11 Politics

England's Reformations, 1527–1660

Late medieval England had an underground dissenter tradition, tracing back to the condemned doctrines of John Wycliffe (d. 1384), an Oxford theologian. That sixteenth-century Lollards became Protestants is not easy to document, but they prepared the ground for Reformation doctrines by rejecting many Catholic doctrines[1] and by insisting that lay people nurture their faith by reading the New Testament in their own tongue.

Luther was told in 1519 that his Latin works were being reprinted and discussed in England. The earliest known center of this discussion was at Cambridge's White Horse Inn, where regular gatherings of students inspired by the humanist program of biblical study, presided over by an Augustinian friar named Robert Barnes, soon had townsfolk calling the tavern "Little Germany." Imprisoned for his heterodox beliefs, Barnes escaped to Wittenberg, where he studied with Luther. When England repudiated the papacy Barnes became an English agent in Germany, but when he returned home he was burned as a heretic (1540) for preaching the doctrine of justification by faith. Though apparently not connected with the White Horse group, William Tyndale, a preacher and an Oxford graduate, proposed to translate the New Testament directly from Greek into English. Church leaders, however, frowned on this "Lollard" idea. Instead, Tyndale found backing from London merchants while he lived in the Low Countries and saw his English New Testament through the press (1525). He then produced polemical writings of a generally Lutheran inspiration, aided after 1528 by another English refugee, John Frith. Frith was martyred for his beliefs (1533) shortly after returning to England; Tyndale too was eventually caught, tried, and executed, not in England, but by Charles V's government in Brussels (1536). Though Barnes's theology was wholly Lutheran, Tyndale and Frith seem to have adopted some Zwinglian ideas during their years on the continent. Right from the start, English Protestantism showed signs of the heterogeneous character that was to be its distinguishing feature.[2]

During the first decade of the continental Reformation, England's King Henry VIII (ruled 1509–1547) had no patience for heretics like Barnes and Tyndale. An amateur theologian, he won praise from the pope for a treatise in defense of the Catholic doctrine of the sacraments against Luther (1521). One of his councillors, the humanist Thomas More (1477/8–1535), matched Tyndale's polemics from the Catholic side book for book; as chancellor of England (1529–1532), More presided over a judicial apparatus that sent Anabaptists to the stake, in keeping with antiheresy laws once enacted against the Lollards (1415). Yet in the end, as in Sweden and Denmark, it was the king and not the scholars who made the first of England's many Reformations.

This chapter briefly discusses Henry VIII's separation of the Church of England from the Catholic Church (1534–1547), Edward VI's establishment of Protestantism (1547–1553), the reestablishment of Catholicism under Mary Tudor (1553–1558), the reestablishment of Protestantism under Elizabeth I (1558–1603), the reassertion of episcopal authority and certain pre-Reformation practices under Charles I (1625–1642), and the Presbyterian establishment mandated by Parliament (1646–1649). While England was controlled by Oliver Cromwell (1649–1658), the Congregationalists or Independents sought without success to have an established church according to their liking, while radical sects like the Quakers created their own religious communities.

+

In 1503 the future *Henry VIII* married his elder brother's widow, Catherine of Aragon, a younger daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella.[3] In light of Old Testament warnings that the man who took his brother's widow to wife would have no issue,[4] Pope Julius II issued a dispensation for the marriage. But Queen Catherine gave Henry no living child save for a daughter, Mary Tudor,[5] born in 1516. Not having a son to carry on his line, King Henry feared he was under God's curse, a fear that took on a new edge when he determined (1527) on marrying one of the queen's young attendants, Anne Boleyn. Did the pope really have authority to dispense anyone from an obligation of divine law, as laid down in the Bible? And could the present pope not retract the papal dispensation of 1503, thus rendering Henry's marriage with Catherine invalid, so he could marry Anne? But this was no time for Pope Clement VII to defy the wishes of Catherine's nephew, Emperor Charles V.[6] Hence, the papal legate who after protracted negotiations finally came to England immediately declared that he was remanding the matter of Henry's annulment to the curia in Rome.

Figure 11.1. King Henry VIII (reigned 1509–1547). Hans Holbein the Younger, "King Henry VIII of England." (*Colección Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.*)

While Clement VII sought excuses for further delay, an angry Henry VIII brought into play a statute of 1393 prohibiting appeals to any court outside of England.[7] The king's chief adviser, who had also been exercising the judicial powers of a papal legate in England, was first to feel the sting of this new turn in royal policy.[8] Henry seized on the fact that royal courts had been suggesting England's ecclesiastical courts were violating the 1393 statute by the mere fact of recognizing Rome's appellate jurisdiction. In return for his gracious pardon for this offense, the king forced a cowed Convocation (assembly of the clergy)[9] to recognize him as "sole protector and supreme head" of England's church (1531). Parliament then approved a suspension of the payment of papal taxes to Rome.[10]

At the same time, a petition purporting to come from members of the House of Commons (actually drafted by one of Henry's ministers) complained that bishops who swore an oath to the pope were not even proper subjects of the king; Henry professed to be shocked. Parliament specifically prohibited appeals to Rome in 1533, just as a new archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556), granted Henry the annulment he had sought and solemnized his marriage to Anne Boleyn. The 1534 Act of Supremacy declared the king to be "supreme head of the church in England," and for good measure Parliament made it treasonous to say otherwise. In 1535 a few brave souls who refused commands to endorse the king's supremacy over the church, including Thomas More, the former chancellor, and Bishop John Fisher of Rochester, were beheaded at the Tower of London.

Figure 11.2. Sir/Saint Thomas More (1478–1535). Hans Holbein the Younger (1497–1543), "Sir Thomas More," 1527. (*The Frick Collection, New York, NY.*)

Since the Latin mass continued to be celebrated as before, the priest vested as before, parishioners had only a dim idea of the great changes afoot. But in 1536 Parliament suppressed England's smaller monasteries and confiscated their property to the profit of the king.[11] This attack on the fabric of church life gave rise to rumors that parish churches too would be closed, which sparked a series of popular uprisings, mostly in northern England, known as the Pilgrimage of Grace (1536–1537). As one of their manifestos proclaimed, the rebels aimed at "maintenance of the faith of God, the right and liberty of his church." Though mobilizing sizable forces in places, they were talked into laying down their arms, and nothing changed. As in other parts of Europe, England's common folk were to be governed in matters of religion, not consulted.

What kind of church was England to have? Two court factions struggled over this question for the balance of Henry's reign. The group that sympathized with the doctrines of the continental Reformers was led by ① Thomas Cromwell (d. 1540), the architect of the king's Reformation legislation; Archbishop Thomas Cranmer; and Edward Seymour, duke of Somerset (1500–1552), the uncle of Henry's third wife,[12] Jane Seymour. ② The group that sought to preserve as much as possible of Catholic doctrine and practice was led by Thomas Howard, duke of Norfolk (1473–1554), and Stephen Gardiner, bishop of Winchester (1497–1555). Various credal statements were drafted, sometimes influenced by the 1530 Augsburg Confession and sometimes not. Henry's preferences are evident in the so-called King's Book, adopted by Parliament in 1543, which asserts a Catholic interpretation of the eucharist and specifically defends human free will against the Protestant doctrine of predestination. When the confiscation of chantries was proposed (1545–1546),[13] the measure was defended before a skeptical Parliament not on doctrinal but on fiscal grounds—the king needed money. But in 1546 Howard was accused of treason, and Gardiner's name was dropped from a proposed list of regency councillors for the king's nine-year-old son.

+

Policy in the reign of *Edward VI* (ruled 1547–1553) was made initially by Seymour, the young king's great-uncle, and after 1549 by a more zealous Protestant, John Dudley, earl of Warwick (1504–1553). It was of great importance for England's subsequent religious history that for Seymour and Dudley, Reformation doctrine came from Zurich and Geneva, not the

Augsburg Confession.[14] The new reign began with a royal decree (1547) banning all emblems of "superstition," including altars,[15] all religious images, candles, and processions. Royal commissioners made a circuit of the kingdom's parishes over the next few years to enforce the decree, though they met a good deal of resistance.

Meanwhile, a committee under Cranmer's direction was preparing an English- language liturgy, with texts for the traditional monastic hours[16] as well as for the mass. *The Book of Common Prayer* was endorsed by Convocation (1549), after Seymour intimidated conservative bishops into abstaining. Introduction of the Prayer-Book liturgy provoked a brief uprising in the west of England, where rebels demanded that every priest at mass pray for the souls of the dead by name, "as our forefathers did." Three years later Convocation approved a credal statement, the *Forty-two Articles*, which repudiated Catholic teaching on the presence of Christ's body in the eucharist but did not endorse the Reformed doctrine of predestination. Under Dudley's influence, Convocation issued a second *Book of Common Prayer* (1552), which confirmed the Reformed understanding of the rite that was now called holy communion, no longer the mass. The legislation of Edward's reign thus amounted to a revolution in belief and worship going well beyond Henry VIII's revolution in the governance of the church. Whether changes of this magnitude could have been successfully imposed on an unwilling populace remains uncertain. When Edward VI died of an illness (1553), England's new ruler was the Catholic daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon.

+

Mary Tudor (ruled 1553–1558) easily overcame a Protestant conspiracy mounted by Dudley,[17] as well as a brief rising in favor of her Protestant half sister, Anne Boleyn's daughter Elizabeth, which was provoked by Mary's marriage to a foreign prince, Spain's Philip II (1554). But her restoration of Catholic worship and of England's ties to Rome evoked no more resistance than Henry VIII's Act of Supremacy in 1534. Some of Henry's conservative bishops—those who opposed a Protestant theology for the new church and were deprived of office under Edward VI—had by now accepted papal supremacy and regained their positions under Mary; Stephen Gardiner and others carried on learned polemics with continental Reformers. To deal with the convinced Protestants whose numbers had grown appreciably during the previous reign, the heresy laws of old were also reinstated. Among the roughly three hundred victims during Mary's reign, many were Anabaptists. Some were leaders of the Protestant wing of England's clergy who had not gone into exile on the continent,[18] like the preacher Hugh Latimer, (1485–1555); they met their deaths as bravely as

Figure 11.3. Mary Tudor. Anthonis Mor, "Mary Tudor, Princess of England." (*Scala / Art Resource, New York, NY/Museo del Prado, Madrid.*)

More and Fisher under Henry VIII.[19] Meanwhile, churchwardens around the country brought out altars and statues and restored them to their places of honor. The fact that these and other church furnishings had been carefully hidden away, not destroyed, suggests parish leaders were hoping that the changes dictated from on high under Edward VI would not last. In fact change was only beginning. In 1558 the ailing and childless Mary recognized her Protestant half sister as her lawful successor.

+

Elizabeth I (ruled 1558–1603) was recognized by the 1559 Act of Supremacy as "supreme governor" of the Church of England.[20] Insofar as the

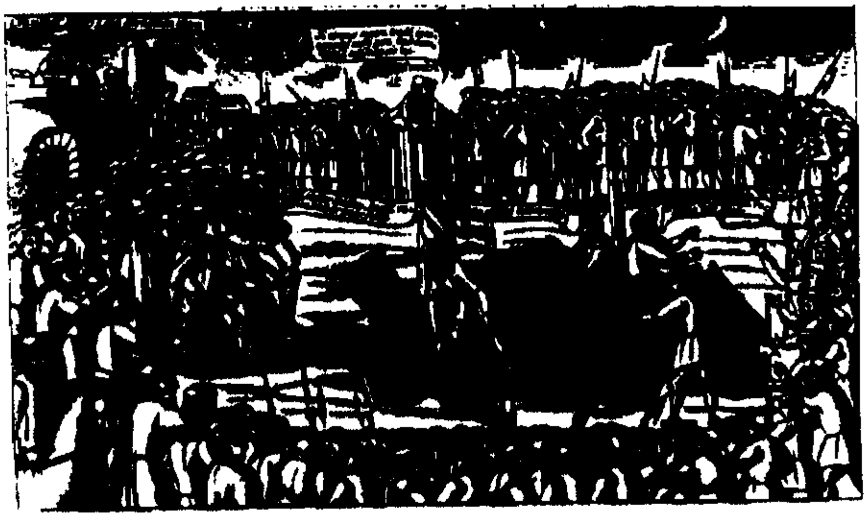

Figure 11.4. Protestant Martyrs under Queen Mary. The Burning of Bishops Hugh Latimer and John Ridley, John Foxe, Book of Martyrs (London, 1776). (*Special Collections, University of Minnesota Library.*)

new queen's intentions may be divined,[21] it seems Elizabeth envisioned a straightforward restoration of the *Book of Common Prayer* and the *Forty-two Articles* of 1552. Note, however, that a church governed by bishops was an unlikely spiritual home for the zealous preachers who now returned from exile in the continental centers of Reformed Protestantism.[22] Elizabeth's Reformation statutes also blurred some doctrinal and liturgical distinctions. The 1559 Act of Uniformity reinstated the *Book of Common Prayer* of 1552, but with new language permitting a Catholic as well as a Reformed understanding of the eucharist and an "Ornaments Rubric" requiring clergy to wear the traditional vestments. When thirty-seven London clerics of a Reformed Protestant temper ostentatiously refused to don "popish rags" for their services, Elizabeth insisted on their removal from office. The queen's concessions to Catholic sentiment were dictated by the politics of getting her statutes accepted in the House of Lords,[23] but they also reflect her fears of the kind of popular resistance to radical changes in worship that had been evident in the two previous reigns. If England's people were still in some sense Catholic, Elizabeth and her officials took well-considered steps toward creating a Protestant sensibility.[24] Royal commissioners who now made a circuit of the parishes ensured that altars and statues and other "superstitious" church furnishings were destroyed—not hidden away for future use, as in Edward VI's time. Copies of the popular *Book of*

1559
Act of
Uniformi

[redacted]

Figure 11.5. Elizabeth I (reigned 1558–1603), standing on a map of England. Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger (1561/2–1636), "Elizabeth I." (*National Portrait Gallery, London.*)

Martyrs by John Foxe (1517–1587), recounting in particular the gruesome torments suffered by faithful Christians under "Bloody Mary" Tudor, were ordered placed in every parish church, along with a copy of the English-language Great Bible completed under Henry VIII (1539).

Partly in hopes of preserving amity with Spain, Elizabeth was at first loath to see Catholics punished for their beliefs—but not after a series of

Catholic plots against her were sparked by Pope Pius V's declaration (1570) that she was excommunicated and that faithful Catholics must no longer recognize her as queen.[25] In 1574 she authorized the first executions of "seminary priests," trained at a seminary for English Catholic exiles at Douai in the Low Countries. A 1582 statute declared seminary priests and Jesuit missionaries automatically guilty of treason, a crime punishable by death. By the 1580s Catholic "Recusants," willing to accept the penalties for their form of dissent, were a dwindling minority.[26]

Meanwhile, Spanish backing for Catholic plots in England helped persuade Elizabeth to provide highly visible support for the Dutch Revolt. This in turn provoked Philip II to send against England his "invincible Armada" (1588), the defeat of which stoked an English national pride that was by now firmly identified with the Protestant cause.[27] But a Protestant foreign policy was of little consolation for those frustrated by the queen's apparent unwillingness to "complete" England's Reformation. When the new Protestant bishops presumed to endorse a new version of the *Forty-two Articles* (1562–1563) they were sharply reprimanded; only in the queen's good time were the *Thirty-nine Articles* approved, and by Parliament, not Convocation (1571). When groups of devout Protestant clergy and laity formed biblical study groups known as "prophesyings,"[28] Elizabeth ordered the archbishop of Canterbury to suppress these divisive gatherings; when he refused (1576), she placed him under house arrest,

seum, Greenwich, England.)

waited for him to die, and found a successor, John Whitgift (1583–1604), who was more than willing to carry out her wishes. To silence those among his clergy who were now calling openly for a presbyterian[29] rather than an episcopal form of church governance, Whitgift required all clergy to swear to the *Thirty-nine Articles*, which included a defense of episcopal authority. Eventually, some three hundred clergy were dismissed for refusing the oath. Such pressures from above provoked a series of bitterly satirical anonymous pamphlets(1588–1589) denouncing the queen's bishops for their betrayal of the Reformation.[30] An angry Elizabeth authorized a roundup of zealous Protestants, of whom a few were executed. The Conventicle[31] Act of 1593 threatened death for anyone (not just Catholics) who refused to attend Church of England services.

By the end of Elizabeth's reign the ambiguities of her religious legislation were causing serious dissension. For example, the *Thirty-nine Articles* took no position on the key question of predestination. Hence a group of young professors and students at Oxford felt at liberty to espouse publicly the doctrine of human free will. To set these errant youngsters straight, Archbishop Whitgift convened a synod that approved the Calvinist doctrine of predestination in its most extreme form (1595).[32] But the queen ordered the withdrawal of this new statement, precisely because it went beyond the *Thirty-nine Articles*. Meanwhile, and without rejecting the authority of their bishops, clerics sympathetic to presbyterian ideas on church governance were forming Netherlands-style *classes* with like-minded colleagues in the same district. Sympathetic lay patrons were endowing preacherships, earmarked for orthodox Calvinists, to make up for a lack of preaching by the poorly paid and sometimes poorly educated parish clergy. The earlier controversy over "popish rags" was not forgotten either. Indeed there was now a more general demand for purging the liturgy of a long list of "popish" elements, like saints' days, candles, the exchange of rings at marriage, prayers at the graveside, and the religious celebration of Christmas.[33] Finally, it grieved many earnest Christians that Sunday, the Lord's day, was mainly given over to such lewd entertainments as drinking, dancing, and plays and that traditional parish festivals continued as before, with the same pagan overtones, like dancing around the Maypole.[34]

Those expressing such sentiments had come to be known as Puritans. But Puritanism in the latter years of Elizabeth's reign was a current of opinion within the Church of England, not a separate church body. Puritans had a distinctive tendency to personalize the doctrine of predestination, searching within their own experience for a moment of conversion at which God's grace had entered their lives. Still, on the doctrinal formula of predestination, and also on a more proper observance of the sabbath, most bishops were of the same mind as the presbyterians with whom they so strongly disagreed on church governance.

Figure 11.7. A godly household in Flanders. Anthonius Claeissins, "A Family Saying Grace before a Meal," c. 1585. (*The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford-upon-Avon, England.*)

Also, not all of those who hoped to see the church some day "purified" of episcopacy and popish ritual had presbyterian views on church order. Refusing to recognize any larger church body, Separatists believed decisions on all important matters must be made by each congregation.[35] Searching their consciences for evidence of God's grace in their lives, like other Puritans, Separatists also concluded that baptism must be the expression of the precious experience of conversion—and hence not a ritual suitable for infants. Harassed by Church of England authorities, in part because of their views on baptism, some Separatist or "Baptist"[36] congregations took refuge abroad.[37] Within the broad Puritan current there were thus numerous countercurrents flowing in different directions. The demarcation between defenders of the established church and a Puritan opposition, overly simple for Elizabeth's reign, did eventually become a battle line, but only because of the events of the next two reigns.

+

King James I (ruled in England 1603–1625)[38] made promises to relax the laws against Catholic Recusants but backed down in the face of pressure

from a solidly Protestant Parliament. James was perhaps never more in harmony with his subjects in England than in the months following the foiled Gunpowder Plot (November 1605), in which Guy Fawkes and several other Catholics secreted thirty-four barrels of powder beneath the House of Lords. For Protestants this was not just the act of a few men; it was a diabolical popish plot directed from abroad, with the complicity of people whose foreign allegiance prevented their being true Englishmen. The growing sense of a distinctive English identity included a streak of rabid anti-Catholicism;

Figure 11.8. James I of England (reigned 1603–1625) and VI of Scotland. Daniel Mystens, "James I of England and VI of Scotland," c. 1621. (*National Portrait Gallery, London.*)