

## THE SHOCK OF CHANGE: CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY IN THE ELIZABETHAN CHURCH OF ENGLAND

EAMON DUFFY

*Professor of the History of Christianity in the University of Cambridge  
and President of Magdalene College*

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*This paper questions accounts of the English Reformation which, in line with sometimes unacknowledged Anglo-Catholic assumptions, present it as a mere clean-up operation, the creation of a reformed Catholicism which removed medieval excesses but left an essentially Catholic Church of England intact. It argues instead that the Elizabethan reformers intended to establish a Reformed Church which would be part of a Protestant international Church, emphatic in disowning its medieval inheritance and rejecting the religion of Catholic Europe, with formularies, preaching and styles of worship designed to signal and embody that rejection. But Anglican self-identity was never simply or unequivocally Protestant. Lay and clerical conservatives resisted the removal of the remains of the old religion, and vestiges of the Catholic past were embedded like flies in amber in the Prayer Book liturgy, in church buildings, and in the attitudes and memories of many of its Elizabethan personnel. By the early seventeenth century influential figures in the Church of England were seeking to distance themselves from European Protestantism, and instead to portray the Church of England as a conscious via media between Rome and Geneva. In the hands of the Laudians and their followers, this newer interpretation of the Reformation was to prove potent in reshaping the Church of England's self-understanding.<sup>1</sup>*

Ten years ago one of my Cambridge colleagues, Professor Gillian Evans, published a 600-page volume of source materials entitled *The Anglican Tradition*. It had a preface by Archbishop Robert Runcie, and it was in many ways an admirable and wide-ranging collection. It had two notable peculiarities, however. The first was that under the rubric 'The Anglican Tradition' it included not only a large amount of patristic material (which one might reasonably expect), but also some surprising medieval documents, which did not at once suggest themselves as specially Anglican, for example the Fourth Lateran Council's teaching on Transubstantiation. Secondly, not only were a mere sixty of its more than 600 pages devoted to the Reformation, but the word 'Reformation' did not occur at all as a section-heading. Instead, the foundational events of the Church of

<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on a lecture delivered at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome on 4 June 2002 and subsequently published in S. Platten (ed) *Anglicanism and the Western Christian Tradition: Continuity and Change* (Canterbury Press, Norwich, 2003).

England were represented under the heading 'The Sixteenth-Century Emergency'. And among the reformation extracts, there was not a single passage from any of the continental divines of the Reformed tradition who had played so decisive a role in shaping the emerging Church of England: no Calvin, no Bucer, no Bullinger.

Behind these significant inclusions and absences lay a distinctive account of the English Reformation which had its roots not only in the Tractarian revival of the nineteenth century, but in older high-church historiographies which can be traced back to the seventeenth century. This account emphasised continuities between the modern Church of England and the patristic and medieval past, and, by the same token, minimised the similarities between the Church of England and continental Protestant Churches of every hue. A similar outlook underlay a remarkable and now largely forgotten book by my first boss, Professor Clifford Dugmore, whose study of *The Mass and the English Reformers* was an ingenious, learned but ultimately perverse attempt to prove the demonstrably mistaken thesis that the eucharistic doctrine of the major English reformers was based on a direct rediscovery of patristic Catholicism, owing little or nothing to the teaching of the continental reformers.

Neither Dr Evans nor Professor Dugmore, of course, were imagining the continuities they discerned between the reformed Church of England and the medieval *Ecclesia Anglicana*. The Elizabethan Church looked in the 1560s and 1570s to the Churches of Switzerland for inspiration, support and fellowship, and, as we shall see, itself offered fraternal support to the beleaguered Huguenots of France. The Elizabethan Church of England perceived itself, fundamentally, as a Reformed or as we should say a Calvinist church. But uniquely among Calvinist Churches, it retained totally unchanged the full medieval framework of episcopal church government. In the Prayer Book it had a form of worship saturated with echoes of medieval Catholicism, or, as its Puritan critics put it, 'culled and picked out of that popishe dunghil, the Masse booke full of all abominations'. Though its eucharistic theology was resolutely and sternly Protestant, not only did it retain many of the proper collects from the Sarum rite, but it preserved many of the rites of passage by which the medieval church had sought to sacralise the day-to-day lives of the people. The Prayer Book contained remarkably conservative religious forms for the main rites of passage such as marriage, the churching of women and the burial of the dead, appearing in the process in radical Protestant eyes to retain much of what was worst in Catholic teaching and practice. The strains and theological contradictions in these survivals can be best gauged from contrasting the thoroughly reformed understanding of absolution on display in what is said about confession in the exhortations to more frequent reception to communion in the 1552 and 1559 Communion Service, with the essentially medieval juridical form of absolution retained in the Office for the Visitation of the Sick.

The retention of such Catholic material in successive revisions of the

Prayer Book certainly owed much to Cranmer's own cautious and conservative temperament, but it almost certainly also represented a pragmatic grip of the importance of such ritual continuities in retaining the loyalty of the population at large. The early Elizabethan Church was that anomalous thing, a Protestant Church largely made up of a population as yet unconvinced of the worth of the Reformation, and mainly staffed by former Catholic priests, relatively few of whom had embraced a full-blooded Protestantism. But these confusions were not merely the result of the ignorance of the great unwashed. At least to begin with, formed Protestant and Catholic confessional identities were the prerogative of the most zealous and most doctrinaire, and would be acquired only slowly by the more tentative or confused. The agonised ditherings in 1559 of no less a figure than Bernard Gilpin, nephew of Bishop Tunstall, an Oxford-trained theologian and Marian archdeacon of Durham, are instructive here. Gilpin was convinced of the necessity of an English Bible, and had possibly already begun to suspect that the pope might be AntiChrist, but he believed passionately in the Real Presence, and was appalled by the stark Zwinglianism of the Visitation sermon preached by Edwin Sandys when the Royal Commissioners arrived to implement the settlement in Durham. Queuing to sign the subscription-book, Gilpin did not make his mind up to conformity till the pen was in his hand. Yet he was to go on to be the Protestant apostle of the North-east, a tireless preacher and the founder of a Protestant grammar school, acting as a feeder for clerical candidates to Oxford: he was to be a prime target for Catholic animosities in the 1569 rebellion.

Gilpin therefore went on to become an ardent Protestant. But to the rage of the Elizabethan episcopate, far too many of the clergy blurred the sharp edge of reform and subverted the Protestant formularies the law required them to use by continuing to 'counterfeit the Mass'. Ministers stood at the communion tables as they once had done at the altar and held up the eucharistic bread to be venerated, some blessed candles at Candlemas, or used crosses and banners in their rogationtide processions. In the recalcitrant West Midlands even three generations on Richard Baxter would complain of the 'profane, ungodly, presumptuous multitude ... as zealous for crosses and surplices, processions and perambulations ... with a multitude of things which are only the tradition of their fathers'.

The early Elizabethan religious authorities were therefore caught on the horns of a dilemma. They understood perfectly well the attraction of continuity which these 'traditions of their fathers' offered to the population at large: it is likely enough that the Queen at least counted on them as a bulwark against rebellion, and that this was one reason for her stubborn ritual conservatism. But as Protestant pastors the bishops were committed to extirpating them, at whatever cost in terms of the alienation of the unlearned. The Elizabethan Homily 'Of the Time and Place of prayer' complained that for many the scouring of the Church of 'such gay gazing sights, as their gross fantasy was greatly delighted with', and the abandonment of false religion in favour of the 'true restored' was

'an unsavoury thing to their unsavoury taste'. Such relics of popery were rightly 'utterly abolished'. The Homily softens this condemnation by pointing out, in an echo of the Prayer Book's note 'Of Ceremonies', that though all such superstitions are deservedly abolished, yet those things that either God was honoured with, or his people edified, are decently retained, and in our churches commonly practised, a tentative gesture towards the *via media* and an affirmation of continuity forced on the authors, one suspects, by circumstances rather than conviction. In 1562 Bishop James Pilkington complained bitterly of the widespread murmuring against the cleansing of the churches, such 'lewd sayings' as "'What shall I do at Church? I may not have my beads; the church is like a waste barn: there is no images nor saints to worship and make curtesy to: little God in the box is gone: there is nothing but a little reading or preaching, that I cannot tell what it means: I had as lief keep me at home.'" This is a woeful saying'. John Jewel took up the same woeful sayings for attack in the Second Book of Homilies, in the following year, when he makes two ignorant wives lament 'Alas Gossip, what shall we do at church, since all the saints were taken away, since all the goodly sights we were wont to have are gone, since we cannot hear the like piping, singing, chanting and playing upon the organs that we could before'.<sup>2</sup>

It is in the light of this popular complaint against the official imposition of 'bare ruin'd quiers', not only in the monasteries but in the parishes, that we should understand the early Elizabethan regime's preoccupation with plaster and whitewash, The Elizabethan injunctions of 1559 recognised that the very stones of the parish churches remembered their catholic past, and attempted to bulldoze away that material memory: the clergy were enjoined to:

take away, utterly extinct and destroy all shrines, covering of shrines, all tables and candlesticks, trundles or rolls of ware, pictures, paintings and all other monuments of fained miracles, pilgrimages, idolatry and superstition, *so that there remain no memory of the same* in walls, glasses, windows or elsewhere within their churches or houses. And they shall exhort all their parishioners to do the like within their several houses.<sup>3</sup>

The trouble was, in many communities this purging of the memory just did not happen. Sales of illegally retained Catholic vestments and books were being forced on the localities by the ecclesiastical authorities all over England in the late 1560s and early 1570s, as their subversive potential as focuses of vestigial loyalty to the old religion was increasingly felt. This perception had been given frightening particularity in the Northern rebellion in 1569, when concealed altar stones and holy water vats were resurrected from the

<sup>2</sup> J Jewel, *Sermons or Homelies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory* (London 1833), p 381.

<sup>3</sup> W H Frere (ed) *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation*, vol III, 1559-1575 (Alcuin Club vol xvi, 1910), p 16, Injunction 23 (my emphasis).

dunghills and gardens where they had been buried and became the focus for resistance to the Elizabethan Settlement. But episcopal concern about these things predated the rebellion, and was emphatically not confined to bishops on the ritual left, like Grindal or Jewel. The concern of Archbishop Parker himself to eradicate such Catholic survivals has left a remarkable trace in East Anglia. The parishes of the Norwich diocese contain a total of 275 Norwich-made communion cups and/or covers, all dating from 1567-8: they were evidently mass-produced and distributed by the archdeacons by the dozen: to avoid confusion, many are labelled round the lip with the name of their destination: 'The Town of North Borlingham', 'the town of Salle'. These cups represent a significant moment of religious transition enforced by authority. From the mid 1560s the Elizabethan authorities became increasingly concerned at the persistence of the use of Catholic chalices at the Communion service, which it was feared would encourage the persistence of Catholic beliefs, clerical 'counterfeiting of the Mass', and idolatrous worship of the elements. In 1567 Archbishop Parker conducted his metropolitan visitation of the Norwich diocese. Under the slack though resolutely Protestant rule of Bishop Parkhurst the diocese harboured many radicals, as well as even more widespread traditionalist and Catholic practice, encouraged by former Marian and Henrician diocesan officials still in office. Parker's Articles included one asking 'whether they do minister in any prophane cups bowls, dishes or *chalice heretofore used at Mass*, or else in a decent Communion cup provided and kept for the same purpose only'. The use of profane vessels, it should be noticed, was not necessarily a sign of radical Protestantism: in 1560 Parker had had to discipline a conservative priest in his own diocese who, having been prevented from using a chalice, instead 'in contempt' used 'a milk bowl'. Parker now resolutely insisted on the substitution of Protestant communion cups for the Catholic chalices: *Carthago est delenda*.

The Norwich communion cups are a vivid reminder of the much more extensive cultural and visual transformation which was a prime objective of the Elizabethan authorities. There was an international Protestant house style, with which we are familiar enough in its Huguenot and Dutch reformed versions. That this was also the house style of the Elizabethan Church of England is disguised from us by the transformation of our parish churches under the joint influences of the Gothic revival and the Tractarian movement.

The attitudes of the man and woman in the pew towards all this, so often satirised by the reformers, are in fact hard to assess, and must often have been ambivalent. In the late 1560s a Yorkshire yeoman who had been part of the syndicate which had bought up the timber and bells from the steeple of Roche Abbey was asked by his son 'whether he thought well of the religious persons and the religion that was then used'. When he replied that he had indeed thought well of the monks, having had no occasion to think otherwise, his son asked 'then how came it to pass you was so ready to distroy and spoil the thing you thought well of? What could I do, said He: might I not as well as others have some profit of the Spoil of the

Abbey? For I did see all would away: and therefore I did as others did'.<sup>4</sup> Consciences continued to stir uneasily about all such spoil. Nicholas Roscarrock told the story of Jane Burlace, a farmer's wife from Rejarra in Cornwall who took up one of the four great stones used as a rest for relics and crosses on the annual rogationtide procession to the parochial chapel of St Neghton, and used it to make a cheese press. When Mistress Burlace died in November 1582, however, her spirit could not rest till this sacrilege had been put right: accordingly, the stone 'was in the night tyme carryed back by one willed so by her after her death or by some thinge assuminge her personage and remaineth, I think, still where it did'. Roscarrock, a recusant antiquary, was hardly a neutral reporter, but he claimed to have had this story 'from report of such as were of her kinsfolkes and friends who had cause to know it', and the ambivalences revealed in the episode must have been common enough.<sup>5</sup>

In Elizabethan England, therefore, attitudes towards the material remains of the Catholic past were often a touchstone of loyalty to or dissatisfaction with the Elizabethan Settlement. And there can be little doubt that the majority of reformers of the generation responsible for the Elizabethan Homilies, bishops included, would have preferred a clean sweep of all such links with the Catholic past, to make clear their decisive separation from the medieval Church. Archbishop Parker might talk to foreign Catholic observers of the 'reverend mediocrity' of the English Church's attitude to ceremonies, but as we have seen he did not mean by it quite what later Anglo-Catholics thought he did, and in any case it was a phrase few of his episcopal colleagues cared to endorse. John Jewel, author of the *Apology for the Church of England* which would become one of the pillars of the Elizabethan Church's defence against popery, mocked those who, in ceremonial matters, sought 'a golden, or as it seems to me, a leaden mediocrity'. They were, he thought, men crying out that 'half is better than the whole', and he longed for the total abolition of such 'tawdry fooleries'. Myles Coverdale insisted in the heat of the Vestiarian troubles of 1566 that the Church should 'not be connected by any similarity of rites with those from whose religion we are utterly abhorrent'. For in similarity of custom and habit lay at least the appearance of unity of substance, so that, as Thomas Lever told Heinrich Bullinger, the retention of popish ceremonies and garb, 'so fascinate the ears and eyes of the multitude, that they are unable to believe, but that either the popish doctrine is retained, or at least that it shall shortly be restored'. And since similarity of ceremonies betokened unity of doctrine, the Church of England had an obligation to conform itself to the pattern of other reformed Churches. 'Why should we receive Christ maimed rather than entire, and pure, and perfect', Laurence Humphrey and Thomas Sampson asked Bullinger in 1566;

Why should we look for precedents from our enemies the papists, and

<sup>4</sup> A G Dickens (ed) *Tudor Treatises*, (Yorkshire Archaeological Society 1959), p 125.

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Orme (ed), *Nicholas Roscarrock's Lives of the Saints: Cornwall and Devon* (Devon and Cornwall Record Society 1992), pp 94, 160.



not from you, our brethren of the reformation? We have the same confession in our churches, the same rule of doctrine and faith; why should there be so great a dissimilarity and discrepancy in rites and ceremonies? The thing signified is the same: why do the signs so differ as to be unlike yours, and to resemble those of the papists?

Humphrey, Lever, Sampson and Coverdale all stood on the left wing of the divisions which were opening up within the reformed Church of England in the mid 1560s over the question of vestments and posture in worship: they were all, as we should say, puritans or puritanically inclined. But these were not peculiarly puritan positions to maintain, and they would become more not less widespread. David Crankshaw has found the hand of Archbishop Parker himself in the attempts in the 1563 Convocation to move the worship of the Church of England more decisively in a Protestant direction, and the desire to set clear blue water between the reformed Church of England and its own popish past as well as the contemporary Roman Church on the continent was given urgency by England's dynastic uncertainties, and by the fact of European religious war.

The steady movement of Elizabethan Anglican self-perception in a Protestant direction can be traced in a rather neglected set of sources, the Occasional Forms of Prayer issued through the agency of the bishops for use in the parishes in times of special crisis. The occasions for these prayers varied greatly, from plague, dearth or earthquake to the victories of the Turks in Malta and in Eastern Europe. A recurrent theme, however, is the threat of Catholicism, from the likelihood of an invasion from Scotland led by the Duke de Guise in the early 1560s, through the rising of the Northern earls in 1569, to the Armada and the wars of the Catholic League against Henri of Navarre in the 1590s. From the very beginning Catholicism appears in these prayers as synonymous with cruelty, tyranny, superstition and opposition to the Gospel, as in the prayer for the success of the English expeditionary force sent to aid the French Protestants in 1563, which called on God to 'make soft and tender the stony hearts of all those, that exalt themselves against thy truth, and seek to oppress this crown and realm of England, and convert them to the knowledge of thy Son, the only saviour of the world ... lighten we beseech thee, their ignorant hearts, to embrace the truth of thy word ...'. That language was heightened in the wake of the Massacre of St Bartholomew in 1572, when the parishes of England were required to pray 'not only to abate their pride, and to stay the fury and cruelty of such as either of malice or ignorance do persecute them which put their trust in thee, and hate us, but also to mollify their hard hearts, to open their blinded eyes, and to lighten their ignorant minds, that they may see and understand, and truly turn to thee, and embrace thy holy word, and unfeignedly be converted unto thy Son Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of the world, and believe and love his Gospel, and so eternally be saved'. Notice that this prayer makes a simple identification between the cause of the French Protestants and the Church of England: the papists here hate 'us': the Protestant cause in England and France is one cause, popery the common enemy.

As the reign progressed, the polarisation sharpened. One of the unofficial forms of prayer circulating in the wake of the 1580 earthquake took time to plead for the overthrow of Catholicism, asking that Elizabeth should be given strength ‘to strike the stroke of ruin of all their superstition, to double into the bosom of that rose-coloured whore that which she hath poured out against thy saints, that she may give the deadly wound not to one head, but to all the heads of the cruel beast’. That apocalyptic note was rare, though it would be adopted into the official formularies by the early 1590s, and the official forms were no less emphatic about the fundamental polarity between Catholics and Protestants. England was increasingly seen as the chief bastion and refuge of Protestantism: the Catholic League in France was seen not as a force against the Huguenots alone, but against all Protestants: ‘Thou knowest O Lord, how they that fight against us have entered into a league, and combined themselves, never to desist, until they have destroyed all such as profess thy Gospel’. The 1590 English state prayers for Henri of Navarre identified the French Huguenots quite simply as belonging to the same Church: ‘their enemies and ours are all one, and the chief cause of their Malice the same: we together with them, as true members of the same Communion ...’. That was a widespread perception, and would remain so in James’ reign. Donne’s Holy Sonnet XVIII would ask:

Show me dear Christ, Thy Spouse, so bright and clear  
 What! Is it She, which on the other shore  
 Goes richly painted? Or which rob’d and tore  
 Laments and mourns *in Germany and here?*

The polarity was encouraged by other official and semi-official publications, most notoriously *Foxe’s Actes and Monuments*. From 1571 two folio volumes were required to be placed side by side for public reading and private browsing in the parlours of bishops’ houses, in cathedral churches, in the Inns of Courts, in Livery Company Halls, and in such parish churches as could afford them. These were the Bishops’ Bible, and the *Actes and Monuments* of John Foxe. The illustrations in Foxe’s extraordinary book were to help burn into the English Protestant imagination the radical evil of Catholicism, its polar distance from true religion. That perception is evident on the title page, and in the gallery of horror and outrage that punctuates the pages. In Foxe’s vivid illustrations the reader learned that Catholicism was barbaric and cruel, sparing neither holy bishops, women or unborn children: Catholics were even horrid to dogs. And the horrors of Mary’s reign were an indication of what might await Protestant England if Elizabeth were to die and the Catholic cause triumph: the *auto da fe* remained a perpetual threat.

These vivid Protestant portrayals of the polarity between the true Church and the pope’s Church were reinforced from the Catholic side by propaganda pictures every bit as gruesome. A succession of picture books by the Anglo-Flemish publisher Richard Verstegen, under titles like ‘The Theatre of Cruelty’, not only depicted the horrors being endured by the



seminary priests, Jesuits and their supporting laity in England, but related those sufferings to the struggle with international Protestantism: pictures of the English martyrs were displayed in propaganda set pieces in Paris by the Catholic League. The gulf between Catholic and Protestant was thus emphasised and widened by both sides.

I have been emphasising the ideological considerations which drove Protestant and Catholic apart in Elizabethan England, and which created contrasting visual house styles which reinforced opposing identities. But life is more complicated than ideology, and religious continuities asserted themselves in a multitude of ways. Consider the example of monastic ruins. Just as the Protestantism of the Prayer Book preserved as if in amber elements of the Catholic rites it was designed to supersede, so the architectural remains of the Catholic past continued to impact on Elizabethan religious identities. The overthrow of monasticism brought not just the destruction and pillage of some of England's greatest buildings, but a massive transfer of land and influence, a drastic shift from clerical to lay patronage within the Church, and a fundamental reorientation of English society. Early modern Englishmen and women were intensely conscious of all these elements of transformation: as Antonio in *The Duchess of Malfi* declared,

all things have their end  
Churches and cities which have diseases like to men  
must have like death that we have.<sup>6</sup>

Protestant conviction complicated these feelings: scholarly reformers like John Bale might loath monasticism, and its 'superstitious mansyons' harbouring 'lasy lubbers and poppysh bellygoddes', and yet lament the destruction of venerable monastic buildings and great monastic libraries, 'those noble and precyouse monumentes' of the past. The first great county chorographer of Elizabethan England was William Lambarde, and his *Perambulation of Kent*, published in 1576, was a seminal influence on the development of Elizabethan antiquarianism. He was also an ardent Protestant, who reflected thus on the monastic ruins at Canterbury:

And therefore, no marvaile, if wealth withdrawn, and opynion of holynesse removed, the places tumble headlong to ruine and decay. In which part, as I cannot on the one side, but in respect of the places themselves pitie and lament this generall decay ... So on the other side, considering the maine Seas of sinne and iniquitie, wherein the worlde (at those daies) was almost wholly drenched, I must needes take cause, highly to praise God that hath thus mercifully in our age delivered us, disclosed Satan, unmasked these Idoles, dissolved their Synagogs, and raced to the grounde all monuments of building erected to superstition and ungodlynesse.

<sup>6</sup> Cited by Margaret Aston in her essay 'The Dissolution of the Monasteries and the Sense of the Past' in *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: Hambledon Press, 1984) p 315.

And therefore, let every godly man cease with me from henceforth to marvaile, why Canterbury, Walsingham, and sundry such like, are now in these our daies becom in maner waste, since God in times past was in them blasphemed moste: and let the souldiers of Satan and superstitious mawmetrie, howle and cry out with the heathen poet ...

The Gods each one, by whose good ayde this empire stode upright Are flowne: their entries and their altars eke, abandoned quight.<sup>7</sup>

For Lambarde, bare ruined choirs, therefore, might be poignant reminders of vanished greatness, but they evoked no fond memories of sweet monastic birdsong: the monastic past was an abomination, the monks and their houses ‘harborowes of the Devil and the Pope ... which in horrible crimes contended with Sodome, in unbeliefe matched Ierusalem, and in follie of superstition exceeded all Gentilitie’. By the just judgment of God, therefore, Canterbury and places like it ‘came suddenly from great welth, multitude of inhabitants and beautiful buildings, to extreme poverty, nakedness and decay’.

Few Elizabethan or Jacobean antiquaries shared Lambarde’s doctrinaire hostility to the religious past whose visible remains increasingly fascinated them and their readers. Notoriously, John Stow’s *Survey of London*, one of the highwater marks of Elizabethan antiquarianism, published in 1598 and vastly expanded in 1603, is saturated through and through with nostalgia for the medieval golden age which had shaped the London townscape and its social and religious institutions. At one level, Stow’s work is a sustained lament for the decay of sociability and old decency which he believed was one of the major consequences of the Reformation shattering of ancient buildings and the monuments they contained. The destruction of the Catholic past had been motivated by greed, not goodness, typified in the covetousness which had led men to pluck up the very funeral brasses from the ‘defaced tombes and prints of plates torn up and carried away’, bringing oblivion to the honourable dead and their good works, ‘a great injurie to the living and the dead ... but not forborne by many, that eyther of a preposterous zeal or of a greedy minde spare not to satisfy themselves by so wicked a meanes’.<sup>8</sup>

Stow’s *Survey*, therefore, did more than lovingly map the bare ruin’d choirs of Shakespeare’s London. It offered a benign account of the antique world, ‘when service sweat for duty not for meed’, a world which had been lost in the dismantling of the early Tudor religious system. His famous description of Midsummer religious celebrations like the St John’s fires, with its idealised evocation of ‘every man’s doore being shadowed with green birch, long fennel, St John’s wort, Orphin, white lillies and such like’.

<sup>7</sup> William Lambarde, *A Perambulation of Kent* (Facsimile ed Trowbridge 1970), pp 267–268.

<sup>8</sup> For this and the quotation that follows, John Stow, *A Survey of London* (ed C L Kingsford, Oxford 1908) vol i/229, ii/75 ; and see Ian Archer, ‘The Nostalgia of John Stow’ in D L Smith, R Strier and D Bevington (eds) *The Theatrical City: Culture, Theatre and Politics in London 1576–1649* (Cambridge 1995) pp 17–34.

of hospitable houses hung about with lamps in honour of the saints, is notorious for its social romanticism:

In the moneths of June and July, on the Vigiles of festivall days ... in the evening after the sunne setting, there were usually made Bonefiers in the streetes, every man bestowing wood or labour towards them: the wealthier sort also before their doores neare to the saide Bonefiers, would set out tables ... furnished with sweete breade and goode drinke ... whereunto they would invite their neighbours and passengers also to sit, and bee merry with them in great familiaritie, praying God for his benefites bestowed on them. These were called Bonefiers aswell of good amitie amongst neighbours that, being before at controversie, were there by the labour of others reconciled, and made of bitter enemies, loving friendes. as also for the vertue that a great fire hath to purge infection of the ayre.

Stow's private papers from the 1560s reveal his hostility to successive manifestations of Protestant zeal in the city, and his memoranda are openly sympathetic to the Catholic clergy rabbled by the London crowds. Unsurprisingly, he was vehemently and probably correctly suspected of being 'a great favourer of papistry', and his house and books were raided and ransacked for incriminating material in 1569. Stow was gradually to come to accept and endorse the Elizabethan Settlement and its leaders like Parker and Whitgift, but the whole drift of his published work was towards a positive reappraisal of the Catholic past, worlds away from the Reformation polemic of Bale or Lambarde. Nostalgia for the visible remains of Catholicism, and a backward and approving look at the religion which had produced them, were therefore hard to separate. The ruins of the monasteries were only the most striking example of the general destruction of the forms of the old religion. From the outset of the Elizabethan Settlement, the fate of religious buildings in general, from monasteries to chantries, from cathedrals to parish churches, were intimately intertwined with the ideological systems they represented.

Consider, again, the most universal of all the visible reminders of the Catholic past in Elizabethan England, the stained glass of the parish churches. The English Reformation was unusual in the extent of its hostility towards pictures in glass, which were virtually never the object of cult. You will recall that the Edwardian and Elizabethan injunctions had called for the removal of all Catholic stories and images 'so that there remain no memory of the same in walls, glass windows or elsewhere within their churches'. The Elizabethan injunctions had added the practical qualification that windows were not to be destroyed if this meant the wind and weather would be let in. Zealous Protestants bemoaned this pragmatism, which left intact so many 'monuments of superstition', but even William Harrison, the ardent Protestant polemicist whose *Description of England* celebrated and justified the removal of screens, images and all the other furniture of the old religion from the parish churches as 'altogether needless' in a reformed Church, noted phlegmatically:

only the stories in glass windows excepted, which, for want of sufficient store of new stuff and by reason of extreme charge that should grow by the alteration of the same into white glass throughout the realm, are not altogether abolished in most places at once but by little and little suffered to decay, that white glass may be provided and set up in their rooms.<sup>9</sup>

Stained glass remained everywhere, therefore, and was a potential focus of intense ideological feeling. The recusant antiquary and chorographer of Worcestershire, Thomas Habington, in whose house Henry Garnet was arrested after the Gunpowder Plot, left a lavish and detailed account of the great narrative and doctrinal series of windows in Malvern Priory, 'the glasse whereof is a mirror wherein we may see how to beleeve, how to live, how to dye, how to pass through temporality to eternity'.<sup>10</sup>

Consider, by contrast, the attitude of the Cheshire puritan John Bruen to the glass in his own parish church in the late 1580s, where on succeeding to the lordship of the manor he found still:

many superstitious images and idoltraous pictures in the painted windowes, and they so thicke and dark that there was ... scarce the breadth of a groat of white glass amongst them: he knowing the truth of God, that though the Papists will have images to bee lay mens bookes, yet they teach no other lessons but of lyes, nor any doctrines but of vanities to them that professe to learne by them: and considering that the dumbe and darke images by their painted coates and colours, did both darken the light of the Church, and obscure the brightness of the Gospell, hee presently tooke order, to pull downe all those painted puppets and popish idols, in a warrantable and peaceful manner, and of his own coste and charge, repaired the breaches, and beautified the windows with white and bright glasse again.<sup>11</sup>

The destruction of the visible reminders of the past was of course grist to the Catholic mill: as government pressure on the recusant community mounted, material ruins became emblematic not only of the condition of the Catholic community, but of the calamities which the Reformation had brought on England itself, in the destruction not only of right doctrine and religious practice, but in the overthrow of charity, social deference, and the roots of community. You may be familiar with the lament for the shrine at Walsingham usually attributed to St Philip Howard:

Bitter, bitter, o to behold  
The grass to grow

<sup>9</sup> William Harrison, *The Description of England* (ed G Edelen, Washington 1994) pp 35-36; Richard Marks, *Stained Glass in England During the Middle Ages* (London 1993), pp 231-232.

<sup>10</sup> J Amphlett (ed) *A Survey of Worcestershire by Thomas Habington* (Worcester Historical Society, Oxford 1895), vol ii pp 177-178.

<sup>11</sup> William Hinde, *A Faithfull Remonstrance of the Holy Life and Happy Death of John Bruen* (London 1641) p 78.

Where the walls of Walsingham  
 So stately did show.  
 Such were the works of Walsingham  
 While she did stand;  
 such are the wracks as now do show  
 Of that holy land.  
 Level, level with the ground  
 The towers do lie,  
 which with their golden glittering tops  
 Pierced once to the sky.  
 Where were gates no gates are now  
 The ways unknown  
 Where the press of peers did pass  
 While her fame far was blown.  
 Owls do shriek where the sweetest hymns  
 Lately were sung;  
 Toads and serpents hold their dens  
 Where the palmers did throng.  
 Weep, weep, O Walsingham,  
 whose days are nights,  
 Blessings turned to blasphemies,  
 Holy deeds to despites.  
 Sin is where our Lady sat,  
 Heaven turned is to hell.  
 Satan sits where our Lord did sway:  
 Walsingham, O, farewell.<sup>12</sup>

The lament for Walsingham is only one example of a whole genre current in the 1590s. There was far more at stake in all this than the fate of buildings or even a change of doctrine. In this complaint literature, the decay of the externals of Catholicism reflected and indeed had caused the collapse of the moral fibre of society: grief for the bare ruined choirs was the objective correlative for despair over the collapse of social value. Reformation meant ruin, in more senses than one. William Blundell, Catholic squire of Little Crosby in Lancashire in the early 1590s, expressed the matter thus:

The tyme hath been wee hadd one faith,  
 And strode aright one ancient path,  
 The tyme is now that each man may  
 See newe Religions coynd each day.

Sweet Jesu, with thy mother mylde,  
 Sweete Virgine mother, with thy chylde,  
 Angells and Saints of each degree,  
 Redresse our contrees miserie.

<sup>12</sup> *The New Oxford Book of Sixteenth Century Verse* (ed E Jones, Oxford 1991), pp 550-551.

The tyme hath beene the prelate's dore  
 Was seldome shott against the pore,  
 The tyme is now, so wives goe fine,  
 They take not thought the beggar kyne.

The tyme hath been feare made us quake  
 To sinn, least god should us forsake,  
 The tyme is now the lewdest knave  
 Is sure (hee'l say) God will him save.

The tyme hath been, with in this land  
 One's woord as good as was his band:  
 The tyme is now, all men may see,  
 New faithes have kild old honestie.

Sweet Jesu, with thy mother mylde,  
 Sweete Virgine mother, with thy chylde,  
 Angells and Saints of each degree,  
 Redresse our contrees miserie.<sup>13</sup>

These poetic products of the 1580s and 1590s were matched by the emergence about the same time of a number of prose texts which similarly constructed an idealised Catholic past, keyed to the contemplation of its physical ruins both in the parish and the monastery. The best known and most elaborate of these texts is the anonymous *Rites of Durham* of 1593, which lovingly reconstructed not only the layout of every altar, tomb and painted window in the Abbey church, but also the monastic liturgy for which they provided the setting. The *Rites of Durham* is written in language deliberately charged with the sweetness of nostalgia, like the description of the altarpiece of the Jesus altar:

All of the hole Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ most richlye & curiously sett furth in most lyvelie colours all like the burninge gold, as he was tormented and as he honge on the cross which was a most lamentable sight to behold.

The monastic liturgy is depicted throughout as beautiful and affecting, 'all singinge reioycing and praying God most devoutly', and the humility of the monks and their charity to the poor is stressed. The villains of the *Rites of Durham* are those who defaced and threw down the monuments of the church, 'lewde disposed personns, who despised antiquities and worthiness of monuments after the suppression of Abbeys', above all the first Elizabethan Dean, the Genevan minister Dean Whittingham and his wife, who took holy stones to make door steps and salting blocks, and who made a washing house for laundresses out of the century garth where the Priors were buried, 'for he could not abyde anye auneynt monument, nor nothing that appertayned to any godlie Religiousness or monasticall liffe'.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> T E Gibson (ed), *Crosby Records*, (Chetham Soc 1887) pp 28-31.

<sup>14</sup> J T Fowler (ed), *Rites of Durham: being a description or brief declaration of all*



The *Rites of Durham* was probably compiled by William Claxton, squire of Wynyard, who died in 1597. Claxton, a dedicated antiquary and a correspondent of Stow's, to whom he loaned many books and manuscripts, was not, it should be noted, a recusant, though he had close relatives who were. He may have had the assistance of George Clyff, the last monk of Durham, who effectively conformed to the new church in 1559, even though he never signed the Elizabethan articles (despite which he held a series of livings in the Diocese of Durham and even retained his stall in Whittingham's Protestant Cathedral till his death in 1595). It is worth reminding ourselves that so blatantly papistical a text, and so positive an assessment of the monastic past, could survive and articulate itself in literary form down to the 1590s among men who outwardly conformed to the Protestant establishment.<sup>15</sup>

And if we can believe puritan complaint literature, this conformist nostalgia for the old ways was very widespread. Protestant polemicists denounced the conservative folk-culture of conformist parishioners for their backward glances at the flesh-pots of Egypt, revealed in proverbial saws like 'it was merry world when the Mass was, for all things then were cheap'. In 1581, George Giffard's fictional Essex countryman, Atheos, was loud in repudiation of the pope and all idolatry, but looked back to England's Catholic past as a time of communal harmony and good fellowship.

I will follow our forefathers: now there is no love: then they lived in friendship, and made merrie together, now there is no neighbourhood, now every man for himselfe, and are ready to pull one another by the throate.

His Protestant interlocutor, Zelotes, foamed with indignation at such perverse romanticism:

Ye follow your owne fond and doting opinion that ye imagine a thing which never was: for the world hath ever bene like it selfe, full of debate and strife, a very few in all ages which have had true love ....<sup>16</sup>

Nor was it Catholics alone who applied this romanticism specifically to the monasteries. The compiler of the *Rites of Durham*, of all texts, was probably a conformist. He was far from being alone. Michael Sherbrook, Elizabethan Rector of Wickersley in the East Riding of Yorkshire,

*the ancient monuments, rites, and customs belonging or being within the monastical church of Durham before the suppression, written 1593* (Surtees Society 103, 1903 reprinted 1964) pp 33, 61-62.

<sup>15</sup> A I Doyle, 'William Claxton and the Durham Chronicles' in James P Carley and Colin G C Tite, *Books and Collectors 1200-1700* (British Library 1997), pp 335-355, esp 347-349.

<sup>16</sup> George Gifford, *A Briefe Discourse of certaine points of religion, which is among the common sorts of Christians, which may be termed the Countrie Divinitie* (London 1601).

completed a treatise on the *Fall of Religious Houses* in 1591. It is an extraordinary work from the pen of an Anglican incumbent, for it was a sustained defence of the monasteries as good landlords and benign employers, centres of charity and industry. Sherbrook had no doubt that England had been in steep moral decline since the Reformation,

for the estate of the realm hath come to more Misery since King Henry 8 his time, than ever it did in all the time before: If it be a Misery to have more theives, whores, extortioners, usurers and contentious persons striving the one against another in suits of law, and to be short, far more Beggars than ever was before.

Anyone who compared pre- and post-Reformation England must agree, Sherbrook thought, that the Builders and Maintainers of monasteries 'were far wiser in building of them, than we in destroying them, and the governors of the Common Weale then far better'.<sup>17</sup> Sherbrooke is an extreme case, though in the light of Ian Doyle's identification of the conformist Anglican authorship of the *Rites of Durham* he looks a little less isolated than he once seemed: at any rate, some of his views were evidently common enough.

What can we conclude from all this? It seems to me plain that the older Anglo-Catholic account of the Reformation, as a mere clean-up operation, the creation of a reformed Catholicism which removed medieval excesses but left an essentially Catholic Church of England intact, is quite simply untenable. The Elizabethan reformers intended to establish a Reformed Church which would be part of a Protestant international, emphatic in disowning its medieval inheritance and rejecting the religion of Catholic Europe. Its formularies, preaching and styles of worship were all designed to signal and embody that rejection. But by the same token, it seems equally plain that Anglican self-identity was never simply or unequivocally Protestant. Whatever the formularies and the idealogues might say, the concrete reality of the Elizabethan Church was always ambivalent about the Catholic past, its religious identity always troubled. Embedded like flies in amber in its liturgy, its buildings, its ministerial orders, and in the attitudes and memories of many of its personnel, were vestiges of that past which were to prove astonishingly potent in reshaping the Church of England's future. Like the mosquito-blood in the amber of Jurassic Park, from these memories of Catholicism would be extracted new forms of Anglican identity. Jacobean and Caroline high-churchmen would reappraise the Elizabethan religious enterprise. Informed in part by the political realigning of Europe, in part by shifts in Patristic theology, and in part by second thoughts about the pillaging of the Church and the reduction of clerical influence and status for which they blamed the Reformation, they would seek simultaneously to distance themselves from Reformed Europe, and to re-appropriate large tracts of the repudiated Catholic past. The direction of that evolving process emerges with startling

<sup>17</sup> *Yorkshire Treatises* pp 90-91.

clarity in the contrasts between two well-known and interconnected poems which attempt to relate the Church of England to the Church of Rome on the one hand, and the European Protestant Reformation on the other. The first is the opening quatrain of Donne's Holy Sonnet XVIII. The poet is seeking the true Church, and thinks there are essentially two alternatives: Rome, or international Protestantism, of which the Church of England is a part.

Show me, dear Christ, thy spouse so bright and clear.  
 What, is it she which on the other shore  
 Goes richly painted? Or which rob'd and tore  
 Laments and mourns in Germany and here?

George Herbert knew that poem (Donne presented a copy of his Holy Sonnets to Herbert's mother Magdalene), and a generation later composed a reply, in which he sets clear blue water between the Church of England and the foreign Protestant churches: no question here of being one and the same church 'rob'd and tore, in Germany and here'. Herbert's poem, a celebration of the uniqueness of the Church of England, is called *The British Church*.

I joy, dear Mother, when I view  
 Thy perfect lineaments and hue  
 Both sweet and bright.  
 Beauty in thee takes up her place,  
 And dates her letters from thy face,  
 When she doth write.  
 A fine aspect in fit array,  
 Neither too mean nor yet too gay,  
 Shows who is best.  
 Outlandish looks may not compare:  
 For all they either painted are  
 Or else undrest.

She on the hills, which wantonly  
 Allureth all in hope to be  
 By her preferr'd,  
 Hath kissed so long her painted shrines  
 That even her face by kissing shines  
 For her reward.

She in the valley is so shy  
 Of dressing that her hair doth lie  
 About her ears.  
 While she avoids her neighbour's pride  
 She wholly goes to th'other sied  
 And nothing wears.  
 But dearest Mother, what those miss,

The mean, thy praise and glory is,  
And long may be.  
Blessed be God, whose love it was,  
To double-moat thee with his grace,  
And none but thee.

Herbert shared that process of distancing the early seventeenth-century Church of England from its reformed roots with the Laudians. It was an enterprise which involved a rewriting of history, and the adoption of the notion that Anglicanism was neither papist nor Protestant, but had self-consciously from its beginning embodied a unique *via media* between extremes. Out of that enterprise of re-interpretation would come both civil war, and, in the longer term, a reborn and reconfigured Church of England. But that, as they say, is another story.