LONGMAN ADVANCED HISTORY

Stuart England

1603–1714

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EVALUATION OF EVIDENCE/ ANALYSIS OF KEY FEATURES

4 What were the major religious divisions in England in 1603?

Read carefully the following extracts from contemporary sources. They have been chosen to indicate some of the major religious divisions in early Stuart England that are discussed in this chapter.

Source 1

'In some parts where I have travelled, where great and spacious wastes, mountains and heaths are ... many ... cottages are set up, the people given to little or no kind of labour, living very hardly with oaten bread, sour whey, and goats' milk, dwelling far from any church or chapel, and are as ignorant of God or of any civil course of life as the very savages amongst the infidels.'

(From John Norden's *The Surveyor's Dialogue*, 1607 quoted in K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971).)

Source 2

Deposition in 1601 against a Wisbech tailor, who was charged with blasphemy after he had heard a sermon by his vicar on the text: 'Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church'.

'He in an alehouse taking a full pot in his hand in jesting manner pronounced these words: "Upon this rock I will build my faith". And there being in the company one whose name was Peter he applied the matter unto him, saying, "Thou art Peter", and then, taking the pot he said, "But upon this rock I will build my church".'

(Quoted in K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*.)

Source 3

From the diary of a Puritan, Lady Margaret Hoby of Hackness in Yorkshire, Friday 21 December 1599.

'After privat praier I ded a litle, and so went to church: after the sermon I praied, then dined, and in the after none, was busy tell 5 a clock: then I returned to private praier and examenation: after supped, then hard publick praers and, after that, praied privatly, havinge reed a Chapter of the bible, and so went to bed.'

(Quoted in J. T. Cliffe, *The Yorkshire Gentry from the Reformation to the Civil War* (1969).)

Source 4

From the autobiography of Richard Baxter, telling of his youth in his Puritan family household in a Shropshire village, c.1620.

'In the village where I lived the reader read the Common Prayer briefly, and the rest of the day [Sunday] even till dark night almost, except eating-time, was spent in dancing under a maypole and a great tree not far from my father's door, where all the town did meet together. And though one of my father's tenants was the piper, he could not restrain him nor break the sport. So that we could not read the Scripture in our family without the great disturbance of the tabor and pipe and noise in the street. Many times my mind was inclined to be among them, and sometimes I broke loose from my conscience and joined with them; and the more I did it the more I was inclined to it. But when I heard them call my father Puritan it did much to cure me and alienate me from them; for I considered that my father's exercise of reading the Scripture was better than theirs, and would surely be better thought on by all men at the last.'

(Quoted in N. H. Keble (ed.), *The Autobiography of Richard Baxter* (1974).)

Source 5

What Susan Kent, a young woman from Wylie in Wiltshire, was alleged to have said about her local rector, John Lee, who had recently arrived in the parish in 1619. The following is part of the case against her and her father in the bishop's court in 1624:

'When once he ... takes the green book [i.e. *the catechism*, see page 43] *in hand we shall have such a deal of bibble babble that I am weary to hear it, and I can then sit down in my seat and take a nap ... We had a good parson here before but now we have a puritan ... A plague or a pox in him that ever he did come hither, and I would we had kept our old parson for he did never dislike with [games and dances] ... These proud puritans are up at the top now but I hope they will have a time to come as fast down as ever they come up.'*

(Quoted in M. Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England 1570–1640* (1987).)

Source 6

Extract from an Act of 1606 'for the better discovering and repressing of Popish recusants'.

Forasmuch as it is found by daily experience that many of His Majesty's subjects that adhere in their hearts to the popish religion, by the infection drawn from thence, and by the wicked and devilish counsel of Jesuits [see key term, page 39], *seminaries and other like persons dangerous to the Church and state, are so far perverted in the point of their loyalties and due allegiance unto the king's Majesty and the Crown of England, as they are ready to entertain and execute any treasonable conspiracies and practices, as evidently appears by that more than barbarous and horrible attempt to have blown up with gunpowder the king, queen, princes, Lords and Commons in the Houses of Parliament assembled ... and where[as] divers persons popishly affected do nevertheless, the better to cover and hide their false hearts, and with the more safety to attend the opportunity to execute their mischievous designs, repair sometimes to church to escape the penalties of the laws in that behalf provided ... be it enacted.* [There then follow new penalties against Catholic recusants, see page 38.]

(Quoted in J. P. Kenyon (ed.), *The Stuart Constitution: Documents and Commentary* (1986).)

In order to understand the main religious divisions in early Stuart England it is necessary to go back into the sixteenth century and look at the impact of the Reformation in England – that is, the break away from

the Catholic Church that was begun by Henry VIII in the 1530s and that became permanent after the accession of Elizabeth I in 1558. Only by doing this will you be able to see that in early Stuart England:

- there was only one national Protestant Church to which everyone was forced to belong
- the monarch was not only head of the State but also head of the Church
- the Church and its officials, including archbishops and bishops, were firmly under the control of the crown
- religious divisions were of major political importance.

The Elizabethan 'religious settlement'

In 1559 Elizabeth I and her advisers had steered through parliament the Act of Uniformity and the Act of Supremacy. These, together with the 39 Articles of Faith that were drawn up in 1563 by **Convocation**, have often been called 'the Elizabethan religious settlement'. The Acts of Uniformity and Supremacy decreed that England should be officially a Protestant country with a national Church with the monarch, not the Pope, as its head (its 'Supreme Governor'). The services which were to be followed in every parish church were to be Protestant in form as set out in the Book of Common Prayer, which was largely that devised by Protestant reformers in the reign of Edward VI in 1552. It was also to be a truly *national* Church in that everyone was legally forced to attend it and **recusants** were liable to be fined, imprisoned and (in cases of persistent refusal) executed.

KEY TERMS:

Convocation

This was (and still is) the general assembly of the Church, representing all the clergy.

Recusants

Recusants were those who refused to attend the national Church. They were called recusants from the Latin *recusare*: to refuse.

But was it really a religious settlement?

As will be seen, very few people, apart from Queen Elizabeth I, considered that the Church that was established in 1559 was finally 'settled' and should not be changed in any way. Not all people in England by any means were willing to accept that what parliament had decided in 1559 was a religious settlement. There was a big difference between what crown and parliament said should be the case and the actual situation in the hearts and minds of the people. The new Protestant Church had to contend with the survival of Catholicism and the existence of those who were either indifferent or antagonistic to Christianity of whatever colour.

The survival of Catholicism

The story of English Catholicism in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is not the straightforward one of gradual, inevitable

decline that Protestant-dominated history would have us believe. Traditionally, the victory of Protestantism in England has been depicted as inevitable because the nation was ready to reject a Catholic Church which was riddled with corruption. Anti-clericalism was rife and, so the argument goes, the English enthusiastically embraced the new Protestant Church that was erected by crown and parliament. In the books of A. G. Dickens and others the official Reformation of the statute book was followed by a quick, popular Reformation of the hearts and minds of the people.

In recent years, however, a group of historians – notably J. J. Scarisbrick, C. Haigh and E. Duffy – have successfully challenged this traditional picture by showing that there is much evidence of spiritual vigour in the pre-Reformation English Church and of widespread popular attachment to it. The implication for the history of the Church in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries of this important historical reinterpretation is to suggest that the progress of the *actual* Reformation at the grass roots in English parishes, as opposed to the *official* Reformation of Westminster and the statute book, was bound to have been very slow.

This seems to have been the case, especially since Elizabeth I in the first part of her reign followed a 'soft' policy towards Catholics. The queen was determined not to push the many Catholics among her subjects into opposition to her by a systematic campaign of persecution. In one important sense, her policy was successful: unlike contemporary France, there were no prolonged wars of religion in England in the years immediately after the Reformation. As will be seen, Protestantism did spread among the English during the later sixteenth century. Yet Catholicism survived fairly strongly in the years after the Elizabethan 'religious settlement', nurtured by the large reservoir of support for the traditional Church in English parishes and helped by the lack of a strong official campaign of persecution against it in the early years of Elizabeth's reign.

After about 1568, Elizabeth's attitude to Catholicism hardened as relations between Protestant England and Catholic Spain worsened, culminating in a prolonged Anglo–Spanish war in the 1580s and 1590s. It now became much harder for Catholicism to survive. Yet embattled Catholics were helped to sustain their faith by the efforts of missionary English Catholic priests, trained at continental colleges or seminaries, including those run by the **Jesuits**. The alliance of Catholic gentry, Jesuits and seminary priests was as vital in keeping Catholicism alive as was the alliance of magistrates and church ministers in popularising the new Protestant faith (see below).

As a result, Catholicism survived in England by the end of the sixteenth

KEY TERM:

Jesuits

Members of the Society of Jesus, a Catholic religious order founded in 1540 by Ignatius Loyola, to combat the threat throughout Europe of the Reformation to Catholicism by promoting a Counter-Reformation.

century. In some places, especially in Lancashire and areas that ministers of the national Church began to call 'the dark corners of the land', it continued to retain a strong, popular hold. Of course, historians need to guard against assuming that what happened in Lancashire was typical of the situation everywhere in England. They also need to be wary of accepting totally the pessimistic picture painted by some Protestant ministers of 'dark corners' of England untouched by the new faith. But it would be equally misleading to exaggerate the rapidity and extent of Catholicism's decline during the later sixteenth century.

Religious indifference and scepticism

The new Church also faced opposition from another direction. As at other times, at the beginning of the seventeenth century there were people in England who were at best indifferent to and at worst sceptical of Christianity. As with Catholicism, historians in the past have given different estimates of the numbers who came into this category. What is certain is that religious indifference and scepticism existed. Church ministers continually bemoaned the lack of attention paid to their sermons by their congregations. Typical of these is the complaint made by a Lancashire preacher, about his congregation.

> *'Some sleep from the beginning to the end [of sermons] as if they come for no other purpose but to sleep, as if the Sabbath were made only to recover the sleep they have lost in the week.'*
>
> The sermon of John Angier, a Lancashire preacher, in the 1580s.

The records of the church courts are peppered with cases of people brought before the courts for making blasphemous statements, like that of the Wisbech tailor in source 2 on page 35.

Nor can the circumstantial evidence of parish churches that were not large enough to seat all the members of the community be ignored. In some areas (like those mentioned by John Norden in source 1) where parishes were large and communities very scattered, people lived miles away from a church or church minister. In these areas it is not hard to imagine that the influence of the Church was slight.

Alongside this, too, needs to be set the findings of the research of historians, notably K. Thomas and A. Macfarlane, who have confirmed the prevalence of the belief in magic and witchcraft in early seventeenth-century English society.

Moreover, an influential study of a village in Essex – Terling – has demonstrated the way in which during the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries a major division emerged between the ruling elite of the village and the rest. Increasingly in Terling the minor gentry, wealthy yeomen farmers and craftsmen who held the principal local government offices in the village avidly set about promoting the national Church; while the poorer and illiterate villagers seem to have drifted into ungodliness, certainly in the eyes of their 'betters'.

As when evaluating contemporary attachment to Catholicism, historians need to guard against accepting at face value contemporary accounts of propertied officials who were frightened by the prospects of a Church being overrun by a godless multitude. As will be seen, there is little evidence to substantiate such fears. Moreover, studies of some other areas do not reveal the godly-elite *versus* godless-poor divide seen in Terling. In this period in the Wiltshire villages studied by M. Ingram the vast majority of people conformed to the national Church and both zealous commitment to Protestantism and rejection of the Church were rare.

Yet it is important not to ignore altogether religious indifference and scepticism. Indeed one of the most important discoveries of recent research is the existence of religious indifference primarily among young people. What makes this idea especially convincing is the fact that, as was seen in chapter 3, most adolescents in early modern England spent as much as ten years from their early teens onwards living away from their parents, unmarried and working as domestic or farm servants. It is likely that this situation contributed towards what M. Ingram calls 'an adolescent culture associated with servants, one of the features of which was some measure of irresponsibility'. You will probably not need convincing of the attractions that drew many young people away from the Church in the early seventeenth century, especially since it was a Church that turned its disapproval against popular amusements like dancing, as well as alehouses. This comment in a contemporary book has a timeless ring about it:

> *'The Youth said to the church minister: "That place [the church] is more fitte for suche olde fatherly men as you are than for such young men as I am . . . Cannot I finde Christe as well in a tavern as a temple?"'*
>
> Christopher Fetherston, *Dialogue Against Light, Lewd and Lascivious Dancing* (1582).

When, then, did England become a Protestant nation?

Despite these challenges, the Protestant national Church established in 1559 made huge advances by the end of Elizabeth I's reign. It ought to be no surprise, given the divisions among historians about the extent both of Catholicism and religious indifference in post-Reformation England, that there is no agreement either about the speed or the scale of the spread of Protestantism in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Consequently, the question 'Was England a Protestant nation by 1603?' is a very difficult one to answer with any certainty. Yet, leaving aside qualifications that have been made in the last two sections, the most likely answer is 'yes: England was broadly a Protestant nation by 1603'.

What are the reasons for coming to this conclusion? The first is the strength and vitality of the prolonged campaign undertaken to convert the English to the new faith in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. One important element in the campaign was an effort to destroy much that remained of the old Church that could be seen both inside churches and outside them in the everyday life of towns and villages. From the mid sixteenth century onwards, church ministers and churchwardens began to destroy altars, rood screens (which divided the chancel at the east end of churches from the nave, the central body of the church – see Figure 4.1) and all carved, sculpted and painted images of saints and the Virgin Mary.

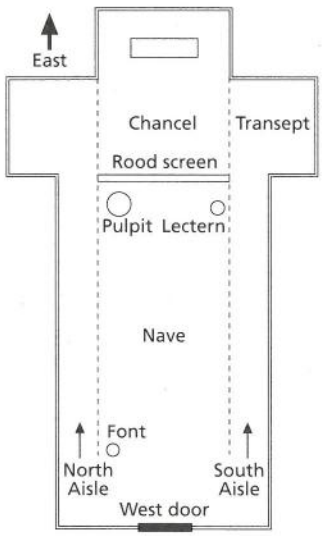

Figure 4.1 *Plan of a church interior*

At the same time, medieval wall paintings were whitewashed over. This is called iconoclasm, a word that triggers vivid pictures of mindless and violent mobs smashing statues and stained-glass windows. This rarely happened in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. On the contrary, the work of destruction was legalised by royal proclamations and was carried out in an orderly fashion by local church officials in an attempt to make church interiors much plainer. Catholic imagery was stripped away and the only decorations that were allowed were painted texts, usually the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer, and the royal coat of arms.

Gradually, many of the traditional festivals that were associated with the old Church – like mystery plays, Corpus Christi processions and saints' day holidays – were abolished and attempts made to replace them with Protestant festivals. National and local fast days were held, devoted to fasting, sermons and prayer. Slowly a Protestant calendar of holidays developed, celebrating key Protestant events, like the accession of Elizabeth I in 1558, the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 and the

KEY TERMS:

Gunpowder Plot

On 5 November 1605 Guy Fawkes was discovered in the cellars beneath the Houses of Parliament guarding barrels of gunpowder. He confessed under torture that he was part of a Catholic conspiracy to blow up the building at the state opening of parliament. He and his fellow conspirators were hung, drawn and quartered. There has been a major debate among historians about whether or not the Plot was masterminded by Robert Cecil, the king's minister, in order to use it as a pretext for the introduction of harsh anti-Catholic measures. There is not much conclusive evidence for this and the Plot seems to have been the work of a few Catholics from minor English gentry families, disappointed that James's accession had not brought relief from persecution of their faith. Fawkes seems to have been a minor figure in the conspiracy. Doubts there may be about the origins of the Plot, but there are none about its effects. It became a central part of a tradition of anti-Catholicism in England that continued for centuries.

Catechisms

These were printed versions of a teaching aid that was widely and more commonly used to spread the Protestant message by word of mouth. Using a series of set questions and answers, **catechisms** were used by church ministers to try to instil into their congregations the key elements of the Protestant faith.

Lay impropriations

These were the right to appoint ministers to churches on estates that had once belonged to the Church and that had often passed into lay hands at the Dissolution.

discovery of the **Gunpowder Plot** in 1605. None of these attempts were, of course, totally successful – for example, in Catholic Lancashire some church interiors remained unchanged from pre-Reformation days; and elsewhere traditional festivals, like May Days, survived – but slowly the traditional forms of worship and celebration were altered in a Protestant direction.

The main device in this campaign of protestantisation was the use of the spoken and written word. In this regard the new Protestant Church was at a distinct disadvantage compared with Catholicism, which relied on visual aids – like mystery plays, paintings, sculptures and processions. These had for centuries proved highly effective among an illiterate population. To overcome this disadvantage ministers and officials of the new Church attempted to exploit the press, flooding the market in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries with cheap popular ballads and tracts, which were priced at one or two pennies and which carried simplified versions of the Protestant message. T. Watt estimates that between 600,000 and 4 million ballads had been sold by the end of the sixteenth century. Alongside these, over 1 million **catechisms** were published.

The main propaganda device of the new Church, however, was preaching. The pulpit, not the altar (which was replaced by a communion table), was given pride of place in post-Reformation churches. But as every student who has sat in lectures knows, this form of teaching is not always effective. To be effective, sermons, like lectures, have to be well informed and to be delivered in a clear and attractive manner. This quality can, in part, be acquired by training. Accordingly, the universities were encouraged to turn out graduates who could preach and, under some fairly vigorous direction by bishops and with the support of Protestant landowners who owned **lay impropriations**, these were increasingly employed by the Church. As a result, the educational level of the clergy rose rapidly until by the 1620s it was very rare for a church minister not to be a graduate. It needs to be pointed out that attainment of a university degree did not automatically guarantee that graduates would be effective preachers and pastors. Moreover, the rank-and-file clergy continued to be badly paid, especially in those cases where the most valuable source of their income, **tithes**, were creamed off by landowners who had rights of impropriation. Yet by the early seventeenth century the Church was recruiting clergy who were much better educated and more fitted for the task of trying to establish Protestantism in England than the clergy it had employed in 1559.

Their success rate was patchy. In counties like Kent, Essex and Suffolk, that were nearest to the reforming influences of the continent, or areas like the Chilterns and upper Thames valley, where there was a long

KEY TERM:

Tithes

Tithes were originally one-tenth of agricultural produce produced by each parishioner and paid to church ministers for their support. There were two types: small tithes of chickens and eggs, and large tithes of agricultural produce. By the early seventeenth century both were often commuted to cash payments.

tradition of religious dissent, progress was fairly rapid. Elsewhere Protestant preachers found fertile ground for their message in areas like Manchester and south-east Lancashire, where Protestant ideas had been brought by commercial contacts, or where the sons of local gentry were fired with enthusiasm for the new faith that they had acquired at university. Indeed the areas where Protestantism spread fastest were often those where there existed an effective partnership between a local magistrate who was an enthusiastic Protestant and a church minister who was well educated and was a good preacher and pastor. The alliance of magistrate and minister was fundamental in bringing about the spread of Protestantism in England.

As a result Catholicism retreated, so that by the first decades of the seventeenth century the numbers of committed Catholics could be counted in hundreds of thousands rather than millions. The old faith gradually became confined to the households of Catholic nobles and gentry, and popular attachment to it slowly withered away. The advance of Protestantism can be measured by the:

- appearance of Protestant preambles in wills
- regularity with which the Book of Common Prayer was used in church services
- refurbishing of church interiors along Protestant lines
- important role that the church courts played in the life of the community
- evidence of regular attendance at communion. In Wiltshire the records of the church courts convey 'the distinct impression that regular attendance at church, and certainly annual participation in the communion, were far more widely accepted by the 1620s and 1630s than they had been in the middle years of Elizabeth's reign'.

In three Cambridgeshire villages in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries 'even the humblest members, the very poor, and the women, and those living in physical isolation, thought deeply on religious matters and were often profoundly influenced by them'. Most surprisingly of all, since the teeming suburbs of London do not seem likely areas for the spread of Protestantism, between 80 per cent and 90 per cent of all adults in Southwark received annual communions during the last years of Elizabeth's reign and that of James I. There seems little doubt that the reformed Church was becoming firmly embedded in the centre of life in most English towns and villages during the early years of the seventeenth century.

Puritans and Anti-Calvinists

Although by 1603 the reformed Protestant Church had made a great deal of progress in becoming accepted as a truly national Church in England, there were few people at the beginning of the seventeenth century who believed (as had Elizabeth I) that the Church was fully reformed. Few believed that it should remain exactly as it had been established in 1559. There was a general desire for further reform of the Church in order to support the preaching campaign in the 'dark corners of the land', where the traditional religion still survived, and to educate the ignorant about Christ and the Church. This commitment to continuing evangelisation was one of the key elements that gave the national Church its strength and unity in the early seventeenth century. But there was far from total agreement within the Church on what other changes were necessary. As K. Fincham has recently put it: 'almost everyone in early Stuart England desired religious unity, but on whose terms?'

Two of the most vocal calls for reform of very different types came from 'Puritans' and 'Anti-Calvinists'.

Puritans

This term has been used in so many misleading ways in the past that it is essential at the outset to stress what Puritans were *not*. Puritans were *not* a group different from 'Anglicans'. Puritans were *not* drawn exclusively from one social group – 'the middling sort' or any other group. Puritans did *not* have a distinctive radical, social or political philosophy.

The opposite beliefs were all widely held by historians in the 1950s and 1960s, when it was assumed that Puritans mounted a campaign against the 'Anglican' structure of the Church. Some historians (like C. Hill) also depicted Puritans as people with revolutionary political and social aspirations, who attempted to subvert the traditional political and social order as well. Many historians believed that in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries there took place 'a Rise of Puritanism' against the monarchy and state Church that climaxed in the Civil War of the 1640s and the establishment of an English republic in 1649.

Important research since the early 1970s by, among others, P. Collinson and N. Tyacke has demolished this idea of 'a Rise of Puritanism', including the 'Anglican versus Puritan' model. What has been most influential in doing this is the discovery that Puritans were members of the national Church at the start of the seventeenth century, as were the vast majority of Protestants. At this time there were very few **religious Independents** or **religious Presbyterians**. This being the case, 'Anglican' is an

KEY TERMS:

Religious Independents

Religious Independents wanted to establish congregations that were to some extent independent of the national Church. Some, but not all, wanted to be completely separate from the national Church and would have been happy if there were no national Church.

Religious Presbyterians

Religious Presbyterians wanted to retain a national Church but one based on a Presbyterian structure, with bishops replaced by elders and a hierarchy of local classes and national synods. (See also key term, page 133.)

irrelevant, superfluous word when writing about the period before 1640, and this is the last time it will appear in these pages on that period. Puritans were part of the establishment within the Church, not revolutionaries seeking to subvert it from outside.

Yet Puritans were an identifiable group within the Church. Their principal distinctive characteristic was that they were more keen than other Protestants to bring about 'further reformation' of the Church. What did they mean by 'further reformation' (a term they themselves frequently used)?

What were the aims of the Puritans? These can be usefully (if artificially) divided into two parts:

KEY TERMS:

Liturgy

Liturgy is the form in which church services are conducted.

Vestments

Vestments were the robes – often long, richly embroidered cloaks – worn by church ministers when conducting church services.

1 The first was to bring about 'further reformation' of the **liturgy** and ceremonies practised in the national Church. For Puritans the Church was, as they often said, only 'halfly-reformed', by which they meant that it still contained Catholic practices that to them were odious and repugnant. Church ministers still wore **vestments** like those of Catholic priests. This and Catholic practices like bowing at the name of Jesus, the use of the ring in the marriage ceremony and making the sign of the cross when children were baptised were all allowed by the Book of Common Prayer. To Puritans they were symptoms of the fact that the campaign of iconoclasm and destruction of the remnants of Catholicism within the English Church had not proceeded far enough.

2 But Puritans also wanted another kind of 'further reformation', not simply one of destruction but of construction. They wanted an inner spiritual reformation of the lives of every man, woman and child in the country. This is what they meant when they called for 'a reformation of manners', to be undertaken by the Protestant alliance of magistrate and minister. The campaign for 'a reformation of manners' was designed to eliminate sins from people's lives by enforcing adherence to strict personal moral codes of behaviour. **Sabbatarianism** was also an essential feature of Puritan beliefs. Drunkenness and adultery were put high on the Puritans' target list of sins to be wiped out. Hence, Puritans spearheaded a campaign against alehouses, which were seen not only as the main cause of drunkenness but also the origin of personal debauchery and crime. Some popular sports and pastimes too were seen by Puritans as sources of sinful behaviour. For example, **churchales** were condemned for allegedly leading to disorder, drunkenness and illegitimacy. Dancing was especially singled out for encouraging sinful behaviour. As they dance, according to a late sixteenth-century Puritan tract, 'maydens and matrones are groped and handled with unchast handes and kissed and dishonestly embraced'. Another made the connection between dancing

KEY TERMS:

Sabbatarianism

Sabbatarianism is the word often used to describe the practice of preventing people from working or playing on Sunday (the Sabbath), so that the day could be spent solely on religious activities.

Churchales

Churchales were festivities, including dancing and sports like bowling, held in churchyards – the seventeenth-century equivalent of church fetes.

and illicit sex even more explicitly. Girls who dance, it was said, 'do return home to their friends sometimes with more than they carried forth'.

For Puritans their pursuit of 'a reformation of manners' was, if anything, even more important than their concern to root out remaining 'popish superstition' in the Church. What drove them on was not a kill-joy spirit, which seems to have been absent from seventeenth-century Puritanism, but a conviction that the continuation of God's support for their cause depended on their living pure lives. What they read in the Bible convinced them of this, especially the Old Testament story of the success of the Israelites in escaping from Egyptian bondage and then eventually inheriting the Promised Land of Jerusalem. As English Puritans often pointed out, the Israelite success was only achieved after they had won God's blessing by first purging themselves of sin. For them, they believed, like the Israelites, moral reformation was essential to their – and the nation's – future prosperity.

Not surprisingly, given these beliefs, what distinguished Puritans from other Protestants was the godliness of their lifestyles. Significantly, the word they used to describe themselves was 'the godly' ('Puritan' was a term that their critics used to describe them). The godly spent a lot of time examining their lives in order both to convince themselves that they were one of the Elect (those chosen by God to go to heaven) and to try to discover God's will. Family prayers were held many times each day in Puritan households. They not only listened avidly to church sermons but often also took notes to use afterwards at **exercises**. If they were not satisfied with the preaching of their own local church minister, they would travel ('gadding' was the word they used) to other parishes to hear sermons.

KEY TERM:

Exercises

Exercises were informal discussion groups held to discuss religious matters and to educate lay people. In the late sixteenth century they were known as 'prophesyings' and were outlawed by Elizabeth I.

By their great zeal for 'further reformation' and 'a reformation of manners' and by their personal godliness, Puritans were different and felt themselves to be different from other members of the Church. Like the young Richard Baxter in his father's house in Eaton Constantine in Shropshire in the 1620s (Source 4, page 36), Puritans felt that they were an embattled minority cut off from their neighbours by the intensity of their commitment to the cause of maintaining and reforming Protestantism. Susan Kent's comments (Source 5) reflect the resentment this sometimes caused among their neighbours. As will be seen, Puritans had much in common with other Protestants. Yet they were not like other Protestants in all respects. They were an identifiable group, 'the hotter type of Protestants', or a 'militant tendency within the Church' as they have been aptly described by P. Collinson.

Anti-Calvinists

Puritans were visible within the Church from at least the 1570s. By the 1590s and early 1600s another 'tendency' within the Church had formed, that is people with an alternative vision of what the Church should become. Again it is difficult to give them a label. Sometimes such people have been called 'Arminians' after a Dutchman, Jacob Arminius, who in the second decade of the seventeenth century published similar theological views to theirs. Other historians have called them 'Laudians' after William Laud, who became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1633. But neither of these words are exactly appropriate to describe the situation at the beginning of the seventeenth century, since this reforming tendency predated both Arminius and Laud. Hence the term 'Anti-Calvinists' is preferred here and will be used to describe this group within the Church before it became associated with William Laud in the reign of Charles I. Only then (see chapter 7) will the term 'Laudian' be used.

What were the aims of the Anti-Calvinists? What principally differentiated them from Puritans is that they did not want to push the Church any further in an anti-Catholic direction. On the contrary, they wanted some return to the theology and liturgy of the pre-Reformation Church. In the last years of Elizabeth I's reign, a small group of conservative theologians began to voice criticisms of the Calvinist doctrine of **predestination** that had gained much ground in the post-Reformation English Church. They began to claim that salvation was open to all people and was not predetermined by God. Salvation, they argued, could be gained by what people did during their lives. 'Good works' would be rewarded by salvation. This is known as the theology of free will and was an explicit challenge to the doctrine of predestination, that was much more popular among English Protestants at this time. Moreover, Anti-Calvinists extended their criticisms to other aspects of the reformed Church, like sermons and preaching. They maintained that the sacraments (notably the celebration of communion) and other ceremonies were more important parts of the church service than sermons.

KEY TERM:

Predestination/ predestinarianism

This is the belief that people's fate after death, whether they are chosen as one of the Elect in heaven or condemned to eternal damnation, is decided by God before they are born and regardless of any good works they might do during their lives.

In 1603 these Anti-Calvinist criticisms were as yet largely confined to a few intellectuals within the universities and a tiny group of theologians. Puritanism was far more pervasive and influential in England at large at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Both Anti-Calvinism and Puritanism, however, were symptomatic of the divisions within the Church when James VI ascended the throne of England as James I.

KEY TERM:

Hindsight

Hindsight is the historian's knowledge of what happened later. In this case, what happened later was that religious divisions helped to bring about the Civil War (see chapter 9).

How serious were these religious divisions in 1603?

These divisions and tensions within the Church are crucial to a full understanding of the political history of the reign of James I and Charles I and to the development of the crisis that culminated in the outbreak of the English Civil War in 1642. But it is important that historians should not allow **hindsight** to influence their analysis of the situation 40 years earlier at the start of the seventeenth century. At that time the issues that divided Protestants were much less important than those that they had in common.

What were the main issues that united most Protestants in 1603?

1 The first is a zeal for spreading Protestantism by an enthusiastic campaign of evangelism (preaching of the Gospel). As will be seen, this was a zeal that was not monopolised by Puritans but was shared by James I and many of his bishops.

2 The second is a commitment to the theology of predestination. A few Anti-Calvinists were beginning to question that commitment, but in 1603, outside a small circle of conservative clerics, there is no evidence of hostility to it.

3 The third is a widespread Protestant enthusiasm for a sermon-centred church service, supplemented by a programme of catechising and Bible-reading.

4 Alongside these positive beliefs, Protestants were bound together by a powerful negative force, a deep loathing of Catholicism.

The fear of popery

The intensity of the fear of popery felt by many English people in the early seventeenth century can be difficult to understand, because it appears to have been an 'irrational' fear. As has been seen, popular support for Catholicism was dwindling; there were relatively few committed Catholics in England; and those that there were seemed, unlike their Elizabethan predecessors, to have abandoned political activism and to have reconciled themselves merely to practising their faith within the confines of the households of a handful of wealthy Catholic landowners. What is even more surprising is that Protestant gentry seem to have lived quite happily alongside *individual* Catholic gentry. Why, then, did they fear and loathe Catholics *in general*?

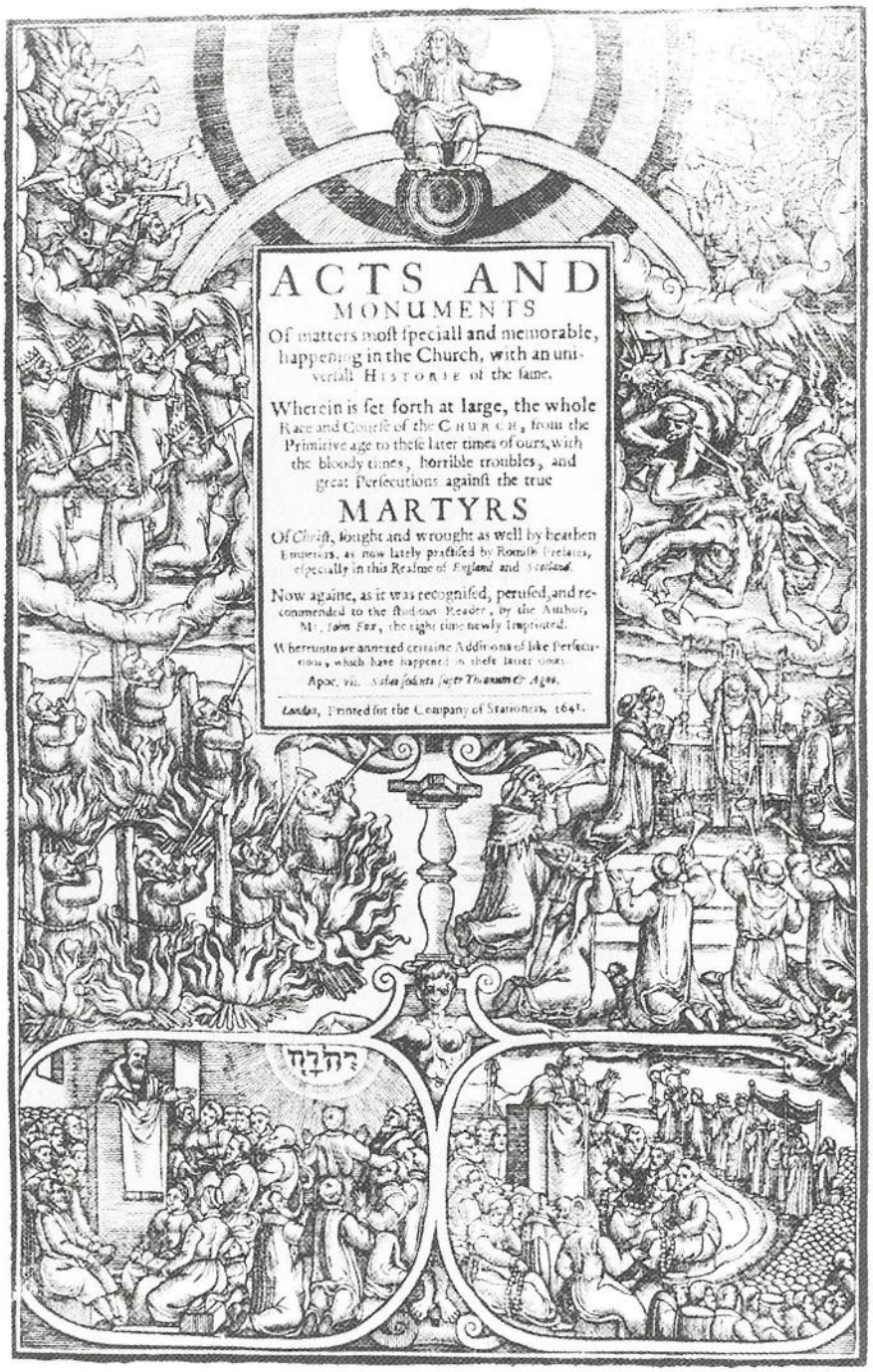

Figure 4.2 *Woodcut from Foxe's* Acts and Monuments

KEY TERM:

Millenarianism

This is the term used to describe the belief in the coming of the Millennium, *i.e.* the 1,000-years reign on Earth of Jesus Christ, which it was stated in the Bible would take place before the final Day of Judgement. It was believed that the Millennium would be inaugurated by the defeat of the forces of Antichrist in a final battle of a long-running war between the forces of Christ and Antichrist. Central to millenarian beliefs was the idea that the world had always been and would be (until the beginning of the Millennium) involved in such a struggle. Most Protestants in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries assumed that in their day the forces of Antichrist were Catholicism; that the defeat of Antichrist and the establishment of the Millennium would take place in the very near future; and that (some English Protestants believed) the English had been chosen by God as the Elect Nation to spearhead (in alliance with continental Protestantism) the war against popery and Antichrist.

The first reason is the widespread acceptance by Protestants of **millenarianism**. What helped this belief to gain ground was its popularisation in John Foxe's best-selling book, *Acts and Monuments* (see Figure 4.2), better known by its popular title *The Book of Martyrs*, which was first published in 1565 and subsequently re-issued in many editions. The most well-

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The most well-

known part of the book is Foxe's lurid descriptions of the deaths of Protestant 'martyrs' in the reign of Mary Tudor. Yet this was merely one episode in Foxe's millenarian history of the world, that made a powerful contribution to the escalating fear of popery in seventeenth-century England.

What also made anti-Catholicism such a potent force by the start of the early seventeenth century is that popery had not only become firmly identified with Antichrist but also with absolutism. It was widely assumed that Catholicism was the principal prop of the tyrannical rule of absolutist regimes in France and Spain. Given these assumptions, what was happening seemed to confirm that there was a popish plot from abroad aimed at the Protestant Church and State. Catholic resistance to Protestant English colonisation in Ireland supplemented the powerful anti-Catholic image that emerged during the Elizabethan war against Spain. This was stamped on the collective Protestant consciousness of the English by events like the Spanish Armadas of the 1580s and 1590s and the Gunpowder Plot in 1605, that gave credence to the growing English fear and loathing of Catholicism.

Conclusion

Broadly speaking, although in 1603 religious tensions and divisions bubbled beneath the surface in England – like the political, social and economic problems that have been identified in the previous three chapters – their seriousness should not be exaggerated. Protestantism was now firmly established in England and the national Church was strong and united enough to embrace differing points of view. Preventing the divisions from getting out of hand called for political skill on the part of the monarch. But the collapse of the national Church that occurred in the 1640s could not possibly have been foreseen in 1603.

Task

Work out answers to the following questions. Write a paragraph on each question.

a Why might the phrase 'the religious settlement of 1559' give a misleading impression of the religious situation at the start of the seventeenth century?

b What arguments can you think of to support the belief that
i Catholicism
ii religious indifference
survived in England in 1603?