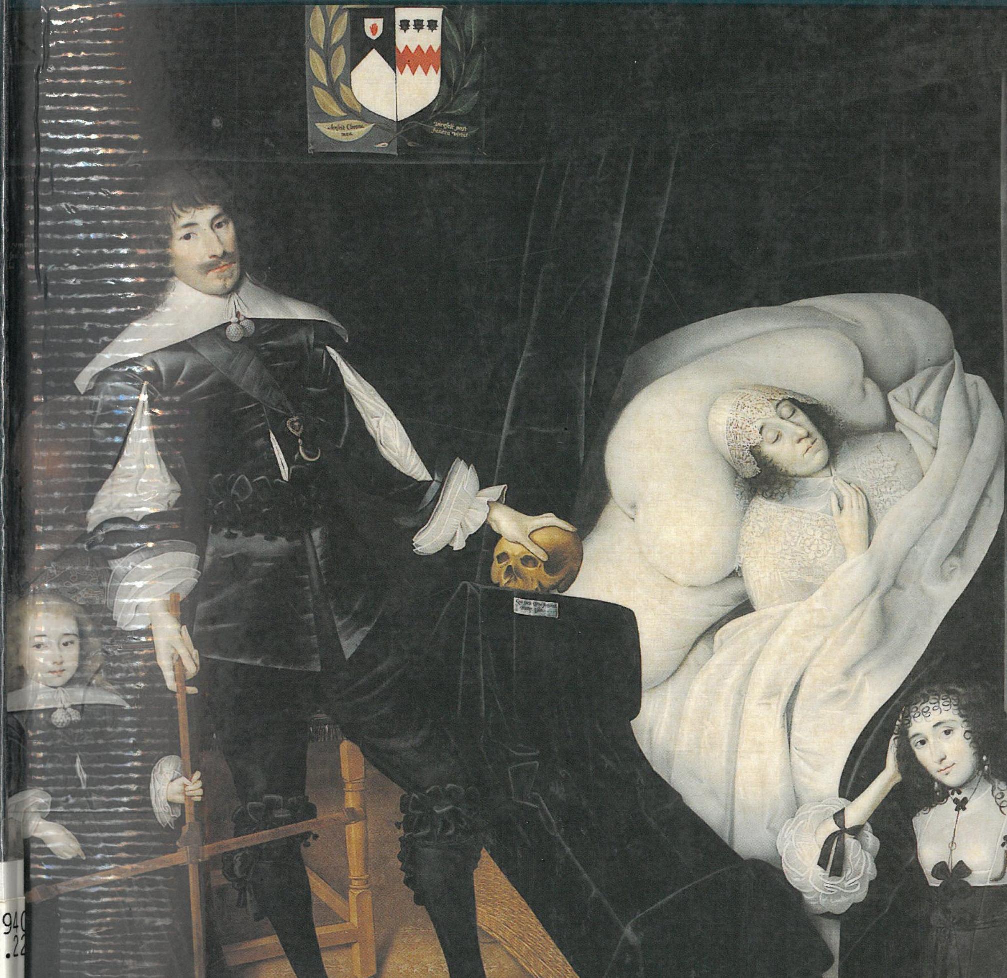
AMBRIDGE **PERSPECTIVES IN HISTORY**

PAPISTS, PROTESTANTS AND PURITANS

1559 – 1714



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Introduction

In 1529 the first session of the Reformation Parliament met, and the Reformation in England began. Over the next seven years the links between the English church and Rome – which had existed for more than nine centuries – were formally severed by a series of statutes. By the close of the Reformation Parliament, in 1536, the king (Henry VIII) rather than the pope was the head of the church in England, while legislation aimed at moderate reform of the church was passed. Yet this was not a Protestant Reformation like that on the Continent, which advocated a full-scale attack on the Roman Catholic Church and was to sweep away all things smacking of 'popery'. As the carefully worded Act of Supremacy of 1534 made clear, the king was *acknowledged* and *confirmed* as 'Protector and Supreme Head of the English Church and Clergy so far as the law of Christ allows': he was not *created* as such. It was not until 1552, in the reign of Edward VI, that the first Protestant church service was celebrated. There was a setback under the firmly Catholic Queen Mary, and it was not until 1559, with the Elizabethan Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity, that anything approaching a full Reformation was undertaken, and even that was not comprehensive. In other words, the Reformation in England was much more a 'process' than an 'event'.

This was quite different from the Reformation in Continental Europe. There, complaints against abuses in the church – which had been raised for centuries – suddenly became concentrated into a tenable and widespread reform movement. It was no coincidence that this happened in early sixteenth-century Germany, where the printing process was well advanced. Scholarship burgeoned and old certainties and practices in the church, which seemed to have no proper scriptural (or biblical) basis, were questioned. Most abhorrent was the way in which the Catholic Church claimed to be able to sell to the faithful swift access to heaven. Anti-clericalism, or hostility to the clergy who perpetrated these practices, led to a call by Martin Luther for the abolition of certain Catholic beliefs and practices and a return to Bible-based doctrine. In other words, he protested against the Catholic interpretation of Christianity, which he maintained had become debased over the centuries. Thereafter, Martin Luther, and others of like mind, became known as Protestants.

The Henrician Reformation

King Henry VIII did not approve of Martin Luther and regarded many of his beliefs as heretical. Indeed, he denounced Lutheran teaching in a book entitled *Assertio* *septem sacramentorum*, which resulted in the pope conferring upon him the title 'Defender of the Faith' in 1521. Thus, the Henrician Reformation presented itself in much more conservative terms. It is possible that, had the pope allowed Henry to divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, in order to marry Anne Boleyn (the affair was known as the king's 'great matter'), there might have been no split with Rome. Certainly, Henry was suspicious of the influence of Continental reformers on the people of England and had some of them burned for disseminating heretical ideas. He justified his position as head of the English church as vital to his overseeing effective action against abuses in the church, a task which the pope was failing to undertake. Yet the most notable episode of reform – the dissolution of the monasteries – was undertaken for financial reasons, though justified on moral grounds. Ostensibly it was intended to close down those monastic communities which had degenerated into ignorance and corruption and to sell their (often substantial) lands to anyone who could afford them. However, it soon became apparent that the process was highly lucrative and beneficial to the crown's financial well-being.

Although Henry had approved the translation of the Bible into English, he was determined that its availability be strictly regulated so that it could not be used to bolster the arguments put forward by those challenging established authority. Right up until the end of his reign, Henry sought to bridle the Reformation of the English church. Not the least of his reasons was his anxiety to prevent new ideas provoking social unrest and disorder. Reformed ideas were attractive – especially to the young and impressionable – for they offered an alternative to traditional values, and they just might stir anti-authoritarian behaviour. In the end, political necessity forced Henry to open the door to Reformation of the English church, but he was highly selective about how much he was prepared to let through.

The Edwardian Reformation

Henry's death and the accession of the young king, Edward VI, in 1547 was seen by some as an opportunity for more radical reform. Thomas Cranmer, archbishop of Canterbury, who had been kept in check by King Henry, was ready to begin the Reformation proper of the English church. Yet his ambitions continued to be frustrated by the essentially conservative outlook of the Lord Protector, the duke of Somerset. Indeed, as with King Henry, Somerset's concern about the church appeared to be driven more by monetary than moral considerations. For example, the Chantries Act, passed in the first year of his Protectorate, ensured a healthy injection of revenue into the exchequer. After Somerset's fall, however, the pace of Reformation quickened and the hopes of the more radical reformers began to be realised. In 1552 Cranmer produced his (second) Book of Common Prayer, which was more uncompromisingly Protestant in its perspective than the first Prayer Book issued in 1547. A second Act of Uniformity (1552), which required that everyone attend church on Sundays to participate in a service according to this new Prayer Book, and no other, ensured its influence would be comprehensive. Then, the following year, the doctrines of the Church of England were registered in the Forty-Two Articles.

By the mid-1540s there was a new influence on the reformers: John Calvin. His outlook, as well as that of a number of other Swiss theologians, was more extreme than the earlier reformers; and they felt that there was still much to be done to complete the Reformation of the church. Calvin's most significant contribution to Protestant thought concerned the matter of predestination. This is the belief that only a limited number of people were destined for eternal salvation and that they were already known to God. These people (i.e. the 'elect') were, like the rest of mankind, essentially sinful, but only they were capable of responding to God's efforts to save them. Everyone else, presumably, was damned. Along with predestination came another unattractive feature of mid-sixteenth-century Protestantism and the Edwardian Reformation. This was the growth of iconoclasm. The fabric of the church – tombs, statues, stained glass windows – together with books deemed heretical, were systematically destroyed. It is difficult to gauge grassroot reaction to such cataclysmic happenings, though historians have recently been making conscientious efforts to do so.

What was certain was that the Reformation depended upon the ability of an unhealthy young man to defy death long enough to allow the reforms of the English church to become firmly ingrained. For his successor was his half-sister, Mary, who had never abandoned her Catholic faith. Efforts to pervert the legitimate succession by having the Protestant Lady Jane Grey proclaimed queen on Edward's death, however, were abortive: clearly, legal considerations outweighed religious sentiments with the English people and Mary was proclaimed queen in 1553, within a month of Edward's death.

The Marian restoration

With the accession of Queen Mary, Catholic hopes were high for a restoration of the old faith and a return to familiar practices in the church. On the Continent the Roman Catholic Church had launched a counter-attack against Protestantism and was endeavouring to set itself in strict order. Accordingly, the Council of Trent was convened in an attempt to effect some kind of reconciliation within Christendom. Although it soon descended into acrimonious theological debate, with any question of compromise with 'condemned heretics' or Protestants abandoned, it did produce a comprehensive definition of Catholic doctrine. With renewed confidence and a change of monarch, English Catholics looked forward to the implementation of the Counter-Reformation in England.

Mary's first parliament duly set about undoing the reforms of her father and brother, and in 1553 the first Act of Repeal was passed, which declared much of Cranmer's work illegal. While support for these moves was not unanimous, in the period after her accession Mary enjoyed much goodwill. Almost immediately, however, she sacrificed it by announcing her intention to marry the king of Spain. It is not clear which most dismayed the English people – the fact that Philip II of Spain was Roman Catholic or that he might regard England as a junior partner of Spain – but a strong tradition was born which equated Englishness with Protestantism. It was to cast a long shadow over foreign relations thereafter.

Ironically, for the first months of her reign, Mary was obliged to conduct religious policy in her capacity as Supreme Head of the English church. However, with the arrival of Cardinal Pole as papal legate to England at the end of 1554, she could return the English church to the custody of the pope. Meanwhile, many of Edward's Protestant bishops either went into exile on the Continent or were deprived of their position or imprisoned and they were replaced by those bishops who had been deprived by Henry VIII. Queen, cardinal and bishops set about reuniting England with the rest of the Roman Catholic Church. At the same time a second Act of Repeal was enacted which rescinded all the statutes which had been passed against Rome since 1529. More worryingly, an Act was passed which revived the heresy laws, which carried with them, as the ultimate punishment for convicted heretics, burning at the stake. While this method of execution did not provoke undue revulsion in the sixteenth century, the scale of its application did, for just under three hundred men and women were burnt for heresy in Mary's reign. As a public relations exercise it was a disaster for the Catholics. Moreover, the Protestant cause was much strengthened by these martyrs, as many moderate Protestants became hardened against Roman Catholicism.

On the other hand, recent research has revealed that the restoration of the Catholic faith was not necessarily arbitrarily imposed on a reluctant populace. The fact that the fabric of the churches could be, and demonstrably was, restored, is testimony to the will of those at parish level to revive Catholic worship. Printing presses, which were perceived as the vehicle for disseminating Protestant ideas, were employed to produce Catholic works, and real efforts were made to improve educational standards among the clergy. All of which belies the traditional view of the Marian church as sterile and arid. But the Catholic restoration could only last as long as Mary lived. When she died, in 1558, followed almost immediately by Cardinal Pole, the Catholic reaction was over.

Ireland

The religious issue in Ireland was less clear-cut than it was in England throughout the sixteenth century. While the Reformation was taking place in England, Henry VIII was endeavouring to extend his political control over Ireland. As part of Irish resistance to these plans, the 'Old English' (descendants of the Anglo-Norman adventurers of the twelfth century, who regarded themselves as the natural rulers of Ireland) appealed to the pope and the Holy Roman Emperor for support against the heretical king of England. However, Henry roundly defeated the rebellion, and an English Lord Deputy was appointed to impose direct English rule over Ireland. Consequently, as the 1536–37 Irish parliament dutifully enacted the legislation of the English Reformation Parliament, it appeared that both clergy and laity accepted Henry VIII's supremacy over the church with few misgivings.

Nevertheless, the doctrinal changes made during Edward VI's reign were unpopular with the Irish, from parish priests to bishops. The majority of the native Irish and the Old English remained committed to Catholicism, whereas the

'New English' (sixteenth-century settlers), who were the most influential group in 1530s Ireland, were identified with Protestantism. In the event, the impact of the Edwardian reforms was negligible, given that little effort was made seriously to impose them on a reluctant populace. Perhaps curiously, the accession of the Catholic Mary Tudor, with the reassuring promise of a return to familiar religious practices, was not greeted with unalloyed joy. For, once again, religious considerations were overshadowed by conflicting family interests within Ireland.

Scotland

As long as the Scottish king, James V, lived, the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland was assured of royal protection against Protestant reformers, and his parliament issued statutes which improved the standing of the church. Nevertheless, the church was always under the authority of the pope. Meanwhile, throughout the 1530s, Scottish Protestants found refuge in England. Then, in 1542, James died and was succeeded by a week-old daughter, Mary (queen of Scots). A proposed marriage between Mary and Prince Edward of England (the future Edward VI) offered hopes to Scottish Protestants. With the end of the 'auld alliance' between Scotland and Catholic France, and Scotland closer to Protestant England, prospects were good for some measure of Protestant reform of the Scottish church. The first step came when the Scottish parliament authorised the reading of scripture in the vernacular (i.e. the native language). But, while the Scottish Protestants welcomed the forthcoming alliance with England, which was to release them from French/Catholic bondage, many Scots were suspicious and fearful of English intentions. Consequently, they vigorously promoted a marriage between Mary and the French dauphin, or heir to the throne. With the French marriage confirmed, the Protestant cause in Scotland was checked, but the Protestants were not eradicated. Led by the radical reformer John Knox, they preached ever more determinedly against Catholicism and the pope.

When Mary Tudor became queen of England, Scottish Catholics felt they had little to fear from the Protestants. Indeed, they were afforded a kind of amused tolerance by the regent of Scotland, Mary's French mother, Mary of Guise. John Knox, in Geneva, might rage against the Catholics, and the French, and female rulers, but essentially he represented an impotent force. Support for Protestantism was prompted more by resistance to the regent and her pro-French policies than by religious or doctrinal considerations. Thus, when five Scottish nobles united in 1557 as the 'First Band of the Lords of the Congregation of Christ' to put down superstitious idolatry (i.e. Roman Catholicism), it was as much to prevent Mary's marriage to the dauphin as for religious purposes.

However, when in 1558 an elderly Protestant was burned for heresy, it seemed to have a similar effect to Mary's burning of heretics in England, in provoking a Protestant backlash. Protestant preachers began to make headway, becoming an increasingly significant force in Scotland. Then, at the end of the year, Mary died. Scottish Catholics no longer had the assurance of a Catholic neighbour. Quite what Scotland did have on her southern border remained to be seen.

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The Elizabethan church

Queen Elizabeth was a Protestant. As the product of the king's 'great matter', that was not surprising. But she had also represented the reversionary interests in the reign of Queen Mary – in other words, she became the focus for opponents of Mary's policies, including her religious policy. Elizabeth's commitment to Protestantism was less clear. Her choice of councillors, led by the overtly but pragmatic Protestant William Cecil, indicated that the Reformation of the English church along Protestant lines was to be resumed, while the imminent return of the Protestant exiles ensured that Protestant reform was back on the agenda. Yet Elizabeth herself was a conservative Protestant, while Convocation (the general assembly of the clergy which met at the same time as parliament) and the House of Lords were essentially reactionary in their outlook, which meant that in 1558 there could be no certainties about the future of the English church.

The Elizabethan religious settlement

Nevertheless, in 1559 a religious settlement was constructed which was enshrined in the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity. The Act of Supremacy was designed to restore royal control over the church and all office-holders were required to take an oath accepting the royal supremacy. The Act of Uniformity imposed consistency in religious or liturgical practice throughout the church in England. This touched every one of the queen's subjects, who were forced to attend their parish church regularly or else face financial penalties. That Elizabeth's view of the church was closer to that of the early Reformation years was demonstrated by her choice of the elderly Matthew Parker as archbishop of Canterbury (1559–75) rather than any of the exiles who were returning from Geneva filled with Calvinist zeal.

In many ways the Elizabethan religious settlement of 1559 was a compromise in that it was intended to turn back the clock to the religious situation as it had been at the death of Edward VI, but with three important concessions to religious conservatives. The first of these concerned the authorised form of worship. Church services were to be conducted according to a new Prayer Book issued in 1558 and based on the 1552 Prayer Book, but with a significant modification to the communion liturgy, that is, the ritual used at the celebration of Holy Communion. Holy Communion, or eucharist, was one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church. Others included baptism, marriage and the last rites (prayers said at the moment of death). One of the essential points of conflict between Catholics and Protestants concerned the implications of the communion service, which was observed to honour the broken body and spilt blood of Jesus Christ. Traditionally, the 'communicant' (or worshipper) received from the priest bread and wine which he had transformed into the body and blood of Christ, a process known as transubstantiation. According to Luther, however, the transformation of the bread and wine was a result of the presence of the faithful, rather than any magical powers of the priest – a process which he described as consubstantiation. The 1552 Prayer Book denied both transubstantiation and consubstantiation and, instead, declared that the bread and wine were henceforth to be seen simply as *representing* the body and blood of Christ.

The Elizabethan settlement was designed to accommodate a range of religious convictions. Therefore, the words used during the administration of the eucharist, constituted in the first Edwardian Prayer Book (1549), were added to those of the second Edwardian Prayer Book (1552). Accordingly, as well as enjoining his flock to 'take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died' for them, suggesting a sense of commemoration, the priest had also to assure them that 'the blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ', which was shed for them, would preserve their 'body and soul unto everlasting life', implying a physical presence. In other words, an element of ambiguity was introduced into the precise meaning of the wording used during the administration of the eucharist, which made it acceptable to those from right across the Protestant religious spectrum, for it could be interpreted by each according to their own requirements.

Secondly, all the old 'ornaments of the church and of the ministers' were to be retained. For example, the surplice (a long, white vestment or robe) was to continue as standard wear for the clergy, communicants were allowed to kneel to receive the bread and wine, the sign of the cross was permitted in baptism and the ring could be used in marriage. Furthermore, the directive about further destruction of the fabric of the churches was reassuringly obscure, making the revival of iconoclasm on the scale of the early 1550s less likely. Finally, Elizabeth's title was altered from Supreme Head of the Church to Supreme Governor. Not only did this tackle the knotty question regarding a woman's suitability to lead the church, it also appealed both to Catholics and to the more extreme Protestants. For the former still considered the pope to be head of the church while the latter insisted Jesus Christ was its head.

This, then, was the Elizabethan religious settlement – a compromise which was designed to appeal to as much of the English populace as possible. Yet, almost immediately, its weaknesses were revealed, when all but one of the bishops who were required to take the Oath of Supremacy refused, and they had to be replaced by more accommodating characters. Even so, the church leadership, which was firmly Protestant in outlook, found itself being asked to operate an English church which in many respects was Catholic in nature and did not really reflect recent Protestant theological developments. A commission set up in 1559 to impose the royal supremacy and the Book of Common Prayer onto the clergy was only moderately successful, often achieving nothing more substantial than a grudging and informal submission.

In 1563, Convocation agreed to a series of Articles of Religion which affirmed the 'doctrine of the sacraments' or the beliefs of the Church of England. They became known as the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion. Although they modified the 1559 settlement to a certain extent, they had not gone far enough for some, and a Puritan element made strenuous efforts to have particular ceremonial observances eliminated by Convocation. They were defeated by just one vote. Typically, Elizabeth left it to her archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker, to enforce conformity. In 1565 he issued a series of moderate requirements from the clergy – the *Book of Advertisements* – which served only to harden the resolve of the more extreme Puritans. The Thirty-Nine Articles were confirmed by statute (i.e. enacted by parliament) in 1571. On the other hand, attempts to impose a revival of iconoclasm were also only partially effective because, in many parish churches, Catholic paraphernalia was merely locked away, presumably in case it was needed later.

Varieties of Protestant belief

At first it was believed by many that the 1559 settlement was only a temporary measure, to be further developed and expanded upon in due course. As the Marian exiles returned home to continue the reform of the English church (which had been interrupted by Mary's efforts to restore the Catholic faith), it became clear that the years they had spent in and around Geneva had exposed them to a set of thoughts and beliefs which were quite different from those of Elizabeth and some of her closest advisers. In 1560 the Geneva Bible was published in England and the more radical Protestants sought to construct an English church on the Genevan model, which removed authority from the bishops and gave it to local and general assemblies staffed by representatives elected by members of the congregation. This system of church government became known as 'Presbyterianism', while the advocates of further reform, or purification, of the church and society were called 'Puritans' (often disparagingly).

Puritans adopted Calvinist thinking almost unreservedly. They were firmly committed to Calvin's doctrine of predestination and, in order to facilitate the advancement of the 'elect', devoted a large proportion of their time to religious activities, either in private prayer or pursuing 'religious exercises'. These included assembling to read the Bible, attending lectures on subjects of a religious nature and deliberating over religious matters at meetings called 'prophesyings'. While ostensibly organised as a consequence of the shortage of preachers, these gatherings were viewed with suspicion by the queen, who saw in them a challenge to her 1559 settlement. The moderate Puritan Edmund Grindal, archbishop of Canterbury from 1575, on the other hand, was convinced that religious exercises were essential for the future health of the church and he risked incurring royal displeasure by defending them. The Puritans lost valuable support when Grindal was succeeded at Canterbury by John Whitgift, in 1583, for his position was much closer to Elizabeth's regarding Puritan nonconformity.

Meanwhile, the Puritans endeavoured to create God's kingdom on earth by preparing society for the return of Christ and God's final judgement on his creation. As well as ministers filling a fatherly corrective role, civil authorities also had their part to play. Thus, the Puritan clergy supported the efforts of the gentry in their capacity as local magistrates (Justices of the Peace or JPs) and members of parliament to impose discipline. But, while this commitment to effecting an orderly society was commendable, the habit of Puritans to gather together to engage in 'religious exercises' (at 'conventicles') provoked misgivings on the part of the state. Their clear dissatisfaction with the religious settlement of 1559, and their determination to further cleanse the church of Catholic influences, reinforced the reputation of Puritans as potential subversives.

Nevertheless, the Puritans were always committed to further reform of the English church from within. They were even willing to work with an episcopacy (church government by bishops) if it were necessary. There were others who felt that a true Bible-based church could only be achieved apart and separate from the established church with its ecclesiastical hierarchy, which they believed to be contrary to the word of God. Accordingly, in the 1580s, they set up separate communities – such as the Brownists, who were followers of Robert Browne (?1550–?1633), and the members of the Family of Love, or Familists – and set about restoring the church according to its biblical origins. Because these separatists were clearly divisive and threatened the unity of the realm – at a time when a united realm was essential to its well-being – they were perceived by the authorities as subversive. In extreme cases, some of their leaders were executed on charges of sedition. In general, though, their activities tended to be on the fringes of society and, by maintaining a low profile, they avoided attracting undue persecution by the state.

Finally, there was a Protestant element which was, by and large, content with the religious settlement. But because satisfied customers are not usually as vociferous as malcontents, they tend to be less easy to observe. These Protestants have been described as 'Anglicans' or as 'Prayer Book Protestants', suggesting a sincere attachment to the form of service and ceremonial as advocated by the 1559 Book of Common Prayer. Whether their quiescence was indicative of their sincere accord with the church as it was established in 1559, or was simply a manifestation of apathy or indifference, is difficult to determine, but they seem to have represented a significant proportion of the English population. Moreover, the traditional view of the Elizabethan church as a battleground, with the 'Anglican' establishment under constant challenge from a Puritan opposition, has probably been overdrawn. The situation was more one of different emphases over the need for further Reformation of the church. So that while, on occasion, conflicts did spring up and attract considerable attention, at other times the church was relatively quiet.

Roman Catholics and church Papists

Catholic survival into Elizabeth's reign has been the subject of much debate among historians. One view maintains that the Catholic community survived from Mary's reign, depending on their priests to ensure that Catholic practices quietly endured in the households of the Catholic gentry. The other view is that Catholicism was revived in the 1570s as part of a conscious mission when newly qualified priests from foreign seminaries (training colleges for Catholic priests) secretly infiltrated English gentry households.

English Catholics in the reign of Elizabeth adopted one of two courses. Some, known as 'church Papists', outwardly conformed to Protestantism by attending church services often enough to avoid prosecution. They justified their decision either by stressing their desire not to break the law or else by maintaining that by being selective they could, in conscience, attend ordinary Sunday services without compromising their beliefs. Moreover, by deflecting the attention of the authorities and adopting church papistry, many Catholics actually ensured the continuity of Catholicism, because protecting their estates from confiscation by the law meant they were then able to maintain priests to perpetuate the practice of their faith. Other Catholics, however, refused to attend authorised church services under any circumstances and suffered the consequences. Laws were passed, in 1581 and 1585, making 'recusancy' (refusal to attend church services according to the settlement of 1559) punishable by hefty fines and the confiscation of lands, which could cripple a Catholic family. This was a far cry from the 1559 Act of Uniformity, which had imposed a fine of twelve pence (5p) for each absence from church. Some Catholics worked out a compromise whereby the head of a household attended church services to avoid the full rigour of the law while the rest of the family adopted the stricter recusant position.

Tensions within the Elizabethan church 1: the Puritans

The first major controversy in the Elizabethan church concerned clerical dress. As part of Elizabeth's determination to enforce conformity she directed her archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker, to issue an order for all clergymen to wear a surplice when conducting church services and the traditional everyday dress at all other times. (This was one of the directions in Parker's 1565 *Book of Advertisements*.) However, for many people the prescribed vestments were too closely associated with Roman Catholicism and the celebration of mass. Worse, there was no biblical precedent regarding clerical dress. The issue threatened to polarise the English church, with the more radical Puritan element insisting they would not revert to discredited Catholic practices, while the more moderate bishops, required to enforce a ruling they felt was one of several 'matters indifferent', reluctantly endeavoured to comply with the queen's wishes. There were riots on the streets of London, a furious pamphleteering contest ensued, and a number of ministers were deprived of their livings. In the end the

Vestments Controversy was resolved in the queen's favour – but it was an uneasy victory and was only ever partially enforceable.

One outcome of the Vestments Controversy was a hardening of Puritan attitudes. The late 1560s saw a new generation of Puritans led by Thomas Cartwright, a young Cambridge Professor, who demanded that the English church be restructured along the lines of Calvin's church in Geneva – that is, on Presbyterian lines, and without bishops. Under pressure from William Cecil and John Whitgift (Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, later archbishop of Canterbury), Cartwright was expelled from Cambridge and he left for Geneva in December 1570. But the Puritan struggle continued. It was reinforced by the support of Puritan gentry who sat in the House of Commons as MPs, and in the 1571 session they introduced a Bill to reform the Prayer Book. With renewed confidence, Cartwright returned and engaged in a pamphlet war with Whitgift. However, the moderate Puritans were unnerved by the position adopted by the more radical reformers, and they reasserted their leadership. Prospects looked even more promising for effecting further reform of the English church – from within the system – when Edmund Grindal was appointed archbishop of Canterbury in 1575.

Grindal, however, soon came into conflict with Elizabeth – and her view that the church had been sufficiently reformed – over the matter of Puritan 'prophesyings'. Although he could not be dismissed, he was suspended from office by the queen in 1577 and it seemed that moderate Puritan ambitions were never to be achieved. On his death in 1583 he was succeeded by Whitgift. Although Whitgift appeared to be much more in tune with the queen than his predecessor, he still had ambitions to reform the church at certain levels. His principal concern was ending abuses against the church, especially regarding church property and finances. While these were not as blatant as under Henry VIII and Edward VI, the church was still exploited by the laity, who pocketed the profits from vacant bishoprics and impropriated tithes (i.e. they took for themselves money and lands which rightfully belonged to the church). As the chief culprits were the queen and her principal subjects, he had to tread carefully.

Accordingly he set out to work with Convocation to address the question of lay interference in church affairs as part of a package of reform of church (especially clerical) standards in general. The central tenet of his initiative was to enforce complete conformity among the clergy, embodied in instructions for all ministers formally to subscribe to a declaration that the Prayer Book 'contains nothing contrary to the word of God'. In the face of opposition from a number of privy councillors, he modified his direction with an *ex officio* oath. In other words, by virtue of his office, any member of the clergy was obliged to explain his beliefs on demand. This did not lessen unease with Whitgift, however, and he found himself in conflict with William Cecil (now Lord Burghley) and other powerful councillors.

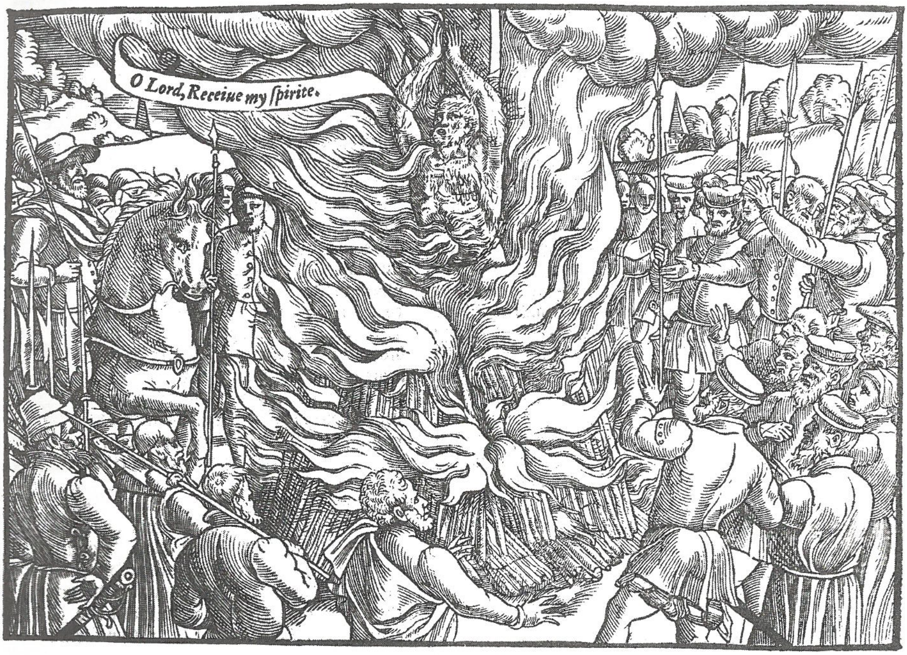
Meanwhile the Puritans were again gathering force. After the 1583 session of parliament – when Elizabeth had resorted to her powers as Supreme Governor of the church to thwart their attempts to use the parliamentary process to effect further reform of the church – the Puritan leaders concentrated their efforts on the session of parliament which was to meet in 1586. They produced a report on the clergy which revealed that educational standards were as low as ever, and initiated a drive to correct abuses against the church and improve the standards of the clergy. This was to be based on a *Book of Discipline*, which set out how a Presbyterian system of church government would be organised. Elizabeth simply reasserted that parliamentary intervention in the government of the church was contrary to the royal prerogative.

With their hopes for reforming the church from within dashed, in the late 1580s the radical Puritans embarked on a campaign of denouncing the established church through a series of vitriolic dispatches called the *Marprelate Letters*. This finally gave the authorities the justification they needed to act against the Puritans: their leaders were imprisoned in 1591 and some were executed in 1593. Thereafter, though they were never completely suppressed in the regions, where they still commanded the support of many of the gentry, the Puritans were sufficiently subdued at the centre no longer to represent a viable challenge to the established church. Possibly they felt that, with the queen getting older, their best hopes for realising their ambitions lay in the future.

Tensions within the Elizabethan church 2: the Catholics

During the first decade of Elizabeth's reign, the Catholics were relatively tractable. The religious settlement was not as unacceptable as it might have been – although a number of Marian bishops had been deprived of their office in 1559 – and it was possible for Catholics to maintain a low profile throughout the 1560s while quietly continuing to worship according to Catholic rites, especially in areas remote from the capital. Catholics who could not accept the English church as it was established in 1559 went into exile. But then, in 1570, Pope Pius V issued the Bull (i.e. decree) *Regnans in excelsis*, which excommunicated Elizabeth and released her Catholic subjects from loyalty to her. It was a short step to Roman Catholicism becoming perceived as the religion of disloyalty, and its association with foreign aggression, born in the reign of Queen Mary, was revived. By the same token, Protestantism became synonymous with patriotism.

The Catholic menace was also present closer to home. In 1569 there was a rising of the northern Catholic earls, who felt increasingly out of sympathy with the English government. Though the Northern Rising did not attract large-scale support from the English Catholics, and it was easily put down, it did demonstrate a certain danger from within the realm. That the Northern Rising had tenuous links with the queen of Scots and the king of Spain, which were strengthened for the second rebellion against Elizabeth in 1571 (the so-called Ridolfi Plot), was a clear indication that firm action was needed against the Catholics. Accordingly, the parliament of 1572 responded with the first of a series of Acts against the Catholic community. Throughout the remainder of Elizabeth's reign, anti-Catholic legislation became increasingly severe to counter the growing threat posed by the Catholics, especially when they were bolstered by the Jesuits.


The deſcription of the burning of Thomas Haukes in Eſſex,
at a towne called Coxehall. Anno. 1555. the. 10. of Iune.

O Lord, Receiue my ſpirite.

John Foxe's *Actes and monuments*, published in 1563, contrasts devout Protestants, prepared to die for their faith, with self-indulgent Catholics, preoccupied with ritual at the expense of personal piety. Given that the book was also known as 'Foxe's book of martyrs', how might it have been exploited by Protestants in their struggle against Catholicism, then and subsequently?

Among the Catholics who left England after the death of Queen Mary in 1558 were over a hundred Oxford graduates. Led by William Allen, a number of them founded a college (or seminary) for young Englishmen at Douai, in the Spanish Netherlands, where Catholic learning could flourish. Though it was not originally intended to serve any other purpose, a steady stream of its graduates (i.e. seminary priests) returned to England to strengthen the Catholic cause throughout the 1570s. Then they joined forces with priests from the English College at Rome, run by the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits), who were passionately committed to missionary endeavour. This Jesuit campaign was to be organised far more effectively than recent efforts had been, and in 1580, under the leadership of Robert Parsons and Edmund Campion, they arrived in England. Despite its declared intention not to become involved in English politics, the mission was identified with papal interests, and the pope was in conflict with Elizabeth.

Elizabeth's parliaments of 1581 and 1585 passed increasingly repressive legislation against both Catholic recusants and missionary priests. Fines for failing to attend church services escalated from a shilling a month to twenty pounds, and failure to pay could result in the exchequer sequestering two-thirds of the recusant's lands. Missionary priests were subject to execution by hanging, drawing and quartering, and over a hundred of them paid the penalty, including Campion. Many Catholics wanted to declare their allegiance to the queen in order to secure a relaxation of her government's persecution and to be allowed quietly to practise their faith. They also wished to escape from Jesuit influence, with its commitment to returning England to papal control. This division among the Catholics ensured that, by the end of Elizabeth's reign in 1603, the impact of the Catholic mission was mitigated. But it was never eliminated, for in 1602 the pope had appointed an archpriest to take control of the mission. Clearly, the Catholics as well as the Puritans had an eye to a future after Queen Elizabeth.

Document case study

1.1 Parliament legislates to ensure compulsory attendance at church and conformity in church services

Extract from the Act for the Uniformity of Common Prayer and Divine Service in the Church, and the Administration of the Sacraments, 1559

III. . . . from [24 June] all . . . persons inhabiting within this realm . . . shall diligently and faithfully, having no lawful or reasonable excuse to be absent, endeavour themselves to resort to their parish church or chapel accustomed, or . . . to some usual place where Common Prayer and such service of God shall be used . . . upon every Sunday, and other days ordained and used to be kept as Holy Days, and then and there to abide orderly and soberly, during the time of the Common Prayer, Preachings or other Service of God there to be used and ministered; upon pain of punishment by the censures of the Church, and also upon pain that every person so offending shall forfeit for every such offence twelve pence, to be levied by the church-wardens of the parish where such offence shall be done, to the use of the poor of the same parish . . .

Source: ***The statutes of the realm,*** **12 vols., London, 1810–18, vol. IV. i, pp. 356–57**

1.2 Legislation denying papal authority

Part of the Act for the Assurance of the Queen's Majesty's Royal Power over all Estates and Subjects within her Highness' Dominions, 1563

. . . if any person . . . shall by writing . . . preaching or teaching, deed or act . . . maintain or defend the authority, jurisdiction or power of the bishop of Rome [i.e. the pope], or of his see, heretofore claimed, used or usurped within this realm . . . or by any speech, open deed or act, advisedly and wittingly attribute any such manner of jurisdiction, authority or preeminence to the said see of Rome . . . then every such person . . . shall incur the . . . penalties provided by the Statute of Provision and Præmunire* . . .

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* a penalty of outlawry (i.e. loss of the monarch's protection and the benefit of the law) and forfeiture (i.e. loss of lands and/or goods) according to an Act of 1392

Source: ***Statutes of the realm,*** **vol. IV. i, pp. 402–03**