



ST GEORGE'S LECTURES

14 - The English Reformations and the Making of the Anglican Church

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The English Reformations and the Making of the Anglican Church

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The London preacher John Field did not think much of the Church of England. In 1572 he declared it was 'a certain kind of religion, framed out of man's own brain and fantasy, far worse than that of popery (if worse may be), patched and pieced out of theirs and ours together'. It was, he thought, not a true Church, but a man-made political compromise between Protestantism and popery. As far as Field and other Protestants were concerned, the Church's official theology was not too bad – the Thirty-Nine Articles did not go far enough, but at least they pointed in the right Reformed direction. But everything else about the Church was dreadful, hardly changed at all from the medieval Catholic past. The Church of England simply was not a proper Protestant Church. It was still an episcopal Church, with a clerical hierarchy of archbishops, bishops and archdeacons – and they governed through church courts that still used the old Catholic canon law. It still had the three-fold ministry of bishops, priests and deacons, not a reformed ministry of doctors, pastors, elders and deacons. It still had cathedrals, monstrous anachronisms that wasted resources and worked like popish monasteries. Its structures of patronage and finance, were, if anything, even worse than before the Reformation: the crown appointed to senior posts, and most parish appointments were now made by the country gentry; there were gross inequalities in clerical incomes, and about half of all church tithes went to lay proprietors. Worst of all, the church services were popish: the ministers were supposed to dress up like Catholic priests, and the communion service looked and sounded too much like a Romish mass. Was this what Cranmer, Latimer and all the Marian martyrs had died for, some were asking? Did we suffer so much just to get this?

At its beginning in 1559, the Church of England satisfied no-one. It was too Protestant for the Catholics, and too Catholic for the Protestants. Nobody liked it, and certainly not the new Protestant bishops who were supposed to run it. They were deeply disappointed with what they'd got. Bishop Grindal of London explained in 1567, 'You see me wear a cope or surplice in St Paul's. I had rather minister without these things, but for order's sake and obedience to the prince' – that is, for political reasons, and to keep the queen quiet. In 1588, after thirty years of Queen Elizabeth's Church, Archbishop Sandys was still arguing that the superstitious ceremonies in the Prayer Book should be abandoned rather than enforced. By any recognizably Protestant standard, the Elizabethan Church was inadequate: proper Protestant Churches simply did not have bishops and cathedrals and consistory courts; they did not have



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rectors and vicars and curates; they did not have services based on the Roman missal; they did not have copes and surplices, and fancy dress for bishops. The Reformed Churches of Switzerland, France, the Netherlands and Scotland were properly Protestant; the Lutheran Churches of Germany and Scandinavia were acceptably Protestant - but the Church of England was not. It was still contaminated by the 'dregs of popery, the leftovers from the old Catholic Church that had preceded it. It was, Protestants said, 'but halfly reformed', and they wanted the job finished. That was the crux: the Church was 'but halfly reformed', because England had not had a proper Reformation. The Church of England, and so the Anglican Churches that came from it, was the result of a Reformation process that had only half succeeded.

Sentimental churchmen and women sometimes talk of 'the genius of Anglicanism' - its humane capacity for moderation and inclusivity; its sensible recognition of the authority of Scripture, tradition and reason; its gentle balance of dignity and enthusiasm - in short, its 'middle way'. Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, the man who made the Book of Common Prayer, is often credited with inventing Anglicanism - and if not Cranmer, then sensible Queen Elizabeth I. But the Church of England was not planned: nobody would deliberately have invented such an unnatural monstrosity. There was no blue-print, no founding constitution, but a series of political accidents that produced an unwanted outcome - and then Richard Hooker and Lancelot Andrewes and George Herbert and John Cosin and the other 'Anglican' writers later dreamt up a justification for the Church they were stuck with. The Church of England was an accident: it was the way it was because that is how things turned out, not because anyone planned it that way. And it was like that because that was how Reformation happened in England.

There is a tendency among some historians now to insist on the Protestantism of the Reformation in England, and to see it as part of the broader European Reformation. They emphasise the influence of continental theologians on English Church leaders - especially the influence of Reformed rather than Lutheran theologians - Zwingli, Calvin, Laski, Bullinger and Beza. In part this is a reaction against Anglo-Catholic interpretations of English religious history, interpretations that stressed continuity with the medieval Church and regarded determined Protestants as puritan deviationists. There is a lot to be said for this correction: the early leaders of the Church of England, Cranmer, Ridley, Parker, Grindal and the rest certainly owed much more to Calvin than to Luther or to the Catholic past. But we must not go too far: England's religious reformers were Protestants, but that does not mean that England had a Protestant Reformation - it had a political Reformation. The Church of England was not made by the theologians, it was made by the politicians.

England did not have a Reformation on the continental model. The term 'Reformation' links together a number of distinct changes in religious ideas, institutions and practices - an attack on the powers of the priesthood, a rejection of the authority of the pope, a confiscation of Church property, a suppression of organisations such as monasteries, the publication of the Bible in the local language instead of Latin, reformed church services in the vernacular, and a redefinition of prescribed beliefs. In sum, such changes were a wholesale Reformation. In some German and Swiss states there were Reformations like this in the 1520s and 1530s: in a year or two, everything changed, and Catholic churches became Protestant churches. At Wittenberg Luther introduced Protestant reform in stages, between 1522 and 1524. Elsewhere it was faster. At Zurich there was a Reformation in 1523, in Prussia in 1525, in Hesse in 1526, at Strasbourg in 1529, and so on. In Scotland there was a Reformation in 1560 - bang, everything changed. But it was not like that in England. In England it took thirty-four years to get from the first attacks on priestly power in 1529 to



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the agreed Thirty-Nine Articles of 1563 – and then it took another forty or fifty years to persuade the people to be Protestants. In England Reformation did not come as one big event, it came as a string of little events spread over several decades. And those events were not always heading in the same direction. Henry VIII started things off, but then got cold feet in 1538 and later turned some things back. After Henry's death, the government of the boy-king Edward went further towards Protestantism – but Edward died after six years as king, and Catholic Queen Mary took the country back to Rome. Then Mary herself died after five years, and was succeeded by her Protestant sister Elizabeth, so Reformation came again. This is why I prefer to speak of Reformations rather than Reformation – England had three separate Reformations, under Henry, under Edward and under Elizabeth. Elizabeth didn't change her mind, like Henry; Elizabeth didn't die young, like Edward – so the see-saw stopped, her Reformation survived, and so we have the Church of England.

And there were other big differences between Reformations in England and Reformation elsewhere in Europe. In other places, Reformation often came by popular demand: people turned against Catholicism, and demanded change – governments gave in, as in many German cities and states, or were overthrown, as in Scotland and the Netherlands. Popular Protestantism came first, and political Reformation came after. In England, it was the other way around: political Reformation came first, and for political reasons; only a small part of the population had wanted change, and the rest had to be made into Protestants by persuasion and threats. In England Reformation brought Protestantism; elsewhere, Protestantism brought Reformation. And there is a third big difference. In most places, Reformation came with riot and violence; in France there was civil war. There were attacks on Catholic priests and nuns, monasteries were sacked and churches were desecrated. In Switzerland, the Netherlands and parts of France, altars and images were pulled down and smashed by angry mobs. But in England, altars and images were taken down in each parish church on orders from the government, by carpenters and masons paid by the churchwardens – and they were often hidden away carefully in case they were needed again. These are the key differences: a bottom-up popular Reformation elsewhere, and a top-down political Reformation in England – piecemeal, and peaceful.

There is a tendency among historians now to deride what's called 'English exceptionalism' – the argument that England's history developed in different ways from its neighbours. It is partly a political argument, over whether Britain is, or should be, really part of Europe. Now when English exceptionalism is asserted with a smug and insular superiority, as if England's history was somehow better than anybody else's, it *should* be derided. Yes, England had a strong centralised state before the rest of Europe, and representative institutions before them too. But this was not because the English were more sensible. We can't explain English history by invoking the calm good sense of English people and their refusal to rush to extremes. The English *did* rush to extremes – they deposed their kings and had revolutions and civil wars, just like everybody else. But the English Reformations *were* different, were exceptional. They were different because they were unwanted, and they had to be enforced from above by governments. There had not been much wrong with the medieval Church in England, and Catholic religion had been extremely popular – to most English people, there was no *need* for Reformation and Protestantism did not seem very attractive. So when politicians pushed towards Protestantism, for their own selfish reasons, they had to be cautious, they could not go too far too fast. There was little popular momentum behind Reformation, and the enthusiasts for change had a hard time convincing ordinary people to accept it. On this occasion, England was not like Europe: it had a different kind of Reformation.



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A very different Reformation brought a very different Church. Where Reformation began as a popular movement, Protestants often organised themselves as an opposition Church and built up from the bottom – as local units that eventually came together in alliance and formed a presbyterian system, and bishops were abolished. But in England a political Reformation was introduced from the top and through existing ecclesiastical structures, that is, through the bishops – bishops did as government told them, or they were replaced by men who would - but episcopacy itself survived. Where Reformation began as a popular movement, the old ways and the old institutions were struck down in anger, as the tools of Antichrist and the vehicles of superstition. And a new Church was built, based on a blueprint that was said to be derived from the New Testament – as in Geneva, in the Protestant parts of France, in the Netherlands and in Scotland. But in England it was different. The Church of England did not start from scratch, it started from the medieval Catholic Church. And the old Church was not altered because it was the Church of Antichrist, for religious principle – it was altered if it suited the politicians to do so. So the medieval Catholic Church was not changed into a Protestant Church by a wave of Calvin's magic wand. Rather, it morphed into the Church of England by a series of convenient political adjustments: some things were not changed at all, and others only a little - so as not to rock the religious boat.

King Henry VIII had wanted a divorce, the pope wouldn't give him one, so he abolished papal authority over England in 1534. There was then a risk of a Catholic crusade against schismatic England, and Henry needed new defences and new allies. So he abolished the monasteries, and seized their property to fund spending on a new navy and coastal fortresses. He sought alliances with the Lutheran princes of Germany, and to entice them to help him he introduced little bits of Protestantism into English religion: he justified what he was doing by appeals to the Bible, so he allowed the free circulation of the Bible in English. To get these things accepted and enforced, he appointed a few Protestants as bishops. But then popular opposition frightened him, so he backed away from the Lutherans in 1538, sacked a couple of Protestant bishops, and soon restricted Bible-reading to the nobility and gentry. Young Edward VI's government fought a ruinously expensive war of occupation in Scotland: it paid for it by seizing the property of chantries and secular colleges, and justified this attack on endowed prayers for the dead by declaring purgatory abolished. Partly to wrong-foot their conservative rivals, reformist-minded politicians ordered the taking down of altars and images, and introduced an English Book of Common Prayer in 1549 – but so the Catholic people would not mind too much, the service followed the structure of the mass and many traditional festivals were retained. Then came Catholic Queen Mary, and almost all of this was undone: back came the altars and the images and the mass, and back came the pope. Those who wouldn't conform paid a heavy price, and Thomas Cranmer, Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley and 280 other Protestants were burned for their beliefs. In a neat twist, the Cambridge-educated leaders of Protestantism were shipped over to Oxford to be tried and burned. In 1553, when Edward VI had died, it looked as if Reformation was defeated and England was going to be Catholic. But in 1558 there was another accident: Queen Mary died, and was succeeded by her sister Elizabeth. The Protestants had another chance.

Elizabeth I was a Protestant, but she was also a politician and she knew when to compromise. She and her closest allies were Protestants, yes – but most of her people were not, and Elizabeth knew she would have to be careful. She tried to push Protestant laws through Parliament in 1559, and when they were blocked she made concessions to the Catholics to get her legislation through – so the Prayer Book was more Catholic than Protestants had wished. It is indicative of how nervous Elizabeth was that she then tried to keep images in the churches, and even tried to prevent the marriage of priests – all in an attempt to make her Church look more Catholic. But the newly-appointed



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Protestant bishops threatened to resign over images and celibacy, and the queen had to back down. Elizabeth couldn't keep her clergy unmarried, but she determinedly resisted calls for continued Reformation. So all the bits of new Protestantism that a proper Reformation would have brought never came to England. No doctors, pastors, elders and deacons, as in Geneva. No kirk sessions and presbyteries and assemblies as in Scotland. Some Protestants demanded these things, some even tried to build them up from the parishes – but the leaders were sent to gaol. And all those bits of old Catholicism that had not yet been abolished stayed the same – bishops, dioceses, cathedrals and choirs; deans, rectors, vicars and curates; the copes and the surplices; the Book of Common Prayer with its kneeling and standing and bowing; the ring at marriage and the sign of the cross in baptism; the words at baptism that said the child was made regenerate by the sacrament, and the declaration at burials of 'sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life'. They all remained, though most good Protestants abhorred them – and they remained because Elizabeth was afraid that her people might revolt if she changed them.

Now this story all sounds rather sordid. Is this where Anglican Churches came from – a lecherous old king, some scheming politicians, and a cowardly queen who wouldn't stand up for the truth? There is another side to the story, of course: some young academics reading Luther and Calvin, and teaching their students the new religion; some laypeople meeting together to read the Bible and learning to despise the old superstitions; some real conversion experiences. There were some real Protestants, and they made even more real Protestants – but until the 1580s they were quite a small minority, and they did not make the English Reformations and the English Church. If they had, they would have done it properly and made a proper Protestant Church. But it was the monarchs and the politicians who called the shots and made the changes, and they only made the changes that suited them. These pragmatic politicians appointed Protestants as bishops – but would not let them do what proper Protestants wanted. In 1553 Archbishop Cranmer was preparing a new code of Protestant canon law, to replace the old Catholic rules: among other things, it would have allowed divorce and remarriage, for example, as proper Reformed Churches did. But the code was scotched by Edward VI's leading councillors, who were not going to allow the Church to run its own affairs. And when, in the 1570s, the bishops were encouraging in-service training for preachers and evangelical preaching campaigns, Elizabeth ordered them to curtail the preaching lest it frightened the Catholics: Archbishop Grindal refused to carry out her orders and was suspended from office in 1577. Protestantism was all very well, but it mustn't cause too much trouble.

So sixteenth-century England had two sorts of Reformations. It had political Reformations, and there were three: a Henry one, an Edward one and an Elizabeth one: the Elizabeth one survived, and was not undone. They made the Church of England, with all its oddities. And there were also personal Reformations, all those individual conversions and educations that made particular people into Protestants. But the real Protestants did not much like the Church of England they found themselves in – even Elizabethan bishops like Edwin Sandys were unhappy, and preachers like John Field were furious. For them, and their lay followers, the Church of England was a flawed Church, and they wanted it reformed properly. They wanted it to be more like those they called 'the best reformed churches' – like Geneva or Zurich or Strasbourg or Scotland. They didn't want compromises, they didn't want concessions to keep the Catholics quiet - they wanted Biblical truth and no popery. That is why Elizabeth had so much more trouble in the first half of her reign with her fellow Protestants, rather than with Catholic opponents.



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That trouble included a series of published attacks in the 1570s on the constitution and the liturgy of the Church of England. They said, in short, let us get rid of the bishops and let us get rid of the Prayer Book. The bishops, and those who wanted to be bishops, had to come up with some sort of defence. And, to respond to fellow Protestants, they had to come up with a new argument. Hitherto, intellectual challenges to the Church of England had come from Catholics, and the response by English churchmen had been strictly Protestant. The Church of England had been defended against Catholic attack as one of the 'best reformed Churches' - a Church like Geneva, Strasbourg or Zurich, a Church reformed according to the Word of God (they knew it was not quite like that, but they wished it was and hoped it would be). Their Church was, they argued, a 'via media', a middle way - but a middle way between Roman superstition and Anabaptist heresy, so it stood alongside Geneva and other Churches, not to the right of them. The early apologists for the Elizabethan Church did not argue for a distinctive 'Anglican' position, but claimed that their Church was 'Reformed' just like its sister Churches on the continent. We need to remember that the word 'Anglican' was never used until James VI of Scotland called the Church of England 'Anglican' in 1598, and he did not mean it as a compliment. Indeed, the word 'Anglicanism' was not used until the 1830s.

But when Protestants attacked the Church of England, as Thomas Cartwright and others did in the 1570s, the bishops could not use the same argument that they had used to Catholics: they could not say their Church was properly Reformed, because they and Cartwright did not believe it was - so they said it was acceptable nonetheless. On those things which differentiated England from the other Reformed Churches - bishops, clerical dress, church ritual, and so on - they were defensive and somewhat embarrassed: as yet, the Church of England was a failed Geneva. So bishops and ceremonies were not justified in their own right, but only as acceptable features of an independent Church. Government and worship were, John Whitgift argued, *adiaphora*, things indifferent, things neither prescribed nor forbidden by God in Scripture. So they could be decreed by appropriate authority in each national Church. The queen was the supreme governor of the English Church, the queen wanted bishops, so the Church of England had bishops - and surplices, and ceremonies. It was a rather lame - but nevertheless accurate - defence: it was the will of the queen, not the will of God, which had prescribed the Church of England.

But there was a major defect in this argument. If the monarch could say 'Let there be bishops', the monarch could say 'Let there be no bishops'. There was no risk that Elizabeth would say that - but from February 1587 the heir to her throne was the king of presbyterian Scotland. James VI seemed to pose a real threat to the episcopal structure of the Church of England: he might make England like Scotland. (In fact, he was to make Scotland like England, but no-one knew that in 1587.) In 1573 John Bridges had preached a sermon in defence of episcopacy: he said it was convenient. But by 1587 he was looking for a stronger argument, and published *A Defence of the Government established in the Church of England*: he argued episcopacy was a historic feature of God's Churches. And in a sermon in January 1589 he produced the clincher: episcopacy, government by bishops, had been instituted by God himself. Richard Bancroft followed him in a further sermon in February, attacking the presbyterian structure of foreign Calvinist Churches: England was not a failed Geneva (or a failed Scotland), it was better than Geneva (and better than Scotland) because it had God's bishops. And in 1595 Thomas Bilson published *A Compendious Discourse proving Episcopacy to be of Divine Institution* - and if that were so, King James could not abolish bishops when he inherited Elizabeth's throne.



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The clergy of England were beginning offer positive justifications for their Church, rather than embarrassed apologies. In part this was self-interest – ambitious men wanted to be bishops, and hoped for promotion for standing up for the current constitution of the Church. But there was also a generational shift. The men who had been embarrassed by some features of the Church were the generation of the Reformations – those men who had grown up in the years of Reformation and who had expected religious change to go on to its logical conclusion – to Calvinist structures and Reformed worship. But the men who began to assert the positive value of bishops, indeed the divine necessity of bishops, were the Elizabethan generation – those who had grown up in the post-Reformation Church of England, and found that it worked. The strange marriage of Protestant theology with Catholic forms of government and worship was proving to be a happy one, and perhaps there was a lot to be said for it.

Much of this was actually said by Richard Hooker, in *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. The really novel part of this monster work was Book V, published in 1597, which dealt with worship. Here Hooker justified the rituals of the Prayer Book by their positive value, what he called their 'efficacy' - not just because they were commanded by law, as Whitgift had said. Hooker wrote of ceremony and singing as giving edification to the worshipper and offering 'seemly' praise and intercession to God – and he described sacraments as conveying God's grace to the recipients. Others were asserting the priority of prayer over preaching, reversing the recent Protestant assumption that preaching was what mattered and what edified. Lancelot Andrewes at Cambridge and John Howson at Oxford both argued for the importance of prayer, thanksgiving and the dignified observance of festivals as the due worship of God.

Hooker also argued for the importance of the Church's inheritance and its traditions. Where earlier writers had seen the origins of the Church of England in pre-Reformation anti-Catholic heretics or in the writings of the continental reformers, Hooker looked to the medieval Catholic Church and was not ashamed of it. Yes, it had fallen into bad ways, yes it had needed reforming, but it had been the mother Church of the Church of England. Even now, Rome was misguided but it was still a true Church. This new respect for tradition was reflected in theological study in the universities. By about 1600, university teachers and their students were showing much more interest in patristics and liturgical studies, and rather less interest in continental theology – and in 1616-17 James I issued orders to the universities encouraging the study of the early Church Fathers and councils, the medieval schoolmen, Church history and controversies. In some respects, the Church of England – or to be accurate, a section of the Church of England – was emancipating itself from the continental Reformation. This is reflected in an interesting shift in interpretation of the article in the Apostles Creed on Christ's descent into hell. Calvin had given a figurative interpretation of 'He descended into hell', in which the hell was Christ's suffering on the cross – so this metaphorical descent was part of the doctrine of atonement. This is how almost all Elizabethan theologians and catechisms had dealt with the article. But in the 1590s some preachers began to give a literal interpretation, and in 1599 Thomas Bilson, bishop of Winchester, published a big book on the subject. Bilson treated Christ's descent as going down into hell in triumph to demonstrate his victory over the devil – 'the conquest and triumph which the human soul of Christ had over hell by the glory of his resurrection, as his body had over death'. And in saying so Bilson abandoned Calvin's view and reasserted a patristic and medieval emphasis on the power of Christ and the power of the Church to deliver men from sin. The descent was not about atonement but about redemption.



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What was going on in the 1590s? Well, I think something we might call an 'Anglican' view of the Church was being invented – by Andrewes and Bilson and Hooker and Howson and others. It had not been there before – the Church of England had not before been seen as distinctive, but as the English branch of the European Reformed Church. But now England was being detached from continental Reformation. The older view that the Church of England was a middle way between Rome and the Anabaptists was now replaced by an assertion that it was a middle way between Rome and Geneva: the theological centre of gravity was moved to the right, and the Church of England was given an independent position. The characteristics of the English Church had not before been defended as good in themselves, but as what a Church could be like if its governor chose. But now English churchmen were arguing that episcopacy was the proper form of Church government, that a dignified liturgy was the proper form of Christian service, and that the traditions of the Church should be respected – and these look to me like some of the essentials of an Anglican view of the Church. But the Church of England was not yet an Anglican Church, because those who shared the views of Andrewes and Hooker were a small minority among the clergy. Most of the clergy still thought of themselves as Reformed Protestants, and took Calvin and Bullinger (and Perkins and Sibbes) as their authorities. Many of them only followed the Prayer Book rituals because the law said they should, and some still refused to wear a surplice or cross a child at its baptism. An 'Anglican' view had not taken over the Church of England yet – and it never did so completely anyway. But it had been born – and its birth was in the 1590s.

Some of the clergy were learning to love the Church of England, with all its flaws and contradictions – and many of the laity loved it too. There was a strong demand from laypeople that ministers should follow the Book of Common Prayer and that services should be performed according to the rules. William Purdie of Winchcombe in Gloucestershire refused to take communion unless the minister was wearing a surplice. He told the visitation court in 1576 that 'he will not receive as long as the sacrament is polluted, for that the curate will offer without the surplice'. People wanted things done properly. Edward Fage of Doddinghurst, Essex, asked the nonconformist Mr Cottesford to keep to the Book of Common Prayer in 1583 – but Cottesford preached against him as no better than a papist, so Fage stopped going to church. In 1586 the churchwardens of Upton Scudamore, Wiltshire, complained that their rector, Thomas Hickman, 'commandeth the parishioners to leave their scraping at the Gospel nor stand upon our feet at the said Gospel, and we must not answer to the said Gospel "Glory be to thee O Lord"'. They were distressed by the parson's attempt to force them into nonconformity: 'we shall not bow our knees at the name of Jesus, neither put off our hats and caps, neither to do any more reverence at that time than we do at any other time, and the said parson sayeth it is plain idolatry'. What was plain idolatry to the rector was respectful ceremony to his people.

The wardens of Stoke Bruern in Northamptonshire reported in 1588 that their minister did not follow the prescribed Prayer Book services, 'but taketh it here and there where it pleaseth him', and did not read the Litany, 'but doth omit it and go to preaching'. In a long list of complaints against their nonconforming curate in 1590, the wardens of Everdon reported that 'as the women of the town affirm, he will not read the thanksgiving after childbirth'. And the 1592 charge against Francis Foster, rector of Whiston, was even more comprehensive: 'he never readeth Common Prayer, weareth not the surplice, denyeth communion to him that kneeled, receiveth divers persons of other parishes to the communion, such as disobey their own minister, giveth not thanks after the delivery of women, buryeth not the dead, marryeth without a ring, baptiseth without any cross on the child's forehead, goeth not the perambulation, and observeth no order but his own'. The anger here is obvious. But sometimes there was humour. In 1605 Anne Vincent dressed herself up, 'with a surplice on her back and a pair of spectacles on her nose and a book



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in her hand', and paraded before the vicar of Haydon, Dorset, saying 'I cannot endure this papistical book' – just like a nonconformist complaining about the Book of Common Prayer. Some churchwardens tried hard to get their minister to conform. Robert Salterne, rector of Stockland Bristol, Somerset, did not wear a surplice in 1612, 'and being admonished by John Tydder, one of the wardens, to wear the surplice, he answered saying "I will not wear it!"' And sometimes everyone was affronted. In 1630 Edward Norrington of Bradwell in Essex was reported to the archdeaconry court: 'the parishioners in general complain against him, for that he doth omit to read services upon holy days and doth very seldom wear the surplice, unless it be at the communion'.

At the bishop's summer visitation of Bath and Wells diocese in 1629, Thomas Parker, vicar of Queen Camel, was reported at the Yeovil session for failure to observe the Book of Common Prayer. Among the churchwardens' specific objections were that he did not always wear a surplice, did not conduct churchings or perambulations properly, did not stand for the reading of the Gospel, and did not allow time for the congregation 'to give the glory unto God for the free passage of the Gospel, having been for many years usually accustomed in their parish'. Soon after, an intriguing discussion took place at Elizabeth Combe's shop in Yeovil. Thomas Rock said 'that he marvelled that Mr Parker should do so, being that he had never heard but that the said Book of Common Prayer was made and allowed of by the learned men of the kingdom', and 'that he did think Mr Parker should not deny the wearing of the surplice, being it was an ornament that was used in all churches'. 'Mr Parker should have been whipped about the town for not wearing the surplice, if he had been his judge', declared Rock. Susan Dennis defended Parker, for 'she had heard a reverent report of Mr Parker', and 'it was a thing very unfitting to pass such a sentence upon any man unadvisedly'. Rock then questioned Susan on her opinion of the surplice. She finally replied 'that the surplice was a thing that did not concern our faith, neither were we to build our faith upon it', and asked him 'What holiness he could ascribe to it?' Rock said 'It was a thing ordained by learned wise men to distinguish them from other men'.

The five who talked about conformity in the Yeovil shop do not make a large or scientific sample, but they do show that the issue was important and that opinions were divided. Thomas Rock, a twenty-five year old linen draper, was a vigorous conformist, who would have liked Mr Parker whipped and who tried to get Susan Dennis to say something incriminating. Anthony Traske was a twenty-three year old mercer, who had pulled Susan into an argument and later testified against her. Francis Waters was a nineteen year old barber, who also appeared as a witness against Susan but said very little in the shop argument. And William Darby was, as far as we know, silent. Susan Dennis may have been in a minority of one, though she seems to have been the most thoughtful and she avoided Rock's efforts to trap her. Rock's outrage against Parker's behaviour is clear – as is his respect for the Prayer Book, tradition, learning and common practice. He didn't like nonconformist ministers – and he didn't like their lay followers either. There were plenty of laymen and women who liked the Church they had got, and were willing to stand up for it.

And there were others, like Susan Dennis, who thought it could be better, and wanted it to be more Protestant. Contemporaries and later historians often called them 'puritans'. But they thought of themselves as 'the godly', as those who really cared about religion and knew what God wanted of them. The history of the Church of England has been a history of secessions, as some of those who felt uncomfortable with its oddities withdrew or were forced out – early Separatists, the Pilgrim Fathers, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists and Methodists. And there were always those who remained within the Church but had different emphases – on the literal sense of the Bible, on the power of the Word, on the sinfulness of the world, and on God's eternal predestination.



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So the Church of England remained divided. There were continuing arguments between those who wanted to move more towards continental reformed Protestantism, and those who were now content with the Church of England they had – and in the middle were those who were reasonably content with what they had, but still preferred to identify themselves with European Calvinism. That was a rather strange position, because the Church of England just wasn't like any other Church, Calvinist, Lutheran or, indeed, Roman. Because the English Reformations had been different, so the Church they produced was different. Lutheran Reformations produced Lutheran Churches; Calvinist Reformations produced Calvinist Churches – and the English Reformations produced the Church of England.

England had a monarchical Reformation: Henry VIII declared himself supreme head of the Church in England – Elizabeth I was a little more modest, and called herself supreme governor. This made the Church a state institution, and one that had to share the priorities of the state – so the Church of England was concerned about hierarchy, dignity and social order, and it was much more bothered about external conformity than it was about internal belief. So the Church of England never had an inquisition that pried into private convictions: it dealt with external acts of disobedience, but hardly ever had heresy trials. Two men were burned for heresy in 1612, one for denying the divinity of Christ and another for denying the Trinity – but both had been loudly declaring their beliefs and causing a nuisance, and they were the last to be burned. There were several cases in the local church courts of ordinary people who denied the existence of God or said that Christ was a carpenter's bastard: they were simply told to apologise and keep their mouths shut in future. It was hardly a tolerant Church, but it was not a persecutory Church – and that was partly because there had been a monarchical Reformation.

England also had a political Reformation – it had a Reformation governed by political calculation. It was not driven forward by fanatics, determined to have their way whatever the cost. Rather, it was implemented by canny politicians who didn't want too much trouble. The canniest of all was Elizabeth I: both her father Henry and her brother Edward had faced rebellions when they went too far or too fast with religious change, and she was not going to make the same mistakes. One consequence of this political priority was that policy-making and enforcement were responsive to popular concerns, and all through England's Reformations governments adjusted their stances to take account of public opinion. One late example of this came in 1595, when leading Cambridge academics campaigned for a much fuller and stricter definition of predestination than was given in the Thirty-Nine Articles. Archbishop Whitgift agreed, and drew up a set of 'Lambeth Articles' as an authoritative statement of the Church's position – but the Articles were vetoed by Elizabeth. We do not know for sure why she did this, but it was almost certainly because she knew that predestination was the most unpopular doctrine being taught in England, and its public enforcement would have been highly disruptive. Because politics mattered as much as theology, the Church of England was a listening Church as well as a preaching Church. To some degree, it was answerable to its people, in a national Church.

And England had had a national Reformation – a Reformation that sought to encompass the whole nation. Before Reformation, the Catholic Church in England had been a national Church: its mission was to the whole nation, and the whole nation was expected to be part of it. Not everyone liked it, but even Lollard dissidents went to their parish church on Sundays. After the Reformation, the Church of England took over this role, as the Church for everyone. Again, not everybody liked it, and some Catholics refused to attend its services – but if they turned up at a parish church, they were welcomed. They were baptised and married and buried, if that was what they wanted. It was a Church for which everyone was qualified, and everyone could be a member. There was no entry qualification but



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baptism, and no religious test for membership. Admission to communion was conditional on knowledge of the catechism in the Prayer Book – but that was hardly more than rote recitation of the Commandments, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. Some clergy thought that admitting communicants who had no more knowledge than that was a profanation of the sacrament: they used much fuller and more technical catechisms, and excluded those who were not up to standard – but over-enthusiastic excluders were unpopular in their parishes and were usually brought to heel by the bishops. Entry qualifications were deliberately low, so everyone could join: it was a comprehensive Church, an open Church, a Church for all.

There is much about the Church of England, and so much about the Anglican Churches that developed from it, that was accidental. Now to suggest that a Church was an accident is not to diminish or undermine it, it is just to state the obvious - that it was made by history. No doubt God can work just as effectively through the chances of history as he can through any direct inspiration of a Luther or a Calvin. But I am an historian, not a theologian, and it is my job to look at the way things were, not whether God wanted them that way. No human mind invented the Church of England. It was the contingency of the times that gave the Church bishops and cathedrals and ceremonies and so on, all the oddities that seemed not to belong in a Protestant Church – that made a Church 'but halfly reformed'. But later Hooker and the others thought up a justification for the marriage of Catholic and Protestant elements, and we have come to call it 'Anglican'. It was not until after the Civil Wars and the Restoration of the monarchy and the Church in 1660 that the Anglicans captured the Church of England – and that was by default, when the Uniformity Act was passed and the Dissenters left. The Church of England became Anglican, again, by accident. And it was the contingency of the times, the nature of England's Reformations – monarchical, political and national – that gave the Church some of its most obvious characteristics – reasonably tolerant, reasonably responsive, and reasonably inclusive.

We live in contentious times, and the Anglican communion is divided in all sorts of ways – in England, in America, in Africa, and not least here in Australia. I hesitate to comment, even obliquely, on local disputes - but there may be some value in remembering these features of the early Church of England. I don't want to idealise it – *its* clergy could be quarrelsome, too, and its bishops also could pursue their own narrow agendas. But, all in all, and especially under the eirenic headship of Queen Elizabeth and King James, the Church of England *was* tolerant, responsive and inclusive. It *didn't* attempt a detailed prescription of permitted views, and those with different opinions generally rubbed along together in the same congregations. It *did* take note of lay concerns, and it did respond to the needs of the times. Finally, it was inclusive, an open Church. It was a Church that sought to serve the whole community, not a sect seeking to advance its own restrictive interpretation of the will of God. These were worthwhile values then, and they are worthwhile values now.