays of Shakespeare did Queen Elizabeth I see, according to published records?

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