CHAPTER 10

Reforming the World of the Parish

By 1560, England's and Scotland's political establishments were committed to the Protestant Reformation. In particular, they were committed to the Reformed Protestantism of Zürich and Geneva, and to making that Reformation a reality in the lives of the people. And that was where agreement ended. The debates over exactly what kind of Reformations there would be in England and Scotland were bitterly divisive. English Protestantism contained a vocal and energetic minority, who called themselves the 'godly' or the 'elect' but whose many mockers and enemies called them 'Puritans' or 'precisians'. These 'Puritans' believed that England was divided between a truly Christian minority (that is, themselves), and a wider population still sodden in the dregs of popery. Neither the structures nor the morals of the English Church had yet attained the purity for which they hoped. But to understand their world-view, we need to begin with the country that many of them saw as the ideal to be followed: Scotland.

Protestant Scotland: from kirk session to presbytery

A disciplined Church

The Scottish Reformation's success in embedding itself in parish life is one of the most mysterious events in the sixteenth century: for that success was remarkable. Few records survive from before 1560 that allow us to peer into the daily life of Scottish parish churches, but as Reformed churches were established, they formed 'kirk sessions' (see above, p. 220).

Their records give us an extraordinary picture of Reformed Protestantism in action.

The 1560 Scots Confession of Faith had declared that one of the distinguishing marks of a true Christian Church was godly discipline. On this view, a Church was not merely a collection of individuals. It was the bride of Christ, his chosen and covenanted people, called to holiness. It was also a light to the world – that is, it ought to be demonstrably virtuous, to refute the Catholic claim that Protestantism was moral anarchy. To achieve this, they turned to Matthew's Gospel:

If thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he hear thee, thou hast won thy brother. But if he hear thee not, take yet with thee one or two, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be confirmed. And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the Church: and if he refuse to hear the Church also, let him be unto thee as an heathen man, and a publican.[cxxv]

Reformed Protestants took this as a literal pattern for their collective life.

The system of discipline which emerged in Scotland, modelled closely on that in Calvin's Geneva, centred on the kirk session: an assembly of ordained ministers and lay 'elders'. These elders were pillars of the community who took responsibility for policing the people's morals – including one another's. The people were encouraged to report grave or public sins, but the elders were also responsible for actively seeking out such sinners. The Reformed Scots service-book, the *Book of Common Order*, required that kirk sessions should assemble every Thursday 'diligently [to] examine all such faults and suspicions, as may be espied'.[cxxvi] Those suspected of moral offences would be visited privately by members of the kirk session. If they proved obstinate, they might be summoned before the session and formally reprimanded. If they were still unrepentant, the procedure could be repeated publicly before

the whole congregation. The more discreet stages of the process might be bypassed for notorious or public offenders.

Such penitence was designed to be humiliating. The penitents' stool, where offenders sat so that the whole congregation could see them and marvel at their folly, became a fixture in post-Reformation Scottish churches. Penitents would be clothed in sackcloth, go barefoot, or wear signs describing their offences. Yet kirk sessions were not courts of law, and did not punish as such. They applied moral and social pressure to secure repentance and reconciliation. Those of us with modern concepts of liberty and privacy tend to bristle at the thought of a kirk session: busybodies judging others' morals. Yet in a society with no privacy and little concept of individual liberty, this made some sense. For example, sexual misconduct (inevitably, the bread and butter of kirk sessions) was not simply a private affair. Extramarital sex produced illegitimate children, the costs of whose care would usually fall on the parish. And while the kirk sessions' handling of illicit sex reflected the wider society's double standard on these issues (unchastity was widely seen as a mere foible for men and the defining, unforgivable sin for women), they did at least make attempts to identify, and discipline, the fathers of bastards as well as their mothers. Nor were the kirk sessions' attitudes to their people forbiddingly judgemental. The kirk session minutes document the patience and care which elders frequently took in pacifying disputes or in attempting to help those whose lives were in turmoil. Patching up family quarrels was a particular concern. The Reformed system of discipline could be paternalistic in the best sense.

Yet if the kirk session was not quasi-totalitarian, neither was it a kind of institutionalised counselling service. Its primary purpose was neither social control nor social harmony, but godly order. Alongside sexual offences and quarrels, the mainstay of its business was religious offences. Those who missed sermons, who arrived late, or who talked or fell asleep during them; those suspected of work or of inappropriate recreation on a Sunday; those who

did not send their children to be catechised – all such people could expect a visit from an elder. Likewise those who disparaged the new faith (or its ministers), or showed any signs of sympathy or nostalgia for the old. Such offences did not need to be overt. For example, the Reformed church in Scotland (showing a zeal unmatched anywhere else in the Reformed Protestant world) suppressed all traditional feasts, fasts and festivals, making no distinction of days aside from Sundays. However, many lay people persisted in marking 25 December as if it were still the popish festival of Christmas. An elder might come knocking that morning, and woe betide you if he found a goose in your oven. Such disciplines could not, of course, make people into good Christians or save their souls. Only God's decree of predestination could do that. But it was the elders' responsibility to ensure that God was honoured by at least the outward reverence of all the parish, and that sinners did not lead the righteous astray.

This might seem a radically new experience for most lay people, but the shock of the new should not be overestimated. For one thing, kirk sessions did not spring into being fully formed; although since their records are our main source, we know frustratingly little about the processes that led up to their establishment. It was a matter of decades before a reasonably comprehensive network of kirk sessions was in place across the country – an impressive enough achievement, but not one performed with a click of John Knox's fingers. What is reasonably clear is that the creation of a functioning kirk session depended on two separate elements being present: first, a committed minister, who would provide the diet of preaching which both justified and underpinned the kirk session's discipline; and second, a lay elite who were willing either to co-opt the Reformed Church, or to be co-opted by it. This second part of the process inevitably involved some compromise, as the ministers' zeal accommodated itself to existing social realities. This was made painfully clear in Edinburgh, where, uniquely, a pre-1559 clandestine Protestant congregation had developed a kirk session of its own. This congregation, a small and socially undistinguished gathering, tried to take

advantage of the victory of 1560 to assert its authority over the whole burgh; but it failed entirely. The burgh's merchant and professional oligarchy swiftly took control of the new establishment and marginalised the early converts. Before long the kirk session was staffed principally by trained lawyers. Although the kirk session was structurally separate from the secular magistracy, the overlap of personnel between them meant that the two became different faces of the same social elite.

Edinburgh was a religiously conservative town, but the same process of taming Reformed zeal can be seen in a town like Perth, where the Reformation rebellion had first broken out. Although there is no indication of lingering Catholicism in Perth, the new system bedded down there only slowly. The earliest kirk session records surviving for Perth date from 1577, and although the session had certainly been functioning for some years by then, it seems to have been doing so in an *ad hoc* fashion. Here, too, the kirk session's membership reflected the town's political structure and its political divisions. Perhaps this seemed like contamination: the Reformed Church was becoming simply another forum for local politics. Yet it was only through adapting itself to local political structures that the new Church could get under Scotland's skin. As a result, there were compromises. The first of Perth's kirk session records, from 1577, refers to a Corpus Christi play recently staged in the burgh. The session clearly disapproved of this, yet did not confront it directly. Instead, they were often inclined to use such routine breaches of discipline as a way of funding their extensive poor-relief efforts, through imposing fines on offenders.

In other words, even once it was established, the kirk sessions' discipline was never so relentless in practice as it was in theory. Perhaps it never could have been. At the edges of every community are the misfits, the awkward, the incapable and the pitiable, and kirk sessions – like any local magistrates – were forced daily to take decisions over quite what to pursue when dealing with such people, and what to overlook. Moreover, the kirk sessions did

not attempt to impose a total cultural revolution. They targeted the religious practices which they found most egregious, but allowed a good deal of the ritual life of the parish to persist or to resurface in different forms. For example, baptisms, weddings and burials had been liturgically and theologically transformed; but liturgy and theology are only small parts of the communal marking of births, marriages and deaths. Other festivities and rituals around these and other events continued much as before. Some practices were tolerated even more directly. When the *Book of Common Order* was translated into Gaelic, its translator added a prayer for use in blessing a ship going to sea. As the best recent study of discipline in the Scottish Church puts it, 'when Reformed ministers and elders threw out the popish bath water, they were careful to keep not only the baby, but also some bath toys to keep it happy'.[cxxvii]

As a result, in much of Scotland the kirk sessions achieved more than compliance: they achieved respect. The Church's elders, who were also almost everyone's social betters, were seen to be working painstakingly to preserve the peace and to correct antisocial behaviour. The system's inbuilt safeguards against hypocrisy also helped. Elders were formally required to look for faults 'not only amongst others, but chiefly amongst themselves',[cxxviii] and in particular to give minute attention to any shortcomings in their minister's life or teaching. Many of them did indeed discipline their own members readily. The response to this regime went beyond grudging compliance. Even those who, for reasons of illness or distance, were excused from attendance at sermons frequently made an effort to be there, and to be seen to be there. For if the kirk session was oppressive for the minority who crossed it, it was also a source of moral reassurance and approbation for the rest of society. To be in good standing with the kirk session was valuable testimony to one's moral character. Kirk sessions became arbiters of reputation.

This was most apparent at the celebrations of the Lord's Supper, the Reformed sacrament

of the Eucharist. Originally intended to be held four times a year, it was in fact usually celebrated only once or twice. These set-piece events, often spread over two or more Sundays in large parishes, were again a mix of the new and the old. The liturgy, based on that which Knox and his congregation had devised in Geneva, was stark in its opposition to the old Mass. Sacramental confession had been abolished too. Yet the minister and kirk session would now examine the people to decide who might be admitted to the sacrament, a process which must have felt somewhat like confession to those on the receiving end. The chosen ones would be given a communion token – often a simple button of leather, or the like. These tokens were bluntly functional, but they were heavy with meaning. More than a sacred meal ticket, a communion token was a marker of moral standing. A believer might even feel a twinge of pride at holding one, however much the preachers warned that such pride was the devil's snare.

And if the kirk sessions had a stick to wield, after all their exhortations, this was it: excommunication. This was a well-established punishment, known as 'cursing' in pre-Reformation Scotland, when its overuse had devalued it considerably. The Reformed Church reinforced it with the full weight of the kirk session. To be excommunicated was not simply to be excluded from communion, but to be cut off from all traffic with good Christian people. All members of the Church were expected to avoid any but essential dealings with excommunicates. Wives were to shun their husbands, and children their parents. Business dealings with them were forbidden. Those who broke the exclusion risked censure themselves. Although the practice was, again, messier than the theory, excommunication was a genuinely fearsome threat. The pressure on an excommunicate to repent and to petition for readmission to the Christian community was strong; and such offenders would be expected to demonstrate that their repentance was heartfelt.

This system worked well, then: almost too well. Kirk sessions became formidably

powerful, and the more scrupulously and responsibly they exercised that power, the more powerful they became. In Reformed societies across Europe, these powers were a focus for controversy. Even in Geneva, Calvin had secured the Church's right to excommunicate offenders only after an extended and nasty struggle with the city council. In other Reformed territories, such as the Netherlands, only a minority of the population were ever full members of the Church – making the social exclusivity of membership more appealing but the decree of excommunication less alarming. Scotland was the only territorial state which achieved a universal system of discipline where the power of excommunication was firmly in the Church's own hands. This was a source of considerable pride to some Scots Protestants. It was also one of the factors underlying the bitter ecclesiastical quarrels of the half-century after the Reformation.

Bishops and presbyteries

From 1560 to 1689, the Scottish Church was engaged in a protracted and often vicious internal battle over an apparently minor issue. The problem was one of Church government, not of theology. One party – which tended to be supported by the crown – favoured the retention of bishops. The other, led by ministers claiming to be the heirs of Reformed purity, favoured more conciliar forms of Church government. From the late 1570s, these purists advocated the creation of structures they called 'presbyteries', and as such they themselves were called 'Presbyterians'.

A presbytery was an elected council (consisting of 'presbyters', from the Greek for an elder), chosen by the churches in a particular geographical area, whose responsibility was to oversee and govern those churches. Its function was, in other words, very like that of a bishop, although the geographical areas were generally somewhat smaller. The differences

were twofold. First, bishops were seen as having an intrinsic authority over their fellow clerics, bestowed by consecration and symbolised by their status as lords of the realm who sat in Parliament. Presbyteries, by contrast, were composed of ordinary ministers, who remained formally equal to one another and to all other ministers, and who held office for a limited period. The principle that all ministers are equal became one to which Presbyterians rallied. This issue concealed a second, more practical difference. Bishops were appointed by the king, but presbyteries were elected by the churches under their care. In other words, the battle between Episcopalians (the supporters of bishops) and Presbyterians was about royal power. How much control ought the state to have over the Church?

For a Church which had first established itself by rebellion, and then maintained itself for six years under the doubtful protection of a Catholic queen, the obvious answer was: not much. John Knox insisted that monarchs owed their authority simply to divine providence, and could command obedience only insofar as they obeyed God's will. He repeatedly showed himself ready to denounce or oppose rulers he disliked to their faces (once reducing Mary, queen of Scots, to tears). The *Book of Discipline* – Knox's project – insisted that everyone should be subject to the Church's discipline, 'as well the rulers, as they that are ruled'.[cxxix] Knox was no theorist, but after his death in 1572 a more thorough set of demands was worked out by the scholar Andrew Melville.

Melville, like Knox, had spent time in Geneva; unlike Knox, he had a head for administration. It was under his oversight that a *Second Book of Discipline* was created in 1578, clarifying several issues which the first book had left uncertain. The *Second Book* vigorously asserted the near-complete independence of the Church from state control. The symbol of this was the General Assembly, the supreme governing body of the Scottish Church, an institution which had taken shape informally during the 1560s. The Assembly had then functioned as a focus for Protestant opposition to the queen, and had of course operated

independently of her. It now had no wish to lose that independence. The *Second Book* therefore asserted that General Assemblies 'ought always to be retained in their own liberty', and needed no royal permission to meet. The one role which the crown might have, the *Book* admitted, was that in emergencies a king might intervene to reform or purge the Church of error. But in more settled times, 'where the ministry of the church is once lawfully constituted, and they that are placed do their office faithfully, all godly princes and magistrates ought to hear and obey their voice, and reverence the Majesty of the Son of God, speaking by them'.[cxxx] This did not apply only to the General Assembly. In principle, a kirk session could call *any* sinner in Scotland before it, regardless of rank. God is no respecter of persons. As Melville reportedly said to James VI's face in 1596, it was Christ who was king of the Scottish Church, 'whose subject King James the Sixth is, and of whose kingdom not a king, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member!'[cxxxi]

Unsurprisingly, those in authority had a different view. It was easier for the Melvillians to write manifestos than to bring these structures into being. For most of the 1567–73 civil war, the Scots Church remained a strange hybrid, a half-finished Reformed Church alongside the still-functioning husk of its Catholic predecessor. The General Assembly believed that the structures and revenues of the old Church should come under its control; the various regents for the young James VI wished to continue treating ecclesiastical offices as their own property. Regent Mar's unilateral appointment of a new archbishop of St Andrews in 1571 stirred up so much resentment from the ministers that it became urgent to find a compromise. The resulting agreement – the Concordat of Leith, in 1572 – initially met with widespread approval. Even Knox, in his final illness, accepted it. The Concordat allowed for bishops, who would be nominated by the crown but examined by ministers, and who would be under the General Assembly's oversight after their appointment. This was not terribly different from the system of superintendents which had been half-erected after 1560 (see above, pp.

220–1), although some Protestant consciences recoiled from certain dregs of popery – the old diocesan boundaries, the wealth and lordliness of the bishops, and indeed the title 'bishop' itself.

The Concordat failed because the General Assembly could not hold the crown to its side of the bargain. Neither the earl of Morton, regent from 1572 to 1578, nor the bishops whom he appointed, honoured the Concordat's spirit, inflaming the suspicion of those ministers who had always disliked it. It was in this mood that the Assembly drew up the *Second Book of Discipline*. That *Book* did not propose presbyteries as such, but did urge that elders in different churches work together for mutual support and correction. There was a vacuum for godly leadership which plainly needed filling. In 1579, the Assembly suggested using the 'exercises' which had emerged in both Scotland and England as a forum for this (see below, p. 271). Political change made the task seem more urgent. The earl of Morton had been deposed in 1578, and the twelve-year-old king declared an adult. However, real power was slipping into the hands of his French-raised kinsman Esmé Stuart, soon to be the duke of Lennox, who was a Catholic. There was talk of toleration for Catholicism, or even of the restoration of Queen Mary to the throne in a co-regency with her son. For the more advanced Protestants, it was time to take the law into their own hands. In 1581 the Assembly ordered the creation of thirteen 'model' presbyteries in a block of territory across the central Lowlands, prototypes for a network of some fifty which they hoped might cover the whole country. It was the 1560s all over again. Rather than overturning the authority of the bishops, the Reformed Church was simply going to bypass them.

While the Assembly responded to Esmé Stuart's pro-Catholic, pro-French regime by reasserting its independence, Scotland's Protestant nobility took more direct action. In 1582 the young king was kidnapped in the so-called 'Ruthven Raid', and a group of Protestant nobles and lairds seized control. Stuart was banished, and died shortly afterwards, and

Protestants in both kingdoms feared that the danger had passed. However, the fifteen-year-old king was in no mood to be treated like this. While James's own Protestant convictions were sincere, the Ruthven Raid sealed his distrust of Presbyterian zealotry. He already had ample reason to be suspicious of the mulishly independent political culture which Knox, Melville and others had cultivated. These were the men who had fought a war against his grandmother and deposed his mother. A particular hate-figure for James was his former tutor, George Buchanan, who had justified Mary's deposition in almost republican terms. James had received a formidable education at Buchanan's hands (he joked that he had learned Latin before he learned Scots), but also some formidable beatings. When James escaped from the Ruthven Raiders, after less than a year, he began seriously to assert his independence. He and his new favourite – James Stewart, whom he made earl of Arran – were too shrewd to seek vengeance on the Ruthven Raiders directly, but they did act to bring the Presbyterians to heel. The result was a series of parliamentary Acts in 1584 which the ministers dubbed the 'Black Acts'. Rather than a negotiated compromise like the Leith Concordat, this was a full-scale assault. The Black Acts reaffirmed the Protestant Church's doctrines and practices, but suppressed the presbyteries, subjected the General Assembly to royal control, and placed sweeping new powers in the bishops' hands. Clergy were required to subscribe to the Acts. Some two dozen who refused chose exile in England instead. Doomsaying Protestants were joined by optimistic Catholics (including the authors of *Leicester's Commonwealth*) in wondering whether James was about to convert.

Politically, this worked. The point had been made, and James's authority asserted – an authority which became all the more real when he cast Arran off in 1585. Ecclesiastically, however, such a hardline position was unsustainable. The presbyteries were restored in 1586, to work alongside bishops. They slowly spread, numbering over forty by the early 1590s and covering the bulk of the country. The bishops' powers were more eroded than abolished. In

1592, James recognised the presbyteries' and the General Assembly's supremacy in a parliamentary Act which the ministers dubbed the 'Golden Act' – prematurely. For the king continued to see himself as the Church's overlord and protector. He still insisted on his right to regulate when the General Assembly met, although he was careful to use that power circumspectly (requesting, for example, that it reschedule meetings from the morning to the afternoon so that he might be present). Radical Presbyterian sentiment flared up again in 1596–97, in what amounted to a failed coup: for the king again outmanoeuvred his opponents, and persuaded many moderate Protestants that stable royal government was preferable to a Presbyterian theocracy. Yet James was not so foolish as to believe he had defeated the radicals decisively.

James's view of his position was made clear during the other great political–religious crisis of the early 1590s: the witch scare. In 1589 James married a Danish princess. When the happy couple sailed back to Scotland, they were caught in a dangerous storm. In accordance with warnings he had received earlier, James feared this might be the work of witches. It sparked a large-scale witch-hunt which crossed much of the country and which ebbed and flowed for most of the 1590s. James himself was to write a book on the subject (one of many this most literary of kings produced), and he interrogated several suspected witches in person. According to the earliest published account of these trials, one such witch confessed to having asked the Devil why he wanted to drown the king of Scots. The Devil replied that 'the king is the greatest enemy he hath in the world'.[cxxxii]

This was the kind of testimony that James VI wanted: that he was no mere member of Christ's Church. Nor would he accept the Presbyterian insistence on the inherent equality of all Christian ministers, an equality which seemed to deny not only his own distinctive role but also the whole hierarchy of Christian society (indeed of Creation). He would tolerate the existence of presbyteries, but not the abolition of bishops. During the 1590s, as he patiently

positioned himself so that his succession to the English throne would seem inevitable (the achievement his mother had never managed), Puritans and Presbyterians in England hoped that he might bring some of the Scots' radicalism south with him. It was wishful thinking. In 1604, as a newly minted king of England, he famously and bluntly rebuffed such hopes by asserting, 'No bishop, no king.' In James's experience, this was not a debating point. It was a statement of fact.

Puritans and conformists in England

During the reigns of Elizabeth I in England and James VI in Scotland, jealous eyes looked from each country at the other. James and his allies in Scotland envied the Elizabethan regime's control over the English Church. Likewise, a noisy minority of English clerics and lay people looked longingly at Scotland, where a purer and more complete Reformation had been enacted. Not all of these 'Puritans' were actual Presbyterians, wishing to abolish episcopacy. But there was much else for Puritans to admire in the Scots Church. The plain simplicity of Scottish worship contrasted starkly with the Book of Common Prayer's ceremonious complexity. The General Assembly's freedom, even though mitigated by royal oversight, was scarcely imaginable in England. Above all, perhaps, English Puritans envied the congregational discipline exercised by kirk sessions. For those who thought that such discipline was a distinguishing mark of a true Church, England's failure to embrace any such system was damning indeed.

However, envying the Scots was all that Elizabethan Puritans could do. Their own government spent forty years repeatedly facing down their attempts at reform. Clergy were deprived; careers ended; even an archbishop of Canterbury was broken, as successive waves of Puritan agitation dashed themselves on the rock of Elizabeth's monumental stubbornness.

The experience of zealous Protestants during her reign was an arc from hope, through frustration and anger, to resigned defeat. But this is not the whole story. If the pressure for further Reformation made no progress at national level, the parishes were another matter. While Puritanism did not transform England's public life in the way that it hoped, it had more impact on its wider culture than is often acknowledged – indeed, more than the Puritans themselves liked to admit.

The long struggle against the Settlement

As we have seen (see above, pp. 201–3), plenty of the English Church's senior clergy in the early 1560s had grave reservations about its structures and rituals. Their choice nevertheless to accept office in it can be viewed cynically: dignities and regular incomes have their appeal. But the choice also made strategic sense. Experience suggested that reformation was a process, and as long as it was moving in the right direction, most Protestants could accept some compromises. The new Church's core beliefs were unequivocally Reformed Protestant. The most authoritative Reformed theologians in Europe – notably Peter Martyr Vermigli, who had spent much of Edward VI's reign in England – urged their English friends to conform.

This is an important point, because during the seventeenth century the Church of England would mutate into something distinct from Reformed Protestantism, and assert an 'Anglican' identity for itself. These Anglicans then rewrote the history of the sixteenth century in their own image. The peculiarities of Elizabeth's Reformation made this rewriting possible, but we should not be deceived by it. To describe the sixteenth-century English Church as 'Anglican' is anachronistic. This was a Reformed Protestant Church, which, like every Reformed Protestant Church in Europe, had its idiosyncrasies. Reformed Protestantism was not a

franchise to be imported wholesale. There was wide agreement that while some religious questions were essential, others were 'matters indifferent' – *adiaphora*, in the Greek term popularised by the Lutheran Philip Melanchthon. On such matters, Christian practice could legitimately vary. The concept of *adiaphora* permitted considerable variation in the practice of religion. It also, in principle, allowed English Protestants who disliked aspects of Elizabeth's Reformation to conform without staining their consciences. In practice, however, the concept of *adiaphora* caused as many problems as it solved – for the questions of what was truly 'indifferent', and of who might regulate it, remained open.

If there was space for consciences to be flexible about details of religious practice, there was no such space on another issue. One of Henry VIII's many legacies was that English Protestantism retained an exceptionally high doctrine of obedience. That was only reinforced when, in 1558–59, Protestants were providentially liberated from Catholic tyranny by the accession of Elizabeth, a queen who was clearly God's gift to her people. It was her subjects' duty to obey her, not to second-guess her. Moreover, maintaining the unity of the Reformed Church in England was also a matter of supreme importance. Given Protestantism's well-deserved reputation for being quarrelsome, this is worth stressing. All but a tiny radical fringe of English Protestants wished to maintain a single, national Church, into which all English people would be born: not voluntary congregations, still less a plurality of churches. Puritans were not (with very few exceptions) separatists. Their loyalty to the established Church was put under immense pressure at times, and they certainly strained at the bounds of conformity. Yet they were also convinced that schism was a grave sin, and very few were willing to abandon visible unity until the Church itself broke down in the 1640s. For the time being, the English Church was an argumentative family, headed by an obstinate matriarch. Her spiritual children might fight bitterly with one another and even grumble against her, but that did not mean they were ready to run away from home.

How fundamental were these divisions, then? Different measures produce sharply different answers. Most English Protestants during Elizabeth's long reign, and beyond, shared a common devotional culture. They used similar prayers, admired similar preachers, and drew on the same spiritual and emotional repertoire to express and deal with their lives' highs and lows. They belonged to the same world as one another and spoke the same language, and there were no sharply drawn party lines. Yet close kinship can make family quarrels more, not less bitter, and deep mistrust was woven into the Elizabethan 'settlement' from the start. The long split between Puritans and conformists is, in one sense, an extension of the primal division between the exiles and the Nicodemites of Mary's reign. The former exiles believed those who had stayed in England and conformed – a group who included Archbishop Parker, William Cecil and, all but unmentionably, the queen herself – were guilty of a grave sin, for which they ought openly to repent. During 1559, the underground Protestant congregation which had survived in hiding in Marian London came out into the open, and a procession of believers who had conformed under Mary came to it to confess and to be reconciled. Cecil and the regime's other grandees did not. There was never any official repentance for, or even acknowledgement of, the evils of Mary's reign: a stark contrast with the act of national reconciliation which Mary herself had demanded. To the purists, that was the Elizabethan regime's original sin, and it was still being recalled in bitterness decades later. How could those who risked death for their faith under Mary accept these unrepentant cowards as their fathers in God? On the other side of the divide, the rigorists' insistence looked fanatical, judgemental and liable to lead to schism.[cxxxiii] In practice, the two parties were very alike. That did not mean that they trusted one another.

The first set-piece confrontation between Puritans and the regime unfolded in the reign's first meeting of the Convocation of Canterbury, in 1563 – almost the last occasion on which that ancient assembly seemed like a possible locus of power. The 1563 Convocation secured

one undoubted triumph. Edward VI's Church had set out a formal definition of its doctrine in the Forty-Two Articles. Convocation now approved a lightly revised version of this text. A short group of articles denouncing Anabaptist radicals were dropped, for that threat no longer seemed pressing. Most of the other revisions were cosmetic, although the new text was slightly more flexible on the issue of predestination. The article on the Eucharist was revised much as the Prayer Book had been: a flat rejection of the Lutheran doctrine of Christ's presence was replaced by a somewhat more ambiguous text. The queen accepted these Thirty-Nine Articles – or rather, she accepted thirty-eight of them: the Eucharistic article, which still had the potential to insult potential Lutheran allies, was quietly dropped. It was restored when Parliament took the matter up in 1571, establishing the Thirty-Nine Articles in law.

The Articles were, and were seen to be, a statement of solid Reformed Protestantism, akin to the 'Confessions' adopted by the Reformed Churches of France, Scotland and the Netherlands in the 1560s and 1570s. Two differences between the Articles and those Confessions are worth noticing, however. First, the Articles did contain some thin cracks of theological ambiguity. This was not unusual in texts of this period. By the early 1580s, the Scots Confession, too, looked insufficiently precise, and in 1581 the so-called 'Negative Confession' was drafted – a text designed specifically to make it impossible for Catholics to affirm it. Yet Elizabeth did not permit any such clarifications and developments. The Thirty-Nine Articles' cracks remained, cracks into which later theologians could work their chisels. Second, these were Articles, not a Confession. They were imposed by authority, not a statement of a Church's or a people's faith. Paradoxically, this made them less powerful. Initially, clergy were not compelled to subscribe to them (as they had been to the Forty-Two Articles). In 1571, Parliament did require new clergy, and those ordained before 1558 to subscribe. This did more to put Catholic bitter-enders under pressure than to ensure

conformity among Protestants.

These were quibbles, however. The English Church's Reformed Protestant identity, already unmistakable from its liturgy and Homilies, was now formally proclaimed. Naturally enough, the 1563 Convocation also set itself to reforming the popish elements surviving in that liturgy. A slate of six proposed reforms tackled several particular Reformed bugbears, including pipe organs, holy days, traditional vestments, signing with the cross in baptism and kneeling at the Eucharist. The battle in Convocation's lower house was hard fought, with senior figures on both sides twisting arms mercilessly. Many of the bishops, including Archbishop Parker himself, supported some or all of the reforms. The queen and her closest allies, however, were determined to block them. In the end, the lower house rejected the proposals by fifty-nine votes to fifty-eight. If there was a moment when 'Puritans' as a distinctive group appeared within the English Church, this was it. They would become familiar with the taste of defeat.

Needless to say, the wafer-thin defeat in Convocation did not end Puritan disquiet. The first conflict to boil over was that over clerical dress. It may seem a strange subject to become excited about, and even to smack of clerical narcissism. No one argued that vestments were theologically significant. All sides in this quarrel agreed that they were *adiaphora*, things indifferent on which good Christians might legitimately disagree. But the queen insisted, as a matter of obedience, that her clergy wear a stripped-down version of traditional clerical vestments when preaching or presiding at divine service. The ornate sacramental vestments of the old Church were gone, but Elizabeth wished her clergy to retain a surplice (a plain white gown worn over the outer clothing) and a black cap. The royal injunctions of 1559 had indicated this, although with typical ambiguity. Many of the more 'advanced' clergy took advantage of that ambiguity to tread a different path. They did not wish to conduct worship in ordinary civilian clothing – that would lack order and dignity – but in academic dress,

including a degree hood where appropriate. They wished to be Protestant ministers distinguished by their learning, not Catholic priests endowed with sacramental power.

Puritans found the vestments issue genuinely troubling. Those who had been in exile had seen the simple purity of Reformed worship in Zürich or Geneva. Now they were being asked to dress up in a pale imitation of popish frippery. To stand before their congregations actually wearing this get-up implicated them personally and directly. It was, they feared, a visible sign of continuity between the reformed and the unreformed Churches, yet another indication that the Elizabethan church had failed properly to break with the past. Worse, it could lull the laity into underestimating the change. How could Puritans denounce popery and call the nation to repentance when popery's rags still hung about them?

The reasons for Elizabeth's unbudgeable stand on the issue are less clear. At no stage did she or her supporters argue that traditional vestments had positive values beyond 'order and comeliness'. Yet this was not merely a matter of the queen's old-fashioned personal tastes. We may speculate that she and her ever-cautious regime hoped that the maintenance of some visible continuity might ease the transition to the new religion. More importantly, however, it became a matter of obedience. The dispute was plainly a proxy for many other battles. If Elizabeth had yielded on vestments, a dozen other demands would have followed. Instead, she took a stand. When the nonconformists cited the concept of *adiaphora* and their own consciences, the regime asserted that, if the question was indifferent, the queen had the right to determine it authoritatively for all her subjects, whereupon they had an absolute duty to obey her.

Characteristically, however, the queen did not fight this battle herself. Rather, she left it to her hapless archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker. Parker himself had no difficulties with vestments, but this was not a fight he would have chosen to pick. Worse, while Elizabeth insisted that he enforce conformity, she refused publicly to involve herself. So

Parker – who was not even a member of the queen's Council – was forced to do so as if on his own (limited) authority. In 1565 he issued a set of so-called 'Advertisements' to the clergy, laying down precise rules on vestments: not royal injunctions, nor even episcopal injunctions (which could, at best, have applied only to the province of Canterbury), but orders whose legal status was at best unclear.

First in Parker's sights were Thomas Sampson and Laurence Humphrey, heads of the Oxford colleges of Christ Church and Magdalen respectively. Sampson was a Puritan whose quarrelsome, hair-trigger conscience was exasperating even to his allies, and his loathing for traditional vestments had long been apparent. Parker negotiated with the two dons at gruelling length over the late winter and spring of 1565, finally detaining them at his palace at Lambeth. Sampson and Humphrey had powerful friends. The earl of Leicester backed them, and Bishop Grindal of London invited both men to preach at London's prime pulpit, Paul's Cross, at Easter 1565. Magdalen College's statutes, moreover, made Humphrey almost impossible to displace. As so often, due process trumped politics. But Parker was able to muster a range of impressive authorities on his side. Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr Vermigli had both accepted the Edwardian Church's use of vestments. Even more tellingly, when Sampson and Humphrey appealed to Heinrich Bullinger, the chief pastor of Zürich, he not only came down on Parker's side but also sent a copy of his reply to the archbishop. It was a significant victory, for Bullinger was probably the most eminent Reformed Protestant theologian then living. Bullinger knew Sampson, and disliked him: 'The man is never satisfied; he always has some doubt or other to busy himself with.'[cxxxiv] Sampson, however, would not budge, and was ejected from Christ Church by royal order: the first minister of the reformed Church of England to be deprived for nonconformity. A trickle of other deprivations of vestiarian nonconformists followed over the next few months. The first round had been won by the conformists, but at the cost of a good deal of bitterness.

Puritan hopes were raised again by the failed Northern Rebellion of 1569 and the queen's excommunication in 1570 (see above, pp. 247–8), which hardened the religious battle-lines. It was reasonable to hope that the regime would no longer be so respectful of Catholic sensibilities. In 1570 John Foxe produced a second, much expanded edition of his *Book of Martyrs*, amply supported from within the regime. Where the first edition had simply celebrated Elizabeth's accession, this one paid more attention to what was still undone. Earlier the same year, a young Cambridge theologian named Thomas Cartwright had laid out a manifesto for such reforms. He wanted to replace bishops with a network of elected synods, like the presbyteries that would later emerge in Scotland. Cartwright was driven from office (like his Scots counterpart Melville, he went to Geneva), but when Parliament met in 1571, Puritan hopes were high. The Parliament did indeed enact the Thirty-Nine Articles, but the queen was no more willing to accept radicalism from the Commons in 1571 than she had been from Convocation in 1563. Bills to revise the Prayer Book, and to reintroduce Cranmer's canon law reform, were killed in the Commons by the queen's order (and with much less difficulty than the Puritan articles had been defeated in Convocation). A second attempt to introduce such legislation in 1572 drew a direct rebuke from Elizabeth.

In disarray, Puritans responded in two different ways. Those closest to power bided their time, and resolved in future to persuade and petition their touchy queen rather than peremptorily to demand reform. Foremost among these was Grindal, who in 1570 was made archbishop of York. Less politic and less patient souls chose instead to let off some steam. In 1572 a polemical *Admonition to the Parliament* was printed, the work of two ministers named John Field and Thomas Wilcox. This bitter and immoderate text, which promptly landed its authors in prison, denounced the English Church as still mired in popery. Instead of a Church in which priests of little learning and less godliness parroted the words of the Prayer Book and Homilies, these Puritans wanted a Reformation fired by preaching and built on

discipline. The manner of their protest pushed their cause further from political respectability than ever.

Still the more moderate Puritans could hope. Archbishop Parker, in poor health and ever more withdrawn into his antiquarian studies, died in 1575. On Cecil's urging, Grindal was appointed to succeed him. It looked like the Puritans' moment of opportunity. Instead, it was a disaster. Grindal and other 'advanced' bishops had been attempting to press forward the reformist cause in their dioceses through events which were known as 'prophesyings'. That term suggests – and may have suggested to Elizabeth – something spontaneous and chaotic, but it was and is misleading. Grindal preferred to call them 'exercises'. The name came from the *Prophezei* of the Church in Zürich, on which they were closely modelled. They were, in effect, sober master-classes on Biblical exegesis. Clergy from a wide area would gather in a particular church, to hear a few of their number (pre-selected by the bishop) debate the interpretation of a chosen Biblical text. It was, as Grindal explained, simply a university theology class held in the shires, in order to train clergy to be more effective preachers. Lay people might attend to hear this display of learning, but they were forbidden to take part. The practice had spread rapidly across England during the 1570s. To Grindal, and a majority of his fellow-bishops, it was a harmless, cost-free and effective way of building up the Church.

Elizabeth disagreed. Like her father, she feared that public theological debate would inevitably degenerate into idleness, innovation, lay preaching, quarrels, sedition and rebellion. There had indeed been disturbances at some prophesyings, or occasions on which unauthorised ministers had taken part. When she eventually overrode Grindal and ordered the prophesyings suppressed, she denounced them as 'unlawful assemblies of a great number of our people out of their ordinary parishes' for hearing 'new devised opinions'. She even described them as 'invasions',[cxxxv] for the fact that people were leaving their own parish churches to attend these events particularly alarmed conformists. Puritans' enthusiasm for

sermons regularly led them to travel to hear preachers outside their own parishes. Conformists mocked this as 'sermon-gadding', and feared it as a sign of destabilising and divisive enthusiasm.

Like the vestiarian controversy a decade earlier, the prophesyings were symbolic of a wider cultural divide. This time, Grindal and his Puritan brethren were in no mood to compromise. Rather, they deliberately blew up the prophesyings issue into a full-scale crisis, and tried to use the dangerous international situation to their advantage. The prophesyings were presented as a means not only of building a godly Church but also of stamping out the twin perils of popery and sectarianism. This argument produced, in 1577, the first systematic attempt to count the Catholic recusants in England – a hasty exercise which resulted in only some 1500 of the usual suspects being named, but a harbinger of more systematic efforts to come. The 400-fold increase in recusancy fines in 1581 (see above, p. 248) arose from the same mood. Mirroring this was a sudden assault on a tiny, enigmatic sect known as the Family of Love. The name suggests something profoundly sinister, but they were merely a reclusive group of mystics, originating from the Netherlands but with a presence in Cambridgeshire and some other parts of England. Their secretive practices did cause genuine alarm; and since they conformed outwardly to the established Church, the scale of the sect was unknowable and alarmist assessments of its size impossible to refute. But the anti-Familist panic of 1577–81 was not a sober response to a real threat.[cxxxvi] Rather, it was a replay of the anti-Anabaptist panic of Edward VI's reign (see above, pp. 163–4): conjuring up a largely imaginary sectarian threat in order to bolster the respectability of the Protestant establishment. This time at least, it did not work. Anti-Familist books and sermons were published and preached, some suspected Familists were arrested, and anti-Familist legislation was tabled. But the legislation died in Parliament, and political Puritanism did not see any tangible benefits from its scaremongering.

For despite all this sound and fury, the queen would not yield an inch on the Puritans' substantive demands. In 1577, Archbishop Grindal wrote her a careful but steely letter laying out his own position. With all possible care and humility, he flatly refused to obey Elizabeth's order to suppress the prophesyings. 'Bear with me, I beseech you, Madam, if I choose rather to offend your earthly majesty, than to offend the heavenly majesty of God.' He told her to leave religious matters to theologians, and not to 'pronounce so resolutely and peremptorily' on them, as if she were the pope.[cxxxvii] It was, quite consciously, an act of political self-martyrdom. The result of this defiance was six years' virtual house imprisonment at Lambeth Palace. The queen wanted to deprive him of office, too, but Grindal's many friends at court (not least Cecil) shielded him from the worst consequences of her wrath. During the febrile years of the Anjou match (see above, pp. 234–5), he remained both a prisoner and an archbishop. He was on occasion able to exercise some small influence, and by his simple survival in office he prevented the primacy of England from falling into other hands. But the moderate Puritans' hopes had been cruelly exposed.

The resurgence of conformity

For some time before Grindal finally died in 1583, it was plain who his successor would be. By the early 1580s Elizabeth's religious policy was in the hands of two trusted advisers, and – increasingly – a third, younger man who was their protégé. The duo were the lawyer Sir Christopher Hatton, a confidant of the queen who was widely rumoured to be a crypto-Catholic (and who may not even have been crypto-); and John Whitgift, a Cambridge cleric who had first come to prominence when he wrote a reply to the *Admonition to the Parliament*. Whitgift was made bishop of Worcester in 1577, and in 1583 he succeeded to Canterbury almost as of right. The third man was Hatton's chaplain Richard Bancroft,

another Cambridge man, who had already acquired some experience as an episcopal enforcer. When Whitgift eventually died in 1604, it was Bancroft who succeeded him as archbishop. Hatton, Whitgift and Bancroft formed the core of a powerful conformist Protestant phalanx. Hatton's own religious loyalties may have been ambiguous, but Whitgift's were plain: he was an orthodox Reformed Protestant who saw the doctrine of predestination as non-negotiable. However, their doctrinal views mattered less than their (and Elizabeth's) agreement on the urgency of uniformity and good order.

These new conformists were not simply fighting a rearguard action, and their defence of the Elizabethan settlement was driven by more than simple fear of change. While Archbishop Parker had been a uniting figure who shared many aspirations with his Puritan brethren, Whitgift viewed diversity and debate as simple evils. He was as ready as his queen to see Puritanism as presumptuous and seditious, defying divinely ordained authority in the name of impertinent conscience. As such, he took the battle to the Puritan enemy.

Shortly after taking office, Whitgift ordered all clergy (private chaplains and civic preachers as well as parish clergy) to subscribe to articles affirming that the Prayer Book did not contradict the Bible. A substantial group – as many as 400 – refused. Whitgift promptly suspended them from office. The resulting outcry forced the novice archbishop to back down, only to adopt a more subtle method. A series of questions were put to non-compliant clerics, with the intent of separating out the more dangerous radicals. What made this controversial was that the court overseeing the process – the High Commission, created originally to root out Catholics – could compel clerics to answer the questions and so to incriminate themselves, via a device known as the *ex officio* oath. Refusal was an imprisonable offence. Warning shots had been fired at the Puritans before, but this was a full-scale assault.

Partly in response, a new set of informal Puritan networks started to appear: the bodies known as *classes* (singular *classis*), a name borrowed from an ancient Roman unit of

administration. It was a pretentious name for informal gatherings of the godly, but that pretentiousness reflected some Puritans' hopes that the *classes* would evolve into full-blown presbyteries. The recent development in Scotland, where the 'model' presbyteries established unilaterally in 1581 had begun to spread across the country, was an inspiring one. In England, however, it could not simply be done unilaterally. The Scots had been filling a vacuum of governance in their Church; English Puritans enduing Whitgift's onslaught could only wish for such a thing. Instead, coordinated through the *classes*, they readied themselves for another parliamentary battle. Puritans were now actively trying to be elected to the House of Commons, and in 1584 and 1586 unprecedented numbers of them were.

Once there, however, what could they do? Petitions to the queen were ignored. Detailed bills proposing Presbyterian systems of Church government were introduced in the Commons in 1584 and 1587. Hatton, acting as the queen's parliamentary manager, ensured that the bills were killed stone dead. A few outspoken MPs were given a taste of imprisonment, parliamentary privilege notwithstanding. Meanwhile, their tormentor Archbishop Whitgift was raised to the Privy Council in 1586 – the first Elizabethan bishop to be so promoted. The Presbyterian agitation succeeded only in provoking a newly forthright defence of episcopacy, led by Richard Bancroft. Instead of seeing bishops merely as an expedient means of governing the Church, Bancroft and others began to argue that the office of bishop was instituted by God's law (*de jure divino*). For those in power, trying to control unruly Puritanism, episcopacy seemed the only guarantor of the Church's unity. For those outside, it seemed simply that episcopacy corrupted, and that *de jure divino* episcopacy corrupted absolutely.

In 1588, Puritan frustration boiled over. Tired of banging their heads against the queen's stony immovability, a group of conspirators decided to play the game of popular politics and to attack the bishops from below. This group organised the clandestine writing, printing and

distribution of a series of scabrous pamphlets under the pen-name Martin Marprelate, or Mar-Prelate. The identity of the real author, or authors, has never been proved. The outspoken MP Job Throckmorton remains the likeliest candidate, although in truth 'Martin' was a collective rather than a single individual. The question matters because these tracts do not read like the work of a committee. The seven surviving tracts, printed between October 1588 and September 1589, attacked the bishops with vicious directness. They were self-consciously nimble, in contrast to their theologically ponderous opponents: one vast tome proclaiming the dignity of episcopacy was 'a portable booke, if your horse be not too weake'. And they stand out even by the vitriolic standards of sixteenth-century print. 'Martin', the 'primate and metropolitan of all the Martins in England', mocked the bishops mercilessly for their lordliness, self-importance and perceived hypocrisy, explicitly intending to smash their moral authority so that presbyteries could fill the vacuum. So the bishops were mere popelings, and Whitgift the 'Pope of Lambeth'. Indeed, 'friars and monks were not so bad; they lived in the dark, [but] you shut your eyes, lest you should see the light.'[cxxxviii] As the presses were spirited from one safe house to another before the fury of Whitgift's and Bancroft's searchers, 'Martin' taunted his pursuers. He also aimed some barbs at the Puritan establishment, whose quiet reasonableness had betrayed the cause. He rightly diagnosed that establishment's fury at his unruly intervention.

For the tracts of 'Martin' mark the point when political Puritanism was finally discredited. Bancroft now had all the excuses he needed to pursue Puritans as seditious, and in 1589–90 he proceeded to roll up their networks. The regime had already shown itself willingn to shed radical Protestant blood. Two Dutch Anabaptists had been burned for heresy in 1575, despite John Foxe's pleas; more ominously, two Puritan separatists who were calling for withdrawal from the national Church were hanged in 1583, a case in which Bancroft had been personally involved. Now more mainstream Puritans were in the regime's sights. In

1593, one of the ringleaders of the Marprelate conspiracy – a young polemicist named John Penry – was hanged for sedition. Two leaders of underground separatist congregations were executed in the same year, under legislation which had been aimed at Catholics.

In the event, however, the regime found it did not need to make many martyrs. The Martin Marprelate episode was the first of a series of disreputable incidents which helped to take the fight out of mainstream Puritanism. In 1591, a deranged visionary named William Hacket was proclaimed as Messiah by two London Puritans, who for good measure also announced Elizabeth's deposition. He was promptly executed, but he had a long afterlife as a useful bogeyman for conformists to deploy against Puritans. Bancroft, in particular, found wild-eyed Puritan radicals invaluable in his ongoing attempts to discredit the movement. When he became bishop of London in 1597, his chaplain Samuel Harsnett (later archbishop of York) became his enforcer, and was instrumental in exposing a Nottinghamshire Puritan named John Darrell who had built up a thriving business as an exorcist. Darrell was, for Bancroft and his allies, the perfect Puritan: enthusiastic, theologically shaky, and (so Harsnett proved to his own satisfaction) a deliberate fraud. Exorcism was hardly a mainstream Puritan activity, and the episode probably says more about the place of magic in wider English society (see below, pp. 280–2) than it does about Puritanism. But it also helps to explain why it was the prelates who marred the Puritans, not the other way around.

Building Puritanism in the parishes

Puritanism's political ambitions were comprehensively defeated in the late 1580s and were to remain subdued for two generations. But in one sense, these national battles were a distraction. Freedom from traditional vestments, prophesyings, even presbyteries – these were, for most Puritans, means to an end. That end, the real Puritan ambition, was to establish

a universal godly preaching ministry, proclaiming the true Word and imposing true discipline on the people. The irony of Elizabethan Puritanism is that while it decisively lost its proxy and symbolic battles, it won some real victories in the quieter but more important battle for the soul of England.

The most unambiguous Puritan defeat was the failure to reform the English Church's polity in any way. English Puritans could only envy the independence from state control, and the pervasive system of discipline, which the Scots enjoyed and endured. Discipline in the English Church was left to the cumbersome and traditional Church courts, whose remit was strictly limited. And bishops remained mitred and rocheted lords of the realm, consecrated to their office and set above their brethren. Yet even here, continuity of form belied a change of substance. Elizabethan bishops were very different animals from their medieval or Henrician predecessors. The prince-bishops and politician-bishops who had attracted so much medieval anticlerical scorn were gone. There were no more Wolseys. Until Whitgift's appointment in 1586, Elizabeth did not even place bishops on her council. She appointed laymen as her Lord Chancellors, a break with ancient custom. She also followed her father's and brother's example by steadily plundering the lands of her bishops. That plunder was hardly driven by reforming ideals, but its effect was to change the nature of episcopacy. Almost all of the bishops lost their London houses, compelling the somewhat impoverished prelates to reside in their dioceses. By medieval standards this was something of a novelty, but most Elizabethan bishops did this willingly. They were, on the whole, conscientious Protestants who were serious about their responsibilities for building the Church in the parishes.

This, indeed, is the real English Reformation, beneath all the political sound and fury. The political changes were an essential prerequisite for change, but from a clergyman's point of view (if not from a politician's) they were merely that. For Protestant believers, Puritan and conformist alike, the ultimate aim of the Reformation was not removing papal jurisdiction,

reforming the liturgy or refining the Church of England's official doctrines. All of these things were means to a greater end, that of bringing the pure Gospel to England's people, that souls might be saved and that God might be honoured. Ultimately, the battles of the English Reformation were won and lost not in set-piece political and theological confrontations, but parish by parish and soul by soul, in a myriad quiet battles and crises which are almost entirely hidden from us. What is clear is that, during Elizabeth's long reign, the steady, unspectacular spread of Protestant ministry and Protestant allegiance amounted to a gradual but decisive tectonic shift.

The great Puritan causes of the reign were all ultimately driven by their fear that the preaching of the Gospel was being stifled. Vestments compromised the new message; prophesyings trained preachers. Yet despite their repeated defeats, the work in the parishes crept forward. Obstructive and traditionalist clergy were slowly driven to the margins; some 300 were deprived of office during the 1560s. A newly educated generation of ministers began to fill their places. The Elizabethan bishops' systematic enforcement of long-established and long-flouted rules helped here: minimum ages for ordination, and the prohibition on holding several benefices simultaneously, began to mean something. A concerted push for better clerical education made itself felt too. The universities, the cradle of Protestantism, now became redoubts of Puritan theology – especially Cambridge, and especially the energetic new college there, Emmanuel College, founded in 1584 explicitly as a Puritan seminary. As committed Protestants were slowly pumped into the bloodstream of the English Church, the preaching ministry for which the Puritans had yearned began to become a reality – slowly, far more slowly than they wished, but relentlessly.

This was a project around which the entire Church could unite. Archbishop Whitgift would brook no challenges to the Church's discipline or authority, but he also took its ministry very seriously. He was particularly concerned by the surviving rump of clergy who

were neither graduates nor preachers. He made serious attempts to train those non-graduate clergy who were already in post, promoting the use of the official Homilies and of catechisms. He ordered non-preaching clergy to acquire the Zürich reformer Heinrich Bullinger's daunting sermon cycle, the *Decades*, and to study one of its sermons each week. If Zürich-style prophesyings were being suppressed, Zürich's theology was being aggressively promoted. Even the suppression of the prophesyings was misleading. In their place sprung up 'combination lectures'. These were formal or informal arrangements for pulpit exchanges whereby parishes without a preaching minister had reasonably regular access to sermons, and whereby more sermon-heavy parishes could hear voices other than their own minister's. Although lacking the discursive (and divisive) potential of the prophesyings, combination lectures served many of the same purposes, and they were often organised by the *classes* which had emerged in the 1580s. We know of at least eighty-five such arrangements erected across England.[cxxxix] Where that was not possible, there were alternatives. In towns, often already well-provided with preaching, town councils often took it on themselves to appoint a 'lecturer' or preacher who was a civic employee rather than an ecclesiastical benefice-holder. In the large upland benefices of the North of England, chronically under-ministered, local communities likewise began to raise rates and subscriptions to employ ministers and to repair and enhance their chapels of ease.

So when Puritans retreated from politics towards a more pastoral and parish-centred focus in the 1590s, it was not simply a bloodied withdrawal. It was a turn towards a battle which they had always held was more important, and which they were already winning. The great Puritan publishing success of the 1590s was William Perkins, one of the very few English writers of the century to be widely read outside his own country. For Perkins, the reformation of liturgy and practice took second place to the reformation of the individual conscience. His theological achievement was to apply the forbidding Calvinist doctrine of predestination to

the individual believer's life. That doctrine can lead believers into either despair or conceit; Perkins successfully steered between those two rocks, affirming predestination in the strongest terms while also mapping out how Christians may live (and draw strength from) lives of the highest moral seriousness. His posthumous *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience* became a classic of Protestant devotion. And it had nothing to do with politics.

Others had been treading this path for decades. Richard Greenham was a Cambridge-educated minister who, in 1570, became parson of a small Cambridgeshire village called Dry Drayton. If Greenham was a Puritan at all, he was one of a different stripe, and in Dry Drayton he created a hugely influential model of what godly parish ministry might be. Where men like Sampson sought conflict, Greenham tried to avoid it. His bishop, Richard Cox, had as a Marian exile been a rigorous defender of the Prayer Book (see above, pp. 191–2), but now faced with Greenham's conscientious refusal to wear the prescribed vestments, he turned a blind eye. He was not the only moderate bishop to recognise that he could not afford to lose a hardworking, able, non-confrontational and stoutly anti-Catholic pastor over a technicality. For Greenham's energies went not into political or theological controversy but into pastoral care, and a stream of students from nearby Cambridge came to spend a few weeks or months living with him, learning their trade from an acknowledged master and carefully writing down his pearls of wisdom.

The pattern of ministry which Greenham pioneered, and which spread out across the country with his disciples from the 1580s onwards, began but did not end with preaching. His sermons were not arid or academic affairs, for all his learning: he preached with such passion that his shirt was soaked with sweat, and communicated that passion to his hearers, once provoking a woman to interrupt him by wailing aloud for her damnable sins. Such animated, theatrical performances were again typical of Puritan preachers, who were skilled at their art and who knew that dry, understated monotony gave no honour to God. Greenham's

innovation, however, was systematically to bring his message to his people. He would walk out into the fields to talk with his neighbours as they were ploughing. He regularly visited every house in the parish in order to instruct the families (a manageable proposition in a parish of only thirty households). Such one-to-one instruction began with the use of question-and-answer catechisms, but moved on to intensely personal spiritual counselling. Helping believers to apply the doctrine of predestination to their lives, and dealing with the crises of conscience that resulted, was a dominant theme for Greenham, as later for Perkins. Yet his ministry was not solely concerned with matters of high theology. He apparently acted as a kind of informal, one-man kirk session, resolving disputes and quarrels amongst his flock (none of whom took one another to law during the whole course of his ministry in Dry Drayton). His recorded spiritual counsel was also practical and down-to-earth, believing, for example, that a sensible diet was more useful than heroic self-denial for keeping the temptation at bay.

What effect did such painstaking pastoring have? Greenham himself had no great opinion of his achievements at Dry Drayton, claiming that there was 'no good wrought by my ministry on any but one family'.[cxl] This was too modest. As well as keeping his parishioners out of court, he left one striking record of his work: the names of the babies he baptised. Early modern English people shared a very small pool of Christian names – in the late sixteenth century, more than half of all boys baptised were called William, Thomas or John, and more than half of all girls Elizabeth, Mary or Anne. This was partly because children were traditionally named after one of their godparents, a system which prevented innovation (and sometimes led to identically named siblings). But Puritans, who were uneasy both about godparents and about the use of non-Biblical saints' names, began to give their children new names. Some were Biblical names, in particular from the Old Testament. In Dry Drayton, Greenham baptised children named Daniel, Samuel, Nathaniel, Sarah, Rebecca, Joshua,

Moses and Bathsheba – all names which would have sounded alien on English tongues, yet which he evidently persuaded some of his parishioners to adopt. Other Puritans favoured 'grace' names, which turned a baby's name into a one-word sermon: children were named Charity, Grace, Delivery, Tribulation, Ashes, even Wrestling or Preserved. The appearance of a scattering of such new names, solemnly recorded in baptismal registers across the country, is a sign of the insensible spread of Puritan influence.

However, Greenham's self-deprecating comment draws our attention to a point of wider importance. Puritans of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were consistently gloomy about their impact on the realm. The standards which they expected from their neighbours (and from themselves) were impossibly high. They regularly assumed that the mass of the people – at all levels of society – were slaves to sin, godless and ignorant; and many Puritan clergy readily told their congregations so. The doctrine of predestination, read through a theology which saw the Church as a covenanted people like ancient Israel, made it natural to assume that the English were divided into a godless majority and a small, godly 'remnant'. God would preserve that remnant, but they had realistically to expect to see most of their neighbours damned.

This sense of an unequally divided nation is central to Puritanism. This was a subculture, with its own shared jargon, habits of mind and preoccupations. One historian calls it a 'spiritual freemasonry'.[cxli] Its self-conscious separateness is a fact of some importance, but it means that we should not take Puritans' estimates of their numerical success or failure at face value. It is true that only a minority of English people were zealous, godly Puritans. However, the wider culture of Puritanism had a much greater impact than many Puritans were inclined to admit. The historian Alexandra Walsham has examined the pivotal Protestant doctrine of providence, which insists both that God is sovereign over all earthly affairs and (therefore) that God's will and purposes can be deduced from worldly events.

Walsham's work has demonstrated that the providentialist worldview – so characteristic of Puritanism – was in fact pervasive in English thought by the end of Elizabeth's reign, on the stage and in the gutter press as well as in the pulpit. Neither Puritans nor anti-Puritans liked to admit how mainstream Puritan thought had become, but this conspiracy of silence should not blind us to the fact that, as Walsham puts it, 'zealous Protestantism could . . . be a popular religion'.[cxlii] Puritanism did not take over English culture wholesale, but it did crossbreed with that culture. The process produced some intriguing hybrids.

One notorious example of this crossbreeding is in the field of the supernatural. Medieval Christians, in England as elsewhere, had believed in the existence of witches: that is, of individuals who had access to supernatural powers which they could use to help or to harm their neighbours. Suspected witches were usually (not always) female, and usually (not always) marginal, peculiar or unsettling people. They were regarded with fear, enmity and a measure of respect by the population at large. They were very occasionally prosecuted in the Church courts, but neither Church nor state usually paid them much attention. With the Reformation, this changed. In 1542, Henry VIII made certain kinds of magical acts criminal offences for the first time, although like most of his other penal legislation the law was repealed in 1547. A new Witchcraft Act was introduced in 1563, following which England had its own nasty little witch-hunt. Our sources for this are very incomplete, especially outside the south-east of England; but we know that there was a spate of witchcraft trials in Elizabethan Essex, in which over fifty suspects were hanged (and nearly five times as many tried). The proportions were the same, but the numbers much smaller, in other south-eastern counties. Prosecutions peaked in the 1580s and tailed off sharply in the new century. This pattern roughly parallels a wider surge in witch-hunting across much of Europe, although the English witch-hunt was relatively subdued: the numbers were small, due process of law was (more or less) followed, and there were no mass panics as occasionally took place in France,

central Europe or Scotland. The episode is gruesomely fascinating and continues to be mysterious.

Most Puritans had a clear view of the matter. Magic or witchcraft were either popery or devil-worship, and should be punished as such. They firmly rejected the use of any countermagic or defensive rituals. But, with a little Biblical backing, they did approve of using the law against magicians of all kinds. The 1563 Act was strongly informed by Protestant loathing of magic, but for many Puritans it was not nearly aggressive enough. Others, however, became uncomfortable with the way the laws were being enforced. Reginald Scot, a Kentish magistrate who may have had ties to the Family of Love, argued in a 1584 tract that witchcraft did not exist and that the panic was itself a popish superstition; however, he was an exceptional and isolated figure. More significant, perhaps, is the Essex minister George Gifford. Gifford's Puritan credentials were excellent (he was suspended for non-subscription by Archbishop Whitgift), but he was uneasy about witch-hunting. The Devil's real instruments, Gifford argued in a 1593 book, were not the desperate old women who were being hanged so regularly in his home county. Rather, they were the white witches and cunning-men who provided magical services to the paying public, for it was they who actually lured good Christians into trafficking with the Devil.

Yet while Puritans consistently argued that white magic and black magic, learned magic and ignorant magic, were all equally diabolical, the wider population heard the message selectively. Puritan strictures helped to legitimise the long-held antipathy towards witchcraft, and they provided a legal route by which 'witches' could be hunted. They did not succeed in turning the population against white magic, nor in discrediting learned magic. Indeed, for all their fulminations, many Protestants were themselves powerfully attracted by ideas which we would now call magical, but which at the time seemed to be at the cutting edge of learning. We cannot simply blame Puritanism, or even Protestantism, for the English witch trials:

across Europe, Catholics hunted witches just as enthusiastically as Protestants. We can, however, see this as an example of the acculturation of Puritanism, in which a wider society took the Puritan ideas which it liked and used them for its own ends, while ignoring those that were less congenial. Does this show the limits of Puritanism's achievements, or the extent of its success?

One last, unambiguous Puritan victory deserves to be noted. Throughout the 1540s and 1550s, the most commonly available English Bible was the 1539 'Great Bible' (so called because of its physical size). Everyone agreed that the translation was unsatisfactory, but its replacement was contentious. During Mary's reign, the exiles in Geneva knuckled down to preparing a new English translation, which was eventually published in Geneva in 1560. This 'Geneva Bible' was not popular with the new regime. Quite apart from the association with Geneva (never a recommendation in Elizabeth's eyes), the text bristled with marginal notes and annotations which consistently gave an aggressively Protestant slant. No English publisher picked it up, and copies of the Great Bible continued to be produced in London. There was no second edition of the Geneva Bible even in Geneva until 1569. Meanwhile, the regime prepared its own revised version, the so-called 'Bishops' Bible', first published in 1568: this tidied up the Great Bible's translations but did not provide any provocative marginalia. Backed by Archbishop Parker, it rapidly established itself. The Geneva Bible appeared to have sunk like a stone. The reversal of these fortunes was the greatest legacy of Edmund Grindal's primacy. Even before he was translated to Canterbury in 1575, he was promoting the Geneva Bible. The first edition printed in England appeared in 1576. There was another in each of the next two years, four editions in 1579, and twenty-one during the 1580s. It was the authorised Bishops' Bible that fell out of popular use. The Geneva text, its annotations so ready to guide ministers in their preaching and the pious laity in their reading, became the people's Bible. It appeared in every format, for the pocket or for the lectern: a

symbol of Puritan ambitions, worming its way relentlessly into private homes and into the verbal landscape of England. It was Shakespeare's Bible, although whatever else Shakespeare was, he was no Puritan. Elizabeth's successor James I tried to fight back with a new, 'Authorised' version in 1611, but that took fifty years to win general acceptance. The Geneva Bible is a symbol of how by 1600 England was, despite itself, permeated by the culture of Puritanism.

Popular religion in Elizabethan England: a group portrait

The questions which we would most like to ask about Elizabethan religion have no answers, and indeed can scarcely be formulated. We have no opinion-poll data, despite some ingenious attempts to conjure it into existence from a range of sources. We might wish to know what the religion of the 'average' English person was, but no such person existed. Nor was a hierarchical age terribly interested in such crudely quantitative questions.

We can make a few sensible generalisations about the changes which those 'average' people saw in their parishes. In the place of Catholic priests, there slowly came to be Protestant ministers. Although in theory the spiritual equals of their flocks, these ministers were as formidably set apart by their learning as their Catholic predecessors had been by their sacramental power. They also took their office and their authority every bit as seriously as those predecessors. However, there were many fewer of them. The number of clergy in England fell by more than half between 1500 and 1600, despite the rising population. A Church of Word rather than sacrament, and one which had rejected the monastic life, had less need of numbers, nor – following the Henrician and Edwardian plunder – could it afford them. If there were fewer clergy in each parish, however, a new figure appeared who in some measure replaced them: the minister's wife, a wholly new creature in English society, and

one who was expected actively to model godly family life for the parish. The church buildings themselves changed, too. They became much more like our modern image of a medieval church (see above, pp. 13–14): the walls whitewashed or reduced to bare stone, fixed seating becoming increasingly common, the chaotic kaleidoscope of saints, images and altars gone. Pipe organs, too, were sometimes removed or allowed to fall into disuse. In some places, church buildings themselves fell into disrepair: a visible consequence of the huge transfer of wealth from the Church to the landed elite. That was not, however, mere plunder. For every rapacious landlord exacting tithes he had purchased, there were others who took their responsibilities to the parishes seriously, maintaining, refitting and even extending churches, using longstanding patterns of social obligation to accustom their people to the new religious world into which they had all been swept.[cxliii]

Such generalities, however, miss the most striking feature of Elizabethan religion: its entirely unprecedented diversity. There was no longer, if there had ever been, an average English Christian, but a shifting crowd of them, always reshuffling, with groups forming and breaking up, sometimes quarreling and – more unnervingly – sometimes simply coexisting.

The outlying characters, standing self-consciously apart from the main group, are the easiest to identify. There is a small band of Catholic recusants. There are the sectarians, tiny groups such as the Family of Love. There is a slightly larger number of Protestant separatists: congregations of embittered Puritans, mostly in London or in the safety of English mercantile communities abroad, whose disillusion with the compromises of the established Church had provoked them into organising their own worshipping life. Such groups appeared as early as 1567, but they always remained marginal. The bishops fretted about 'Brownists' (named sweepingly for Robert Browne, a mercurial separatist of the 1580s), but the threat was more potential than real. For most Puritans, the aspiration to establish a universal godly Church, and the obligation not openly to defy the queen's proceedings, ensured that they would not

venture into schism. Some found refuge in the Protestant Church of Ireland, which by the 1590s was both an established Church and a Puritan-friendly minority sect (see below, p. 16). Yet the great majority of English Puritans stood ostentatiously apart from the separatists and sectarians. At the other end of the crowd, the lines were less clearly drawn. The Catholic recusants brushed shoulders with the 'church papists' (see above, p. 246): very often both would be found in a single family. And the 'church papists' shade insensibly into the rest of the group.

What of the rest: the silent centre of the Elizabethan Church? Conformity was what the queen demanded of these people, and conformity is what she received. With what mixture of enthusiasm, distaste or bewilderment that conformity was given, we cannot truly know. Yet a few things can usefully be discerned, or guessed, about these men and women.

First, as the reign wore on, popular Protestantism became increasingly real. The impact of Puritan preaching and pastoring was considerable – even if it did not produce doctrinaire Puritans. The bishops' efforts also had some real effect, not least in the education and vetting of clergy. So too did the regime's official instruments of reform, much as Puritans derided them. The official Homilies were a crude tool of reformation, but not a ridiculous one. Clergy not licensed to preach were supposed to read through the two volumes of the Homilies in a continuous cycle. As we might expect, many clergy and people found this tedious after the second or third iteration, but there were other resources available to fill the gap. Several other approved books were to be found in many parish churches. All parishes were supposed to own Erasmus' expansive *Paraphrase* of the New Testament (in an evangelically slanted English translation). Bishop Jewel's *Apology or Answer in Defence of the Church of England*, Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* and – from the 1580s – Heinrich Bullinger's *Decades* were also widely available in churches or parsonages, to say nothing of the Geneva Bible, with its arsenal of marginal comment. Non-preaching clergy who grew weary of the Homilies seem

sometimes to have read to their parishioners from these other texts.

Secondly, if positive Protestantism remains difficult to diagnose with certainty, the same is not true of anti-Catholicism. By the 1570s, this had spread from being a preachers' and politicians' preoccupation to being a widespread popular force. Forty years of anti-papal rhetoric, a xenophobic nationalism, and – after 1570 – genuine outrage against the queen's excommunication and what it meant: all these things helped to make hatred of papists and of popery seem the natural stance for any self-respecting Englishman. The approach of war in the 1580s only sharpened this. In retrospect, the regime's fears of a Catholic 'fifth column' in that war seem excessive. Recent research has shown how far local communities rallied to the cause during the Armada campaign, often putting themselves to considerable expense in defence of queen, Church and country against the Spanish.[cxliv] Importantly, this anti-Catholicism was typically directed at foreign Catholics rather than at local recusants. Respectable Catholic families who were known to be apolitical usually had little to fear from the zeal of their neighbours.

Thirdly, anti-Catholicism was matched by widespread anti-Puritanism. The extent of this is difficult to gauge, since (as with medieval anticlericalism) so much of the evidence is literary. At the very least, however, Puritans were immensely tempting butts for jokes. Sober, earnest, sometimes self-righteous, relentless in their pursuit of godly lives for themselves, noisy in their advocacy of such lives for others – it would have been remarkable if such people were not mocked. And the vision of comprehensive discipline, Scottish-style, which so appealed to Puritans, appalled their more easygoing neighbours in equal measure. Hypocrisy was the easiest and the commonest accusation. Shakespeare was not above the occasional satirical swipe at Puritans, but the sentiment can be found at every level of society. In the 1590s, an obscure Cheshire gentleman wrote an anti-Puritan diatribe which could stand for many. He reviled them as hypocrites, gluttons and troublers of the commonwealth, and as

prigs devoid of any real charity. He wished all Puritans might be ducked in the river Mersey, 'to the end they may be replenished with more drops of mercy'. He mocked their style of preaching: 'it is not beating of the breast, flinging of the arms, swaggering in the pulpit, or turning up the white of the eye, but sound doctrine plainly pronounced that edifieth the people of God.' And as that last sentiment suggests, this author was insistent that he was a good Protestant, and no papist – indeed, a 'plain Protestant' as against a 'precise Puritan'. But he admitted, 'I know few papists that are bad, and not one Puritan that is good.'[cxlv] Of course, this is nonsense. We have ample evidence that there were Puritan clergy and laity of heroic virtues and immense pastoral sensitivity. But there was certainly hypocrisy too, and those who find excessive virtue discomforting would naturally prefer to latch onto that. By the end of Elizabeth's reign, this was a common stance: a religion defined by being balanced between two hatreds. Such a religion was, of course, quite capable of being shaped – even shaped decisively – by the influence of the extremes which it rejected. Being or believing yourself to be 'moderate' does not mean that you are neutral, still less that you are disengaged.

For Puritans, such people were dismissed as 'carnal Protestants' who, for all their outward conformity to the established church, remained unreformed. They were mocked as half-papists, half-pagans. Here is how one Puritan, Arthur Dent, ventriloquised such people's religion in 1601:

If a man say his Lord's prayer, his Ten Commandements, and his Belief [the Creed], and keep them ... no doubt he shall be saved, without all this running to Sermons, and prattling of the Scripture. ... As long as I serve God, and say my prayers duly, and truely, morning and evening, and have a good faith in God ... I hope it will serve the turn for my soul's health.[cxlvi]

The Essex Puritan George Gifford agreed that when such people were firmly told that

running to sermons was essential, they demurred, saying:

I think there is as good edifying in those prayers [in the Prayer Book] ... as in any that the Preacher can make. ... You would have [Christians] sit moping always at their books; I like not that.^{cxlvii}

The name that Gifford gave to this caricatured carnal Protestant was 'Atheos'. It was a widely shared view: that in truth, such people simply had no religion, like the Biblical fool who says in his heart that there is no God. And perhaps it was true. When a man from Essex told an ecclesiastical court in 1583 'that it made no matter whether he were a Jew or a Christian, seeing that he do well', was he expressing a commonsense traditional morality, a contempt for all religion, or both?^{cxlviii} Those who voiced such opinions, along with the common blasphemers and scoffers from whom they are often indistinguishable (see above, p. 23), were liable to be accused of 'atheism', a newly-minted word (first recorded in 1561) which quickly became very widely used. Yet there were no atheists in the modern sense in Elizabethan England. The intellectual building blocks of a coherent atheist worldview were simply not available. Elizabethan 'atheism', if we can speak of it, was functional rather than philosophical. An 'atheist' was one who lived as if there were no God, regardless of whatever beliefs he or she might formally profess. Hence the Catholic accusation that the Elizabethan regime was 'atheistic' (see above, p. 252). It was a slander, but this much was true. The religious turmoil of the age, and the queen's reluctance to demand more than conformity from her subjects, created an unprecedented space for withdrawal from religious engagement. Such withdrawal is, by nature, invisible and unquantifiable. A few public figures in Elizabethan England had reputations for atheism, giving their names a whiff of brimstone which helped to cement their fame: the conjurer and philosopher John Dee, or the playwright

Christopher Marlowe. But more significant are the unknown masses of those who had learned scepticism rather than renewed belief from the Reformation controversies: who sat quietly in church, who on their deaths bequeathed their souls to God in the most cursory terms and who in their lives found that they needed to pay little heed to Him.

But we should not be too quick to accept jaundiced pastors' verdict on their ungrateful people. For one thing, both Dent and Gifford suggest a widespread affection amongst the common people for the new set prayers and liturgy in English. It may be that some positive affection may have been amassing for the peculiar Elizabethan Church in general, and for the Book of Common Prayer in particular. The historian Judith Maltby, who has made this case most forcefully, argues that some of Elizabeth's subjects should be described as Prayer Book Protestants (in contrast to the Puritans' Bible-Protestantism).[cxlix] It is very plausible, although most of the evidence is indirect. We know that when the Elizabethan settlement was being dismantled during the early 1640s, the Prayer Book was defended with ardour by a surprisingly wide array of people. And we might expect that Cranmer's sonorous prose, whose quality only improves with repetition and which has inspired passionate affection from more recent generations, would have won the heart of sixteenth-century England. Unless, that is, the very durability of that affection is romanticising our view of the subject. At least, it is plain that the Prayer Book's language was bred in the bone of English-speakers from Elizabeth's reign onwards. Its literary fingerprints are everywhere.[cl] We can perhaps connect this to another mood we have already observed, of the widespread respect and nostalgia for a Reformation along Henry VIII's lines. Such people may have earnestly accepted their new identity as Protestants, but, as Puritan preachers worried, they paid much less attention to the rigours of Protestant theology than to older values of communal life and moral obligation. Loyalty to the new religious establishment may have reflected honest Prayer Book Protestantism as much as convenience or inertia. If our Cheshire gentleman did indeed have a

religion, this, perhaps, was it.

For Dent and Gifford, the distinction between atheist and prayer-book Protestant might hardly have seemed worth making, but we need to notice it, in part because prayer-book Protestantism could be a cloak for, or a path to, a more potent and dynamic set of possibilities. This began to appear in the later sixteenth century: or perhaps it had always been there, and was only now returning to public view. It was almost exclusively a clerical movement. It incubated at those traditional ecclesiastical institutions which had managed to survive the successive Tudor culls: the cathedrals, the college chapels of the two universities, and a scattering of idiosyncratic collegiate churches. In particular, it was connected to the strangest church in England, Westminster Abbey, which in Elizabeth's reign became what it has since remained – a cathedral with no bishop, a church with no parish, a free-floating liturgical entity answerable only to the crown. This clerical movement had two strands, theological and ceremonial. Theologically, these men moved on from favouring *de jure divino* episcopacy (see above, p. 274) to trying to reclaim some continuity between the pre- and post-Reformation Churches, and also to questioning the orthodox Calvinist doctrine of predestination. The ceremonial strand – which was the more important – emphasised dignified liturgical worship, traditional church music, and the sacraments, and sought to redress a perceived overemphasis on preaching.

Two names stand out among this group. Lancelot Andrewes was a preacher whose exceptional gifts were widely recognised, but who used the pulpit to advance some daringly novel (or daringly old-fashioned) views about worship. His views chimed with some of the ageing queen's aesthetic preferences, and she made him dean of Westminster in 1601. Under James I, he would become a bishop and, partly despite himself, the founding father of the Stuart ceremonial revival. The second figure received less notice at the time. Richard Hooker was briefly famous for a pulpit duel with the Puritan Walter Travers in 1586, in which he

maintained that the medieval Church was a true Christian Church which had erred, rather than a mockery of one enslaved to Antichrist. He spent the remainder of his life developing these ideas in his vast *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, unfinished and only half-published at his death in 1600. It was not much noticed to begin with, but Hooker's book provided a new level of theological underpinning for what Andrewes and others were doing, by thinking about the nature of the English Church in a new way. He not only presented the medieval Church and even the contemporary Catholic Church as entities of some spiritual worth, and emphasised the value of liturgy and the sacraments; he argued that his genuinely national Church was more truly Reformed than the Puritan theocracy, and presented what was in fact a highly hierarchical, even authoritarian view of religious politics as sweetly reasonable. Hooker was a prophet without honour in his own time. For the historian of the Elizabethan Church, he demonstrates the range of ideas which were conceivable and publishable for an idiosyncratic cleric, and, in particular, that the English Church's ceremonial vestiges were not doomed eventually to die of natural causes. In the end, however, he would eclipse Andrewes, Perkins and all his contemporaries in the Church of England's memory, and his huge book would become a foundation document for that strange religious phenomenon which emerged in the seventeenth century: Anglicanism.

Notes