The Liturgical Commemoration of the English Reformation, 1534-1625[1]

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The myth of the English Reformation, it has famously been said, is that it did not happen.[2] And indeed, the English Reformation has been forgotten at least as much as it has been remembered, sometimes due to ignorance but often due to deliberate acts of oblivion. This essay considers one of the most resounding silences of the English post-Reformation: how the Reformation was or, mostly, was not commemorated in the Church of England's liturgical life.

Medieval and early modern liturgies were display-cabinets for public memory. The cult of saints ensured that medieval liturgies commemorated more recent events as well as the core narrative of salvation history. Late medieval and early modern primers commonly included calendars which bristled with commemorative dates. Quite what these commemorations meant to the believers who celebrated them remains less clear, despite the recent boom in early modern memory studies.[4] But even if the dates in primers were no more than convenient marker-posts in time and curiosities for those who found themselves browsing in one of the less engrossing sections of their devotional books, their presence in the semi-sacred text bestowed authority on them.

Certainly, the English reformers were from the beginning alive to how this tradition could be adapted to their purposes. We only know of the English Reformation's protomartyr, Thomas Hitton, thanks to George Joye's decision to include him in the calendar of the first English Protestant primer, and to the outrage which this provoked in Thomas More.[5] The commemorative riches which the English Reformation might have offered to its people were most fully suggested in the first and fourth editions of John Foxe's *Actes and monuments*, which included full-scale calendars of 'saints', an initiative by his publisher John Day. The purpose of these calendars (aside from enraging Foxe's Catholic critics) has never been clear.

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[1] I am grateful to the editors and to Cyndia Clegg, Elizabeth Evenden-Kenyon and Celyn Richards for their assistance with this essay.

[2] Diarmaid MacCulloch, 'The Myth of the English Reformation' in *Journal of British Studies* 30/1 (1991), 1-19.

[4] Liturgy is strikingly absent from, for example, Judith Pollmann, *Memory in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Andy Wood, *The Memory of the People: Custom and Popular Senses of the Past in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[5] Thomas More, *The co[n]futacyon of Tyndales answere* (RSTC 18079. London: William Rastell, 1532), sig. Bb2r.

Day may have been trying to the book a para-liturgical feel, to help in sales to churches.[6] He may also have relished the contrast with the official liturgical texts his rivals printed, in which the Reformation's martyrs were not remembered. If English Protestants had surrounded themselves with this cloud of witnesses, the result would have been a strikingly different imagined popular history.

Instead, remarkably, England's principal post-Reformation liturgies neither invoked nor alluded to the Reformation. This despite the fact that each iteration of the Book of Common Prayer included a calendar. These were direct descendants of medieval calendars, found most commonly in primers of the kind that Joye had adapted, which had included comprehensive lists of the saints' days that might be observed across the land. The Henrician Reformation reigned in the number of days actually observed as feasts,[7] but this had no immediate effect on the exhaustive lists of saints' days published in primers during the 1530s and 1540s: only the now-unmentionable name of St Thomas Becket was removed. However, it was no longer entirely clear what purpose these lists served. When the regime finally produced an authorised English primer in 1545, it is no surprise that its calendar was drastically pruned: a step towards a simplified, Erasmian Biblical piety. The 1545 calendar excluded most medieval saints, while retaining Biblical figures, significant Church Fathers and, in particular, ancient martyrs: exemplary and authoritative figures whose life and doctrine ought to edify Christians, rather than saintly intercessors. It even added six commemorations not commonly found in earlier calendars: three for groups of ancient martyrs, plus the historian Eusebius, St John Chrysostom (early evangelicals' favourite Church Father) and, remarkably, an observation that 26 March was the anniversary of Christ's Resurrection.[8] This process of winnowing was completed in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer's calendar. Only the great red-letter feasts remained, plus saints' days for the apostles, John the Baptist, Mary Magdalene, Stephen and the archangel Michael, as well as

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[6] Elizabeth Evenden and Thomas S. Freeman, *Religion and the Book in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 126-7; Robert Persons, *A treatise of three conversions of England* (RSTC 19416. St Omer: F. Bellet, 1604), vols. 2 and 3. I am grateful to Dr Evenden and Dr Freeman for discussions on this point.

[7] Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 74.

[8] Compare *The primer, set foorth by the kynges maiestie and his clergie, to be taught lerned, & read* (RSTC 16034. London: Richard Grafton, 1545), sigs *2r-**3v with, for example, *The primer in English and Laten* (RSTC 16018. London: John Mayler, 1540), sigs A2r-A7v or *The primer in English and Laten* (RSTC 16026. London: Richard Grafton for W. Bonham, 1542), sigs A2r-A5r.

the Holy Innocents. The natural next step would have been to end dated commemorations altogether.

And yet, although in every other respect the 1552 edition of the Prayer Book was more Reformed than its predecessor, its calendar stepped back. Along with some astronomical milestones, St George, St Laurence and St Clement were readmitted to the calendar, as was Lammas Day (although Mary Magdalene was dropped). The 1559 Prayer Book retained this list unchanged, in some early cases apparently even reusing leftover sheets printed for the 1552 edition, or in some cases omitting the calendar entirely. And then, in a 1562 edition of the Prayer Book, the calendar was dramatically repopulated. Fifty-seven new (or, rather, old) blackletter commemorations were added, and Mary Magdalene was restored.[9] This was not simply a return to the calendar of the Henrician primer. The 1562 restorations omitted twenty-one of the commemorations in the 1545 calendar, including all six of its new additions. And they included twenty-five other feasts found regularly in medieval calendars, but omitted in 1545.

Neither the trickle of re-admitted commemorations in 1552 nor the surge in 1562 should be over-read. They may simply have been recognising commonly accepted reference-points for the passage of time. This at least is the implication of the parallel evidence from the calendars in Edwardian and early Elizabethan primers. Generally these kept pace with the 'official' calendars of the time, if they included calendars at all. But the 1562 re-peopling of the Prayer Book calendar was heralded by William Seres' 1560 primer, whose exclusive patent to print primers had recently been reaffirmed. This volume's elaborate calendar included the full swathe of the commemorations which would shortly be added to the Prayer Book, but also four columns of symbols for calculating principal feasts, days of the week, phases of the moon and the times of sunrise and sunset, plus detailed explanations of how these calculations should be performed.[13] This resolutely practical approach does imply that

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[9] *The booke of common prayer, and administration of the sacramentes* (RSTC 16295. London: Richard Jugge and John Cawood, 1562), sigs A2r-A7v. The feast of St Lucy, marking December's ember days, was also noted in *The boke of common prayer, and administration of the sacramentes* (RSTC 16294. London: Richard Jugge and John Cawood, 1560), sig. A7v. The calendar's history is usefully surveyed in Brian Cummings (ed.), *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559 and 1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 751-6, although the 1562 re-expansion is overlooked. I am grateful for Cyndia Clegg's assistance with this matter.

[13] *A primer or boke of priuate praier nedeful to be vsed of all faythfull Christians* (RSTC 20375. London: William Seres, 1560), sigs a2r-b7v.

we are looking at a tool for secular time-keeping rather than for devotion. In this light, the Edwardian purge of the calendar looks like the Jacobins' calendrical reforms in the 1790s: a radical reordering of time that foundered, not on principled conservative opposition, but on deeply sedimented custom which, as it turned out, was much harder to dredge than simply to navigate around.

Yet the result was a Prayer Book calendar filled with traditional feasts. And, at least as it appeared in 1562, that calendar was no almanac: its chief purpose was as a lectionary, a context in which these medieval feasts looked awfully like they were meant to be noticed liturgically. If there was a theme uniting the 1560-2 additions, it was the link between English nation and medieval sanctity. Compared to the 1545 calendar, martyrs and theologians were out: Timothy, Polycarp, Athanasius, Mary Salome, Alban, even Bede. Instead, kings, monks and semi-mythical British saints were in. The restored feasts included sainted Anglo-Saxon kings (St Edward the Martyr, Edward the Confessor), traditional medieval British saints (the abbot and bishop St Chad, the archbishop and monastic reformer St Dunstan, and the miracle-working bishop of Winchester, St Swithun), and even Pope Gregory the Great. The most up-to-date returnee was St Richard of Chichester, who died in 1253. He was, however, almost the calendar's only representative from the second millennium. On 31 December the Elizabethan church might have chosen to commemorate John Wycliffe, who died on that day in 1384. Instead it dedicated that date to Pope Sylvester I, who had been dropped from the calendar in 1545.[14]

And there the Prayer Book calendar stuck. It could have gone further. The 1560 Latin Prayer Book generally followed the 1549 edition for its text, but its calendar was stuffed with thoroughly traditional commemorations, with even fewer days left blank than in the typical primer of the 1530s.[15] The official Latin primer published by Seres in 1564 listed an observance for every day of the year without exception, and even, remarkably, restored

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[14] *The booke of common prayer, and administration of the sacramentes* (RSTC 16295. London: Richard Jugge and John Cawood, 1562), sigs A2r-A7v. The feast of St Lucy on 13 December, marking the start of December's ember days, had also been noted in one 1560 edition: *The boke of common prayer, and administration of the sacramentes* (RSTC 16294. London: Richard Jugge and John Cawood, 1560), sig. A7v. The history of the Calendar is usefully surveyed in Brian Cummings (ed.), *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559 and 1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 751-6, although the scale of the re-expansion of the calendar in 1562 is overlooked.

[15] *Liber precum publicarum, seu ministerij ecclesiastic[a]e administrationis Sacramentorum, alioru[m]q[ue] rituu[m] & c[a]eremoniarum in Ecclesia Anglicana* (RSTC 16424. London: R. Wolfe, 1560), sigs c1r-d2v.

'Thomae arch. Cant.', that is, Thomas Becket, to his place on 29 December.[16] But the English Prayer Book calendar itself acquired no additions until 1607, when 5 November was first marked as '*Papists cons[piracy]*'.[17] This addition persisted, but it remained the sole modern reference until 1662. The newly authorised Prayer Book published that year added two new commemorations to the calendar: 'K. Charles Martyr' on 30 January, and 'CHARLES II Nat. & Ret.' on 29 May, Charles II's birthday and the formal date of his restoration.[18] The inclusion of these deliberately divisive shibboleths makes the absence of any earlier commemorations especially striking. There had never been a commemoration of Henry VIII's break with the papacy. The English Church has never celebrated an anniversary of the overthrow of the usurped power of the bishop of Rome. 6 July, the date of Edward VI's death, which some Elizabethan Protestants did commemorate, did not become the feast of a new Edward the Confessor. Neither Thomas Hitton nor any other martyr of the sixteenth century was formally commemorated in the early modern era: even Thomas Cranmer remained unmarked by his own liturgy.

Where the calendar leads, the rest of the book follows. If our only source we had for sixteenth-century English religion were the Book of Common Prayer, we would not know that the English church had suffered a dramatic and violent upheaval in its structures, doctrines and practices. Almost the only clue would be the bland words of Cranmer's essay on ceremonies, with its coy allusion to how 'in this our tyme' the people are divided between those who are 'addicted to their olde customes' and those who 'would innouate all thyng', and its misleading claim to steer a middle path.[19]

This ought to be surprising. Every Tudor and Stuart regime understood that public worship was the most potent and most dangerous broadcast mass medium available to it. The regulation of preaching and the use of official homilies is well-known. We should not, however, lose sight of the primacy of liturgy as a means of mass communication. In 1534, the break with Rome was first signalled to the wider population through the liturgy, with

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[16] *Preces privatae, in studiosorum gratiam collecte & regia authoritate approbate* (RSTC 20378. London: W. Seres, 1564), esp. sig. *6r.
[17] *The booke of common prayer with the Psalter or Psalmes of Dauid* (RSTC 16332. London: Robert Barker, 1607), sig. A3r.
[18] *The book of common prayer* (Wing B3622A. London: John Bill and Christopher Barker, 1662), sigs c6r, d2r. Cf. John Field's edition of the same year.
[19] *The booke of the common prayer and administracion of the sacramentes* (RSTC 16267. London: Edward Whitchurch, 1549), fo. 35v; cf. Cummings (ed.), *Book of Common Prayer*, 215.

instructions to silence any references to the Pope..[20] From Edward VI's reign onwards, successive English regimes understood – with a gimlet-eyed clarity that the more doctrinally-focused leaders of Europe's other Reformations sometimes failed to emulate – that the liturgy was the high ground from the nation's religious life could be directed. Like radio or television stations for would-be coup plotters in modern times, the liturgy was a nerve centre which it was vital for any regime to control. This was not simply a matter of the infamous homily against rebellion, or the drumbeat of prayers for the monarch that sounded throughout the Book of Common Prayer. The military campaigns of 1544-5 were reflected in a series of orders for prayers to be said in every English church.[21] In 1548, as victory in Scotland began to slip away from Protector Somerset's government, Cranmer not only ordered parish churches to pray for victory and for 'the most happie and godly marriage of the king*e*s Ma*i*estie our sou*er*aine Lorde and the yong Scottishe Quene', but sauced these 'prayers' with explanations of how the whole war was caused by the Scots' faithlessness.[22] The omission of the Reformation from early modern English liturgies was not an accidental oversight, but a deliberate choice.

This is made plainest by the counter-examples which show how it might have been done. Although we still know frustratingly little about liturgical practice in England during Queen Mary's Catholic restorationit is at least clear that the Marian church did not try to minimise the national ordeal of schism and heresy which had now ended. A royal proclamation issued in January 1555 celebrated how the realm had 'been delivered, by the authority of the Pope's Holiness, from all sentences of interdiction' and was restored again to 'the unity of the mother Holy Church'. It called on all subjects to give thanks, for mass and *Te Deum* to be said for thanksgiving in every church, and for the 'making of bonfires in al places' in order than 'the common people' might join in celebrating 'this reconciliation and uniting of the realm to the rest of Christendom'.[24]

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[20] Aude de Mézerac[-Zanetti], 'Reforming the liturgy under Henry VIII: the instructions of John Clerk, bishop of Bath and Wells' in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 54/1 (2013), 96-111; idem, 'Liturgical developments in England under Henri VIII (1534-47)', unpublished Durham PhD thesis, 2011, esp. vol. iii pp. 123-143.

[21] Natalie Mears, Alasdair Raffe, Stephen Taylor and Philip Williamson, with Lucy Bates (eds), *National Prayers: Special Worship since the Reformation. Vol. I: Special Prayers, Fasts and Thanksgivings in the British Isles, 1533-1688* (Church of England Record Society vol. 20. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013), pp. 13-26.

[22] TNA, SP 10/2 fo. 11r (C. S. Knighton (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers of the reign of Edward VI 1547-1553* (London 1992), no. 49).

[24] Mears et al., *National Prayers*, p. 47.

In this, if in nothing else, the Marian regime was of one mind with the English Protestant exile congregation in 1550s Geneva. Their liturgy, too, emphasised England's recent history of religious conflict. It lamented that England's contempt for the Word under Edward VI had finally provoked God to withdraw it, so that the English were now forced 'as men affameshed [to] deuoure the pestiferous dounge of papistrie'. It also warned that 'negligence in reforming that religion, which was begone in Englande, was not the leaste cause of gods rodds light vpon vs',[25] so grounding the argument for a thoroughgoing Reformed church order on the fact of persecution. It would have been both easy and natural for the restored English Protestant Church after 1559 to have built such materials into its worship.

There were unofficial ventures of this kind, some of them more significant than the oddity of the calendar in the *Actes and Monuments*. Henry Bull's *Christian praiers and holy meditations* was one of the age's most popular devotional works: we know of ten editions printed between 1568-1614, most of them tiny 16mos. Since five of those editions survive in only a single copy each, there were probably others which are now entirely lost.[26] The calendar at the beginning of this book developed the direction first hinted at in the 1545 Primer. It listed the major feasts of the Church, but in place of other saints' days, it included a selection of anniversaries of major events in Biblical history, from Noah's release of the dove from the Ark, through Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem, to the raising of Lazarus and the events of Holy Week, confidently placed on 20-28 March. In addition to these Biblical anniversaries, the calendar also marked the Jewish revolt against Rome in the first century AD, the death of St John the Evangelist, and – the only event later than the end of the first century – the anniversary of Elizabeth I's accession on 17 November. This calendar remained unchanged through the book's first five known editions. However, the sixth, 1578 edition introduced a number of new, more modern entries, including a handful of events from the wars with the Turks, and two anniversaries from the European Reformation: Martin Luther's

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[25] *The forme of prayers and ministration of the Sacraments, &c. used in the Englishe congregation at Geneua* (RSTC 16561. Geneva: J. Crespin, 1556), pp. 5, 10-11.

[26] The 1612 and 1614 editions include memorials of the 1600 Gowrie conspiracy, but not of the Gunpowder Plot or anything else referring to King James I, and whose memorials of Elizabeth treat her as if she were still alive: this suggests the publisher was following a model, now lost, dating from 1600-03. Henry Bull, *Christian praiers and holie meditations, as wel for priuate as publike exercise* (RSTC 4032.2. London: William Hall for Richard Bradocke, 1612), sig. A5v; idem, *Christian praiers and holy meditations, as wel for priuate as publike exercise* (RSTC 4032.3. London: J. Beale for Richard Bradocke, 1614), sig. A5v.

birthday, and, on 27 August, a note that 'Religion ... was refourmed, according to Gods expresse trueth in the most renoumed [sic] citie of Geneua. Anno. 1535'. Alongside these sat a handful of sixteenth-century English anniversaries. Elizabeth I's birthday was noted as well as her accession day. The 1552 execution of the duke of Somerset was marked, as, more surprisingly, was the outbreak of sweating sickness in 1551. And on 6 July, readers were reminded that 'the Iosias of our age, Edward the sixt, king of England died. Anno 1553'.[27] Had the Elizabethan regime wished to build an alternative commemorative structure into its liturgical life, here was one for the taking, which had evidently found a popular market.

Another model was offered by England's northern neighbour. Protestant Scotland had no great wealth of martyrs on which to draw, and a deep theological aversion to the use of calendars, but it did have a short, intense war against the French-backed Catholic regime of Mary of Guise in 1559-60 to commemorate. The first edition of the *Book of Common Order* to be printed in Scotland, in 1565, included a series of texts dating from that struggle. There is 'a confession of sinnes, and petitions made vnto God in the tyme of our extreame troubles, and yet commonly vsed in the Churches of Scotland', which confessed 'that iustely y^{u} hast punished vs by y^{e} tyrannie of strangers, & y^{t} more iustelie y^{u} mayest bring vpo*n* vs againe y^{e} bondage & yoak w^{c} of thy mercy for a ceaso*n* y^{u} hast remoued'. Another lengthy prayer was, according to the rubric, 'vsed in the Churches of Scotland, in the time of their persecution by the Frenchmen'. This stresses how the true church is 'oppressed with feare and wounded with sorrowe', laments 'the trouble which increaseth by y^{e} cruel tyrannie of forswome straungiers' and 'their most uniuste persecution', and includes a long historical digression on the cruelty and treachery of the French. A final prayer of thanksgiving for delivery from French tyranny warns that any unthankfulness for such a great benefit would deserve even more terrible punishment.[29]

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[27] These additional commemorations are not found in the octavo edition of 1584, but returned in the 16mo editions of 1596 and 1612. Henry Bull, [*Christian praiers and holy meditations*] (RSTC 4028. London: Thomas East for Henry Middelton, 1568); idem., *Christian praiers and holie meditations, as wel for priuate as publique exercise* (RSTC 4030. London: Henry Middleton, 1578?), esp. sig. A5r-v. The 1578? edition is undated but contains an almanac for the years 1578-98. RSTC and Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), list nine editions, but a tenth, 1577 edition has recently come to light at Dr Williams' Library (ESTC S492571: shelfmark 16.2.51). Evidence for a missing edition comes from

[29] *The forme of prayers and ministration of the sacraments &c vsed in the English church at Geneua, approued and receiued by the Churche of Scotland, whereunto besydes that was in*

We know nothing of how or indeed whether these prayers were actually used, and as the war's memory retreated they must have seemed incongruous. But every edition of the Book of Common Order printed for Scottish use until the era of the Civil Wars retained these texts, and since no church authority demanded this, it must presumably have reflected printers' assessment of the market. Whether or not liturgy could actually keep the memory of the Reformation alive, it could certainly preserve it.

So why did this not happen? We may break this down into three separate but linked questions. First, why Henry VIII's regime make no attempt to celebrate what it had done in public worship? Second, why did the regimes of Edward VI, whose chin-jutting Protestantism is not in doubt, avoid all liturgical mention of the Reformation? And third, why did Elizabethan and seventeenth-century regimes maintain that policy – a decision which was made easier by mere inertia, but which was neither inevitable nor, as we will see, maintained absolutely?

We do not know, but we may guess. For Henry VIII, commemoration of the break with Rome would have run counter to his policies and interests in two distinct ways. First, he was concerned to emphasise how little had actually changed. With opponents at home and abroad crying schism and heresy, his regime was concerned to promulgate the newly-coined and durable myth of the English Reformation's nonexistence. It was merely enforcing some true reformation in line both with ancient principles and with the 'laudabul custume of the church of england' – smothering worries about innovation beneath a blanket of patriotism.[30] And it was pursuing a strictly limited jurisdictional quarrel, about 'the autoryte of o^{r} prince vpon the churche of England, and ... thautorytie of the bisshope of Rome vpon the same'.[31] Like the proverbial police officer at a crime scene, the regime's message was: nothing to see here.

Moreover, even that jurisdictional quarrel was not exactly a change. Famously, the 1534 Act of Supremacy did not make Henry VIII Supreme Head of the Church; it recognised him as such. The king's Orwellian claim was that he and his predecessors had always held this office. Rather than asserting a break with the past, this most imperial of kings was recasting the past in his own image. And so while he was willing to disrupt liturgical life in

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the former bokes are also added sondrie other prayers (RSTC 16577a. Edinburgh: R. Lekprewik, 1565), pp. 27-8, 53-4, 56-9, sigs. D8v-9r.

[30] TNA SP 1/100 fo. 110v (*LP Henry VIII*, IX.1160).

[31] BL Cotton MS Cleopatra E.vi fo. 173v (*LP Henry VIII*, VIII.78).

order to blot out the papacy, he was most reluctant to admit that that the bishop of Rome's authority in England had once been universally recognised. The clearest sign of the consignment of the papacy to this memory hole was the sudden ban on the very word *pope*, a prohibition which itself could not be articulated but which was plainly in place from 1533.[32] And the exception that proves this rule – the reign's most explicit liturgical nod towards the Reformation – is the petition in Cranmer's 1544 English litany for delivery 'from the tyranny of the byshop of Rome, and all his detestable enormities'.[33] This implicit admission that that tyranny had once held sway over England was one of those isolated Henrician experiments, like the burning of a Catholic for heresy, which would not be repeated.[34]

Although the doctrinal mood of Edward VI's regimes was very different, many of their methods were lifted directly from the old man's playbook. The more dramatic the changes that were being introduced, the more important it was, first, not to acknowledge the fact of change; and second, as the 1547 Injunctions put it, to 'take away, utterly extinct, and destroy' all that which was being abolished 'so that there remain no memory of the same'.[35] The more dangerously divided the nation was, the more important it was to double down on the Henrician rhetoric of unity and to deny repeatedly and with a straight face that any divisions existed or that any innovations had been attempted. One of the vital political purposes of the Book of *Common* Prayer was declared in its title: it was, amongst other things, an attempt to ensure the English spoke to God with a single voice. The book did not mention the fact of the Reformation because that fact was too hot to touch. It was, as Andy Wood has argued, 'an assault upon local memory' towards which a custom-bound society was reflexively sceptical: as such, the only possible strategy was to evade the subject.[36] Any mention of it would serve to divide rather than unite England's people. Better to tell them that this 'common prayer' is simply what *ecclesia Anglicana* does, and to wait until they or their

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[32] Richard Rex, 'The crisis of obedience: God's Word and Henry's Reformation' in *The Historical Journal* vol. 39 (1996), pp. 863-894.
[33] *An exhortacion vnto prayer ... to be read in euery church afore processyons. Also a letanie with suffrages to be said or song in the tyme of the said processyons* (RSTC 10620. London: T. Berthelet, 1544), sig. B5v.
[34] Peter Marshall, 'Papist as heretic: the burning of John Forest, 1538' in *Historical Journal* 41/2 (1998), 351-374.
[35] *Iniunccions geuen by the kynges Maiestie aswell to the clergie as to the laitie of this realme* (1547), sigs C2v–3r.
[36] Wood, *Memory of the People*, 92.

children forget that once it was not so. The Reformation was too big to be mentioned liturgically, and so it was treated as elephants in the room traditionally are.

In the Elizabethan and early Stuart periods, the same impetus persisted, but was overlain with other concems. Queen Mary had ordered public celebrations for the realm's reconciliation with Rome. Queen Elizabeth would not have dared order any such celebrations for her renewed schism in 1559, even if she had wished to. Instead, she dropped the embarrassingly frank prayer against the 'tyranny of the bishop of Rome' from the litany. Elizabeth had as sharp an eye for foreign princes' detestable enormities as any other Tudor, but she was also committed to her father and brother's policy of papering over the cracks in national unity by pretending that the divisive events of the past few decades had not happened. This was perhaps especially urgent given that her more zealous Protestant subjects were trying to drive wedges into those cracks – especially into the potentially alarming fissure separating themselves from the cowardly Nicodemites who had conformed under Mary, a group that included William Cecil, Archbishop Parker and, unmentionably but unforgettably, the queen herself.[37]

The fact that the 1549, 1552 and 1559 Prayer Books whitewashed the traumatic changes of recent years, while their 1662 equivalent insisted on them, is a reminder that, over the intervening century, the Prayer Book's meaning and purpose was almost inverted even as its textual content remained nearly unchanged. The Edwardian and Elizabethan Prayer Books were what the seventeenth century would call liturgies of comprehension: carefully crafted compromises issued by regimes which hoped to placate and include as many doubters as possible, in part by evading divisive issues. By contrast, the Restoration Prayer Book was a deliberate attempt to smoke out and exclude those who could not tolerate the new order, the work of a regime confident enough to want its enemies out in the open, and realistic enough to have abandoned the ambition for any truly 'common' national prayer.

The persistence of liturgical silence on these matters is of course most readily explained by inertia, or rather by Elizabeth's general religious policy of immobility, a policy which was taken up by her immediate successors. Yet that is not all there is to say on the subject. As the wounds of the Reformation struggles began to heal, or at least to scab over, the Elizabethan regime began to dare occasionally to lift the dressing and let country glimpse

[37] Robert Harkins, 'Elizabethan Puritanism and the Politics of Memory in Post-Marian England' in *Historical Journal* 57/4 (2014), 899-919.

what lay beneath. For if the text of the Book of Common Prayer was excluded from debate after 1559, there was more to the English church's liturgy than that book. We have long known that the Elizabethan church and its successors issued a series of occasional services for national prayer, penitence and thanksgiving which supplemented or temporarily replaced the statutory liturgy, and thanks to the work of the AHRC British State Prayers Project, we now have a comprehensive view of how those texts shaped liturgical practice in England (and beyond). The remainder of this chapter uses the texts assembled by that project to argue that the story of the liturgical commemoration of the Reformation is not quite so simple as the empty box of the Prayer Book implies.

There is one tantalising hint from the last month of Edward VI's reign. On 19 June 1553, two and a half weeks before the young king's death, a prayer for his recovery was 'set forthe'. It was used in the Chapel Royal, but also printed as a broadside which declared that it was 'mete to be vsed of all the kinges trew Subiectes'. The only surviving copy of this broadside was apparently never sold; it may well be that it was overtaken by events, and that this prayer was never used beyond the Chapel Royal itself. So it is of no more than counterfactual interest that, in begging for the boy king's life, this prayer thanked God for having 'begonne by him the rooting our of Errour, Idolatry & Supersticion, and the planting of trew Religion, trew worshippyng & veritie'.[38] Does this unusually direct acknowledgement of the process of Reformation suggest that a mature Edwardian regime would have become confident enough to lay liturgical claim to what it had done – indeed, to claim exclusive credit for a process which might have been ascribed in part to Henry VIII? Or does it merely suggest that the regime was driven to a new frankness as it became aware that the sands were running out?

A more substantial sign of a new direction comes from the order for services and weekly fasts during the plague of 1563. As the plague was a divine judgement on a sinful people, it provided an opportunity to discuss other providential deliveries – and made it urgent to control the narrative, lest any malcontents conclude that the plague was divine chastisement for national apostasy. So the homily 'concerning the Justice of God' which was issued with the order lacked the timelessness and generality of the two Books of Homilies, which float magisterially above any mention of specific historical events. This text had

[38] Mears et al., *National Prayers*, 41-2; *A prayer sayd in the kinges chappell in the tyme of hys graces sicknes* (RSTC 7508. London: William Copland, 1553).

preachers rehearse the pattern of divine judgement for sins, and deliverance after repentance, throughout history. It began with sacred history, but then made the leap:

> Now to come to our times ... hath he not sente amonges vs hys Prophetes and preachers, who out of Gods holye worde have continually called vs to repentaunce. ... And hathe he not, I pray you, prosecuted the same hys proceadinges with vs also continuing in impenitence, by sendynge vs sundrye plagues at sundrye tymes, warres, famynes, exyles, horryble fyres? And hath he not nowe at the laste, after almoste .xx. yeares pacience and forbearing of vs, sent vs the pestilence?[39]

There is still a certain coyness here, but the references are unmistakable. For almost twenty years – which must mean, since 1547: the Henrician Reformation is written out of the picture – the English have been called to repentance. They have proved obdurate, and have been punished not only with war, famine and plague, but with 'exyles' and 'horryble fyres' under Queen Mary. An official liturgical document was for the first time telling the English how to understand their recent history.

This set the tone for much of what followed, although the historical frame would soon shift such that the focus was exclusively on the current queen. A service issued in the province of Canterbury in October 1572, following the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre, lamented the horrors in France, and gave thanks that England had so far been spared, a deliverance ascribed to God's provision of 'a peaceable princesse, and a gratious Queene'. It also celebrated how God had 'very often and miraculously saued her from sundry great perilles and daungers', a nod to anyone knew the tale of Elizabeth's providential deliverance from her enemies in 1554-5.[40]

These themes would be emphasised more fully in the reign's most significant semi-permanent addition to the liturgical calendar: the service issued in 1578 to mark the anniversary of Elizabeth's accession on 17 November each year thereafter. This text was written to be woven seamlessly into the Prayer Book service of Morning Prayer, and achieved most of its effect by the careful choice of Bible readings and Psalms. Sometimes even under that cover references to contemporary events could be unmistakable. The service prescribed the use of what it called a 'Psalme and prayer'. At first glance this looks like a

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[39] Mears et al., *National Prayers*, 71.
[40] Ibid., 135; Thomas S. Freeman, 'Providence and prescription: the account of Elizabeth in Foxe's "Book of Martyrs"' in *The Myth of Elizabeth*, ed. Susan Doran and Thomas S. Freeman (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), pp. 27-55.

collage-psalm, created by selecting and arranging verses from across the Psalter to create a new text, for each verse has a reference to a Psalm verse in the margin: but in fact it is a pastiche, mixing actual quotations with free paraphrases to create an original text in the form of a Psalm while unmistakably referencing specific recent history:

> We were counted euen as sheepe appointed to be slaine: manye of vs were for thy sake killed all the day long.
>
> And many went astray in the wildernes, wandring hungrie and thirstie in strange landes: our soules fainted in vs, and were brought low, euen vnto the very dust.

The prayer of thanksgiving at the service's end made these themes explicit, thanking God for how Elizabeth's accession saved England 'from daunger of warre and oppression, both of bodyes by tyrranie, and of conscience by superstition, restoring peace and true religion'.[42]

The emerging liturgical narrative, then, focused on the queen's accession and on delivery from the Marian persecution, but was distinctly vague about what had happened before 1553. The accession service's reference to Elizabeth 'restoring' true religion implied that all had been well in England's religious life before the Marian interlude. But – surely deliberately – it did not state whether it was Edward's Protestant church or England's ancient, pristine Christian inheritance that was being restored. The manoeuvre is similar to the treatment of the Yorkists in the reign of Henry VII: by singling out the transgressions of the immediately preceding regime, it was possible to claim a vague and not-entirely-justified continuity with its predecessors.

The same story was told a little more explicitly in the service promulgated after the London earthquake of 1580. The homily provided with the service noticed how

> Since the sharpe tryall which God made of vs in the raign of Queene *Marie,* (at which time we vowed all obedience to God, if he woulde vouchsafe to deliuer vs againe from the bondage of the Romishe Antichrist ...) hee hearkening effectually to our request, hath giuen vs a long resting and refreshing time.[43]

With Mary's reign retreating into the past and the Elizabethan settlement putting down roots, it began to seem plausible for a nationally-mandated homily to assume that its hearers had all

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[42] *A fourme of praier with thankes giuing, to be used every yeere, the 17 of Nouember, being the day of the Queenes Maiesties entrie to her reigne* (STC 16479.5: London, 1578), sigs A8v, B1r.
[43] Mears et al., *National Prayers*, 149.

begged God for delivery 'from the bondage of the Romish Antichrist'. Not that anyone old enough to remember those years actually believed that this was true: but the speed of generational change meant that such people were now a minority. Any of them who might want to dispute this claim were now being expected, indeed challenged, to hold their tongues.

As religio-political crises accelerated during the mid-1580s, this narrative became steadily more explicit. The 1585 service of thanksgiving to be said in every parish for the failure of the Parry plot included this prayer for the queen:

> Not many yeares since, when for our vnthankful receauing of the heauenly light and truth of thy Gospell, we were iustlie cast into thraldome and misery, and thrust again vnder the kingdome of darknes, so that our consciences lay groning under the heauie burdens of errour, superstition, and idolatry, euen then, euen then O Lord, thou didest vouchesafe of thy great goodnes, not only without our desert, but far beyond our hope & expectation, to preserue for vs thy faithfull seruant our gratious prince and Soueraigne Queene Elisabeth, and to saue her from the iawes of the cruell Tigers, that then sought to sucke hir bloud and to worke to vs perpetuall tirannie.

It went on to celebrate how she had not only nourished true religion in England, but welcomed 'thy poore afflicted Saints, in these daungerous daies persecuted and troubled in many contreyes'.[44] So the novelty of the Edwardian (and perhaps Henrician) Reformation, which had been unthankfully received, is more openly recognised here; but the focus remains on the queen's providential escape from danger under Mary and the deliverance that her accession brought.

The prayers issued for use during the stormy weather of that same summer, certainly in London diocese and perhaps more widely, likewise listed several undeserved mercies God's people had received, amongst them that 'thou ... didst consider our calamitie in the late dayes of persecution, when the bodies of the Sainctes were burned in our streates, and didest in a moment turne our mourning into mirth [and] purge thy Sanctuarie, and Church from all the abhominations and Idolatrie of Antichriste' through Elizabeth's accession.[45] The form of prayer issued for use throughout England and Wales during the widespread hunger the following year celebrated how 'when we were in thraldome and captiuitie vnder the tyrannie of Rome, & carried away with the false worshipping of God, he, by our gracious Souereigne,

[44] Ibid., 155.
[45] Ibid., 157.

deliuered vs: he planted the elect & chosen vine of his gospel among vs, by law & authoritie'.[46] If these forms were blunter than before about what Mary's tyranny had meant, they also contained a new emphasis on the positive changes that Elizabeth had wrought: purging the church, planting the vine of the Gospel. Another 1586 service, of thanksgiving for the thwarting of the Babington plot, also thanked God for the peace England had enjoyed 'since the time that it hath pleased him by the hand of her Maiestie to haue the sincere trueth of the Gospel of our Sauiour planted among vs'.[47] That is more or less an open avowal of something we might call a Reformation. But as in all these cases, it is dated firmly to 1558-9.

So this is the myth of the English Reformation that was being promulgated in the services of the English church by the latter years of Elizabeth's reign: the English Reformation did happen, but not under that name, and late. It was intertwined with the developing myth of the queen herself, and in human terms it was ascribed pretty much exclusively to her. This was not the only option open to Elizabeth's regime. These liturgies might have positioned her as a successor to her brother (whose early death both absolved him from any blame for his regimes' misrule and also made it easy for wishful thinking to slather him with posthumous sanctity) or her father (who continued to loom large in the English imagination). But by the late 1570s, instead of using these precedents to justify her Reformation, the liturgy was making a bolder and more politically opportunistic move, by claiming the Reformation for the queen alone. The principal effect was that the Reformation bolstered her legitimacy, not the other way around.

It seems likely that this maneouvre worked. Elizabeth the Reformer became part of the queen's myth.[48] But having been liturgically married to the queen in this way, in 1603 the English Reformation found itself widowed. It could no longer celebrate its emergent myth and its monarch in the same breath. And as providence would have it, the gap left in the calendar by the loss of the Accession Day celebrations on 17 November would soon be filled. On 8 November 1605, Bishop Bancroft of London ordered prayers and thanksgivings throughout his diocese for the failure of the Gunpowder Plot three days earlier. A few months later parliament mandated that the commemoration be observed annually. But while the text of Bancroft's celebration was full of violent denunciations of 'our cruel enemies, which

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[46] Ibid., 164-5.
[47] Ibid., 167-8.
[48] *The Myth of Elizabeth*, ed. Susan Doran and Thomas S. Freeman (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003): in which see especially Alexandra Walsham, '"A Very Deborah?" The Myth of Elizabeth I as a Providential Monarch', pp. 143-168.

delight in blood ... that Babylonish and Antichristian Sect ... whose Religion is Rebellion, whose Faith is Faction, whose practise is murthering of soules and bodies', and of praise for the king who had been worthy to be the target of such malice, it was quite free of historical reference. Indeed, the prayer marvelled that there was 'no age yeelding example of the like cruelty intended towards the Lords Anointed, and his people': a remarkably sweeping assertion which John Foxe might have wanted to qualify.[49]

For a short while, peaking in the 1580s, it suited the English regime to recall the Reformation liturgically, or at least a certain tightly edited version of it. Before that it was too divisive and difficult, and afterwards, it had retreated into the distance, and recent history offered events better able to boost the legitimacy of the currently reigning monarch. Public worship was perhaps not the most important of the theatres in which history was processed and the Reformation recalled. Yet it was undoubtedly the most widespread, and these texts do provide a certain baseline as to what successive regimes saw as the liturgy's politico-historical purposes. If the old saw was true – *lex orandi, lex credendi* – then the prayers which the regimes put into people's mouths would become the truth they believed: whether they therefore learned that there had, or had not, been an English Reformation.

[49] Mears et al., *National Prayers*, pp. 261, 263.