



England's Unwanted Reformation
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So welcome to this second lecture in my series on England's Reformations and their legacies. The idea of the series is that an event as complicated and contentious as the English Reformation can't be reduced to a single master narrative. Instead what I'm aiming to do is show it to you from six different perspectives, six different accounts of how it played out. All of them are, I hope, truthful, or at least factually accurate. Which one you, or I, might think is the most truthful is for another day. Today's story, though, is one of the bleaker versions of events: England's unwanted Reformation. We might even use the term that was coined for it at the time.

In some countries the Protestant Reformation was a mass movement. Protestantism in much of Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Poland, Hungary, Scotland and even France was not exactly *popular* – everywhere, a great many people loathed the new religion – but it was certainly a mass movement, in which townspeople, aristocrats and sometimes even peasants mobilized to create new religious worlds in the teeth of opposition from their rulers. But in a few other territories, the story was reversed. In Sweden, some German territories, Ireland and England, the initiative came from the top. Populations that had shown at best limited interest in religious innovations were suddenly forced to embrace them.

The tale of how England's Protestant Reformation was rammed down its unwilling throat is not the whole truth, but it is a part of the truth which most English people have been too ready to forget – except, that is, for England's persistent Catholic minority, who have made this narrative their own. We apparently owe the most compelling one-word summary of the story to a man named John Proctor, a schoolmaster who, like a great many others, found an unheroic but sincere path through the dangerous confusion of mid-sixteenth century England. Proctor was born in 1521, and so was still only a boy when Henry VIII broke with Rome in 1534. From 1537 to 1546 he was a student at Oxford, the more traditionalist of England's two universities, and he persuaded himself that the 'noble Henry, King of Kings', was merely stamping out superstition and abuses. Thereafter he became a schoolmaster in Kent. In 1547 the boy king Edward VI came to the throne, and England's Reformation entered a phase of accelerating radicalism. Proctor watched this with dismay, trying to hold on to a disappearing religious centre ground. His nightmare lasted until 1553, when King Edward died and was succeeded by his elder sister Mary, who set about returning her wayward subjects to Catholic obedience. A sorrier and wiser Proctor now celebrated the end of England's experiment with heresy. The nation had learned the hard way that the Protestants offered 'not . . . faithful religion, but deceitful delusion . . . not truthful preaching, but ruthless [woeful] breaking of all Christian orders; not right reformation of things amiss, but devilish deformation of things that were well'. He could not know that within five years both he and his queen would be dead; and that Catholic England's Deformation had only just begun.

The story of the English Deformation is one of religious change successfully imposed on an unwilling population. To modern sensibilities, reared as we are on the democratic notion that the will of the people ought naturally to prevail, this sounds as if it should have been impossible, but Tudor England was in no sense a democracy. The normal place of its common people was to endure and obey. However, very little about what happened to England's religious life in the

sixteenth century was 'normal'. As the time-honoured rules of religious politics were torn up, the people who deplored what was happening sometimes simply acquiesced, but sometimes also held the changes at bay, negotiated with or – in some cases – openly resisted them. Occasionally they even succeeded. That is our story today.

So let's begin in the late 1520s, as the people of England became aware that their king was proposing to throw over his longstanding, faithful and pious wife, Queen Catherine, in favour of a scheming, younger, French-educated rival, and to declare his daughter a bastard in the process. This proposal could be defended in terms of canon law or reason of state, but not in common morality. Subjects' opinions about their monarchs' marriages did not usually matter very much, but once it became clear that Henry VIII was planning to throw out the Vicar of Christ as well as his lawful wife, popular distaste acquired a harder edge. In 1532 the Warwickshire MP Sir George Throckmorton accused the king to his face of having 'meddled' both with Anne Boleyn's sister and her mother – a double accusation so shocking that the king, caught off-balance, effectively conceded the first part in his eagerness to deny the second. The fact that Throckmorton could get away with such insolence shows how fragile politics was becoming. Nor was he speaking only for himself. His warning – or threat – to the king was that if Henry persisted, 'such feuds and intestine divisions would result therefrom as to completely destroy and subvert the whole kingdom'. It was no idle fantasy. England had had dynastic civil wars within living memory.

As Henry's battle with his wife turned into a wider war with the Church, his subjects chose sides. It was all too obvious that many of the king's supporters were self-serving careerists, while most of his opponents were taking their stands on principle and had nothing to gain from doing so. John Fisher, the elderly and pious bishop of Rochester, was England's most internationally eminent theologian: he became Queen Catherine's earliest and most consistent defender. As the stakes became plainer, other, more politically cautious bishops began to find their consciences too. Stephen Gardiner, the young and ambitious bishop of Winchester, derailed his own hitherto effortless political ascent in 1532 when he discovered he could no longer collaborate with his king's schemes. Even Archbishop William Warham of Canterbury, a long-serving and generally pliable prelate, was finding it impossible to ignore his conscience. He prepared what would have been a blistering speech to be delivered in the House of Lords, citing Magna Carta and the ominous example of St Thomas Becket to argue that the king must not trespass on the liberties of what he called 'ecclesia Anglicana' – using the Latin so as to avoid uttering the phrase 'the church of England', words that Henry VIII had turned into a nationalistic totem. Bishop Fisher and Archbishop Warham were both connected to a perhaps more dangerous figure: Elizabeth Barton, the 'Holy Maid of Kent', a servant girl turned nun whose pious visions were acquiring a dangerously political edge. She claimed God had told her that if the king remarried, he would forfeit his throne and be deposed within a month. For a brief moment, she looked like a new Joan of Arc, the peasant girl who a century before had helped to drive another English king from one of his thrones.

That these threats never came to a head was chiefly due to the man who, at that disastrous royal audience with Throckmorton, intervened to limit the damage: Thomas Cromwell. He side-lined the conscience-stricken bishops, paralysed by their twin loyalties to God's Church and to his anointed king. Warham never delivered the speech, and he had the decency to die in August 1532, just in time to be replaced at Canterbury by a surprise candidate. Thomas Cranmer was a young and relatively obscure scholar who had become a confidant of the king's, and he was chosen for this dizzying promotion for one and only one reason: he genuinely supported the king's twin grievances with his wife and with the pope. There was no danger of his conscience tugging him in an inconvenient direction. Gardiner and others were frozen out of favour until, one by one, they gave in and reconciled themselves to the new world. Only two prominent naysayers refused to

buckle: Fisher and his friend Thomas More. The pope tried to save Fisher by making him a cardinal, which enraged rather than deterred the king. More tried to save himself by shrewd legal tactics, which only compelled Cromwell to concoct evidence against him. By the time both men were beheaded in the summer of 1535, they were almost alone.

The threat of popular resistance had already been headed off, at least temporarily. Elizabeth Barton shared Joan of Arc's fate: she and her supporters were rounded up in late 1533, and she was forced publicly to denounce her own prophecies as fake before being judicially murdered. In the meantime, Cromwell developed an unprecedented and, in its quiet way, revolutionary policy. Every adult male in England was required by law to swear an oath recognizing the king's marriage to Anne Boleyn and also, by implication, his newly claimed 'supremacy' over the English Church. To refuse to swear was to invite a treason charge. The fact that virtually the entire nation complied demonstrates the regime's strength. The fact that the regime needed to extort such an oath demonstrates its weakness. Kings do not normally need their subjects' consent to marry. By requiring the entire population to express an opinion on the subject, it opened up undreamed-of possibilities for political participation. It was the first time the English (male) population as a whole had ever been formally drawn into politics.

It was also a sign that Henry VIII's Reformation – as it was not yet called – would be more than a matter for lawyers and bishops. Already it was reaching into the parishes. Orders went out to ban the prayers said for the pope at every mass, and to ensure that preachers extolled the king's newly claimed title. As yet these were clouds no bigger than a man's hand, and most parishes accommodated them with no more than a few hand-inked corrections to their liturgical books. But they were harbingers. Cromwell was soon given the grand and new-minted title of the king's Vicegerent in Spirituals, empowering him, a mere layman, to exercise the Royal Supremacy over the Church on his master's behalf. He quickly redoubled the reforming efforts he had once made for Cardinal Wolsey. A steady flow of ominous initiatives poured out of the formidable bureaucratic machine he was developing. His commissioners travelled the country reporting on the property and income of every parish and searching, with undisguised malice, for reports of moral lapses in monastic houses. They do not seem to have concocted much evidence wholesale – that sort of crude tactic was limited to emergencies such as the Thomas More situation; Cromwell's machine was perfectly capable of using ambiguous categories such that, for example, a few reports from a monastery of what used to be called solitary vice could be legally classed as sodomy and used to tar the reputation of the entire house. As these sorts of defamatory reports circulated, in the summer of 1535 Henry VIII went on an extensive royal progress to the west of England and helped to cool anxieties there: he was always superb at the theatrics of monarchy. The north, meanwhile, simmered. In the spring of 1536, Anne Boleyn, the new queen to whose legitimacy the nation had just sworn was suddenly declared an adulterous, incestuous traitor, the marriage was invalidated and she was beheaded. What were the people to think? Rumours flew. A new set of royal injunctions ordered that every church keep a comprehensive register of all baptisms, marriages and funerals. Did that mean that all these services were now going to be taxed? How far could the king and his clique of heretics and opportunists push their luck?

The last straw, as it turned out, was not a new policy but one which looked back to Cardinal Wolsey in the previous decade: putting monasteries to better use. Wolsey had seized carefully selected houses for carefully pious purposes, but in his last year in power, he had secured new powers to repurpose monastic property on a larger scale. These powers lapsed with his fall, but parliament considered several such schemes during the early 1530s. I think it's likely that whoever had been in power in England in the 1530s would have ended up raiding the monastic estate, but as it happened it was Thomas Cromwell, Wolsey's former enforcer, and he did it with verve and a sharp eye. In the spring of 1536, he secured a blunt but effective piece of legislation. All religious

houses with an annual income of less than £200 would be 'dissolved': that is, closed down, with the monks and nuns either released from their vows or transferred to other houses, and the monasteries' lands and goods being placed in the care of the Church's Supreme Head, Henry VIII. The pretence that this was about reform, not plunder, was scarcely maintained.

The commissioners who set out to enforce it in the autumn of 1536 touched a match to an already tinder-dry bonfire of popular grievance – especially in the north, where parish churches were thinly scattered, and monasteries and their services were integral to many lay Christians' lives. The revolts began in Lincolnshire and rapidly spread north. The largest and most dangerous rising, centred in Yorkshire, called itself the 'Pilgrimage of Grace for the Commonwealth'. These 'Pilgrims' marched under a banner of Christ's wounds and, ominously following the example the regime had set them, bound themselves with a common oath. They declared their loyalty to their king, but they also declared that they were 'gnawn in their conscience with spreading heresies, suppression of houses of religion and other matters touching the commons' wealth'. And indeed, the Dissolution was at the centre of their concerns. It was a disaster 'whereby the service of God is not only minished but also the poorality of your realm be unrelieved': spiritual and secular concerns were intertwined. But the rebels also bluntly demanded that the circle of heretics around the king should be driven out, that the bastardized Princess Mary be restored to the line of succession and that at least some degree of papal authority be restored. Within weeks there were forty thousand rebels in arms in the north, and there were alarming whispers of sympathy in the south too. London was abuzz with reports of the rebels' demands, and the City authorities tried to impound weapons... The furious king scrambled together what forces he could, but it quickly became clear that, if it came to a fight, he and his Reformation could not win.

It was a moment, perhaps *the* moment, when popular will could, conceivably, have stopped the English Reformation, and it did not happen. The king did not win a battle, but he did not need to. He outlasted and outmanoeuvred his opponents, lulled them into dispersing with empty promises, found pretexts to abandon those promises as soon as it was safe to do so, rounded up and slaughtered the ringleaders, and imposed martial law on the north. It was a turning-point, but not the one the Pilgrims had sought. The king's opponents had showed their hand and lost. Who was going to stand in his way now?

Cromwell, whose life had hung by a thread while the Pilgrims' army was on the march, now redoubled his efforts, and the Reformation reached into parish life like never before. In 1538 a systematic assault was made on shrines, relics and sites of pilgrimage across the country, with once-venerated objects being publicly ridiculed and then privately melted down, burned or pulverized. A swathe of traditional saints' days and fasting days were banned. Cowed, disorientated and concerned to save what fragments of their communities' former property they could, most parishes mutely complied. And by 1540, Cromwell had dissolved, not only the smaller monasteries targeted in 1536, but every single religious house in England: it was the biggest transfer of landed wealth in English history.

It was in 1540, however, that Cromwell's luck finally ran out, when a sudden, capricious surge of the king's rage cost him his head. There have been any number of explanations advanced for Cromwell's fall, ranging from the elaborate to the storybook-simple, but whatever you make of the frantic political manoeuvres of that spring and summer, the fundamental fact remains: even the most skilled gambler who plays dice with the devil will sooner or later lose a hand. This was what tended to happen to people whom Henry VIII was intimate with: it had happened to Cardinal Wolsey and Anne Boleyn before, and others, not least Archbishop Cranmer and the king's sixth wife Katherine Parr, came within a whisker of the same fate. One thing that perspective shows us is that Cromwell's fall from power did not mean as much as it seemed to. Combined with a law

passed the previous year, the so-called Act of Six Articles, which declared that the king would hold fast to a series of traditional Catholic doctrines, Cromwell's death encouraged English Catholics to believe that the tide had turned and the worst was over. But this was a spasm of homicidal paranoia, not a carefully considered change of direction. Henry VIII had come to enjoy his self-image as the purifier of the English Church, as well as the accompanying profits. A long-delayed royal progress to the north of England in 1541 brought a shocked king face to face with the continued veneration of images and statues there, and a fresh purge of 'idolatry' followed. Archbishop Cranmer persuaded the king to introduce a new English-language form for processional prayers in 1544. Those prayers did not bring victory in the ruinously expensive wars with France and Scotland, and so in late 1545 a new law gave the king the power to seize the endowments of chantries, colleges and virtually any other church foundation he pleased. In 1546 he seriously considered systematically stripping the assets of England's two universities, before deciding that it tickled his fancy more to find an ostentatious new college at each of them instead.

By then Henry was already seriously ill. When he finally died in early 1547, his crown passed to his nine-year-old son. The question was, who would rule in the boy's name; and whether by chance or not, in the last two months of the old king's life, the murderous dance of court politics had lurched decisively against religious conservatives. When the music stopped on 27 January, Bishop Gardiner, the leading conservative churchman, was once again frozen out of favour, and the duke of Norfolk, the leading conservative nobleman, was only hours from being beheaded. (The king's death saved him: the new regime was a little less homicidal, though the six years in prison he enjoyed instead permanently broke his health.) In what amounted to an internal coup, the government of England was seized by a determined clique of Protestants, headed by the king's swashbuckling uncle, Edward Seymour, the brother of Henry VIII's third wife. Seymour became duke of Somerset and Lord Protector. England has never been ruled by a government whose views are so sharply out of step with the country as a whole.

There was more to the programme which this government pushed insistently through over the next six years than simple destruction. Yet traditionalists could be forgiven for feeling that way. A new set of royal injunctions ordered every parish to 'take away, utterly extinct, and destroy all shrines, covering of shrines, all . . . pictures, paintings, and all other monuments of feigned miracles, pilgrimages, idolatry and superstition: so that there remain no memory of the same'. Even before the injunctions were issued, it had begun. Protestant provocateurs were attacking images, rightly confident that no one would stop them. In November 1547, even the great 'rood' (crucifix) in St Paul's Cathedral in London was desecrated. Printers began producing outspokenly evangelical works, viciously mocking pieties that had once been universally respected. No one was willing to print books that made the opposite case. In case parish priests were inclined to argue, the regime suspended all preaching licences until a new wave of preachers could be approved. In the meantime, an official set of printed sermons were sent to every parish, and reluctant priests were required to read them aloud.

The regime's determination was sharpened by its desperate need for cash, as Protector Somerset hurled himself into a fresh and ultimately doomed war with Scotland and France. In late 1547 the regime did what Henry VIII had threatened, and dissolved all chantries and collegiate churches, the universities alone excepted. This second dissolution is now less well-known than the assault on the monasteries, but its impact was comparable. Another vast swathe of property passed into royal hands. These endowments had supported many thousands of priests, almost as many as held parish posts, allowing them to act as teachers, scribes or in other roles vital to local communities: they were now pensioned off on a pittance. The prayers they had said and the sacraments they had celebrated on behalf of the deceased parents, grandparents and children of their parishes now simply lapsed. The principal link between the worlds of the living and the dead

had been severed.

The ratchet of change accelerated. In 1548, as the chantries and colleges were being shuttered, traditional liturgical practices like the use of holy water were banned and a new English-language order for the mass was implemented. One by one, the senior clergy who objected were deprived of office, imprisoned or driven into exile: but not killed, a sign that this regime lacked both Henry VIII's self-assurance and his vengefulness. In 1549, the most imposing physical monuments of the old religion – the roods and the consecrated stone altars – were destroyed. Every one of the nine thousand parish churches in medieval England and Wales will have had a rood loft, a life-size carved crucifix atop the screen separating the chancel from the nave, with the dying Christ flanked by equally life-size figures of his mother and of the apostle John. Not a single one of these images now survives. An ominously titled Act of Uniformity required that, from the feast of Pentecost 1549, every parish abandon its old liturgy in favour of a complete new English order of service, the Book of Common Prayer.

Again, we might imagine that there is only so much unwelcome radicalism that rulers can foist on their people before they push back. In the summer of 1549, a wave of unrest swept across much of England, stirred chiefly by economic woes. The population had been growing for decades, slowly pushing up rents, impoverishing peasants and enriching landowners. That situation was now sharply worsened by a surge of inflation, as a cash-strapped government began debasing the coinage to fund its wars. There was rioting, looting and attacks on landowners. There were encampments, as alarmingly well-ordered troops of protesters assembled to petition their rulers for redress. Some of them wrapped themselves in the old religion. In Hampshire and Sussex there was talk of marching under a banner of Christ's wounds, like the Pilgrims of 1536.

In the south-west, England's most persistently rebellious corner, it went beyond encampments. There had been disturbances in Cornwall in 1547 and 1548, including the lynching of a senior cleric. The rebellion of 1549 was much more serious. The Cornish rebels focused not on economic woes, but on religious change. In 1536 the trigger had been the assault on the monasteries. This time it was the new Prayer Book, which the rebels dismissed as a 'Christmas game', a parody of true religion. They marched east, hoping to rally the region to their cause.

But they made it no farther than Devon, and the support they found even there was less than they had hoped. The city of Exeter held out against them, before being relieved by a royal army. The rebels were now pursued west, cornered and slaughtered, despite attempts to surrender. Dozens of priests, the presumed fire-starters of the rebellion, were killed in reprisals. Once again, a moment when the popular will might have forced a change of direction had come and gone.

For across England, most of the 'campers' seem if anything to have aligned themselves with the new religion, not the old. Protector Somerset's favoured preachers had spent two years blaming the country's woes on the greed of landowners and presenting their own moral crusade as the solution – a stance which may seem naïve but was, it must be said, sincerely meant. Whether the 'campers' of 1549 truly accepted such a claim or merely reckoned it was wise to adopt their rulers' cant, a great many of them couched their economic complaints in the regime's religious rhetoric. Somerset, in truth unable to do anything else, pretended to listen to them. Most of them dispersed without serious incident as the summer wore on. Only in Norfolk did a combination of specific local woes and a ham-handed government response lead to serious violence, the incident known to history as Kett's Rebellion, which ended with a mercenary army slaughtering thousands at the battle of Dussindale on 27 August 1549.

The political fall-out from this summer of chaos was dramatic. Somerset was forced out of power,

and the government took on a steely new face. Its dominant figure was now the victor of Dussindale, John Dudley, the earl of Warwick, who soon elevated himself to the title which he is mostly remembered by, duke of Northumberland. But once the dust cleared from an autumn of furious political intrigue, it was clear that this reconstituted regime was not going to change its religious policy. It was still dominated by convinced Protestants, including the precocious young king himself. The ratchet of change accelerated. Further asset-stripping, extending even to parishes' communion silver. A new, more radical revision of the Prayer Book. A new set of Forty-Two Articles of Religion, defining the English Church as unambiguously Reformed Protestant – the tradition which would later be called Calvinist. So, the rebellions of 1549, in the end, did the same as those of 1536: a dangerous brush with a popular opposition did not weaken the reformers, but strengthened them.

The political potency of religious traditionalism in England was at its lowest ever ebb during the final three and a half years of Edward VI's reign. The remaining conservative churchmen were prised out of office and replaced with Protestant zealots. Their lay supporters were left mute and bewildered, many of them clinging to the fantasy that when the king grew up he would be their good lord and restore true religion. These people, like the Kentish schoolmaster John Proctor, had gone along with Henry VIII's Reformation, swearing to accept him as Supreme Head of the Church and trusting that he and his heirs would be true to the faith they hoped he shared with them. Now that trust was going septic, but what could they do, apart from utter helpless prayers?

And then, in the summer of 1553, those prayers were answered. Instead of growing up to be a Protestant tyrant, the 15-year-old king died of tuberculosis. He tried to fix the succession in favour of a young Protestant cousin, who just so happened to be married to the duke of Northumberland's son, but the plan was carried out too ineptly and smelled too much of trickery to succeed. Instead, in the century's most successful rebellion, Henry VIII's cast-off eldest daughter, Mary, swept to the throne. The wave of popular support that she rode to power reflected her perceived legitimacy more than her religion as such, but it was immediately obvious that England's 20-year heretical nightmare was over. The people who had been cowed into collaboration by Henry VIII and bewildered into silence by Edward VI could now cheer. Perhaps they were not actively demanding the full-scale return to papal obedience that followed, but they certainly accepted it. That at least we can deduce from the effort and expense they devoted to restoring their looted parish churches over the next five years, in the midst of continuing economic woes and, latterly, two devastating years of epidemics and near-famine.

Of course, their relief was short-lived. Although Queen Mary quickly married, the royal pregnancy which was announced and widely celebrated turned out to be a mirage. When she died in 1558, she was as childless as her young brother had been. Unlike him, she was too wise or too cowardly to try to rig the succession and accepted that the throne would pass to her Protestant half-sister Elizabeth. The survivors of Edward VI's Protestant establishment reassembled. It looked as if it was all going to begin again, and as if nothing had changed.

That is not quite how things turned out. True, after a few months of delicate politicking, the new queen enacted a set of religious policies which broadly reset the dial to where it had been in the last year of King Edward's life. There was once again an English Book of Common Prayer enforced by an Act of Uniformity and a sweeping set of royal injunctions banning all the pieties and ornaments so painstakingly restored under Mary. There was almost a clean sweep of the bishops, many of Elizabeth's newcomers being radicals who had returned from years in exile drinking at the wellsprings of Protestant purity in Switzerland and Germany. The restored monasteries were closed, and royal commissioners patiently went from church to church purging them of 'idolatry'. The most obvious difference was that this time, death did not intervene. Elizabeth kept her so-

called settlement of religion in place for almost 45 years, and her successor James I did no more than tweak it. England's religion was not only broken but forcibly reset in a new shape and held there long enough that the bones knitted.

But this bleak story of England's Deformation is not quite adequate. For one thing, as we shall see in the following lectures, by the start of Elizabeth's reign it was becoming impossible to ignore the fact that England genuinely did have a mass Protestant movement, albeit still a small one. For another, Elizabeth's Reformation was less a simple restoration of her brother's than a kind of effigy of it, without its relentless drive to uproot. Her own idiosyncratic but stubborn affection for the old ways made its mark and helped some of her traditionalist subjects to feel that they were not entirely voiceless in this new world.

Most importantly, for those traditionalists, the world had been transformed by Mary's reign. She had failed to save Catholic England, but she had saved English Catholicism. The traditionalists who had been paralysed and impotent under Edward VI were, under their new heretical monarch, energized and grimly ready. Elizabeth hoped to persuade a number of Mary's bishops to accept her new settlement: men like Cuthbert Tunstall, the elderly bishop of Durham who had openly supported Henry VIII's Reformation and had tried to work with Edward VI's. But he refused, and so did all but one of the others, the one exception being an undistinguished Welsh bishop whose reward was to be allowed to serve out the last four years of his life undisturbed. For everyone else, the battle lines were now clear: English Catholics – a term we can now begin to use with meaning – knew where they stood. They had lost their taste for helpless conformity.

Most of the stubborn Marian ex-bishops lived out their lives in Elizabeth's prisons. A younger generation of leaders chose exile, plotting their eventual return. They bombarded the new regime with printed polemics and worked to drum up Continent-wide support for their cause, the most obvious fruit of which was a new seminary for English Catholics, established at Douai in the Netherlands in 1568.

But most of those who were now thinking of themselves as Catholics remained in England. Some chose to be 'recusants', a newly created legal category, defiantly refusing to attend Protestant worship and paying fines as a result; others became 'church papists', that is, papist at heart but nevertheless attending the established church, cloaking their Catholic allegiance in a show of outward conformity. What no one knew was how strong these Catholic remnants were. For a decade, Elizabeth and her ministers sedulously avoided confronting or provoking them, restricting themselves to carefully implementing the new settlement, progressively easing Catholics out of positions of influence, slowly placing a new generation of clerics in the parishes. The regime hoped that time was on their side; and feared that if 1536 or 1549 were repeated, they might not be lucky a third time.

The phoney war was brought to an end when a political crisis that had been simmering since the beginning of the reign boiled over. The crisis was, as it always was with the Tudors, the succession. Queen Elizabeth was unmarried and childless, and most of the serious candidates to succeed her were Catholics. This made her Reformation feel much less secure at the time than it looks in retrospect. By far the most plausible of those Catholic candidates was her cousin Mary, the queen of Scots, who spent the 1560s trying to position herself as Elizabeth's successor. This effort was so spectacularly unsuccessful that in 1567 Mary was deposed from her Scottish throne and by 1568 was imprisoned in England, suspected of having murdered her second husband. But as long as she breathed, she remained Elizabeth's likeliest heir. For Catholics, the prospect of a new queen who could reverse their fortunes at a stroke was too much to resist. In the autumn of 1569, amid a ferment of schemes and plots, two Catholic earls in England's north-east stumbled

into rebellion. Soon most of the region was in arms. There were bonfires of Protestant Prayer Books. The Catholic Mass was celebrated in Durham Cathedral. The earls prepared to march south.

And once again, the threat evaporated. Too few men rallied to the earls' banner. Their hopes hinged on liberating the imprisoned Scottish queen, but she was whisked south long before they could reach her. A royal army was assembled with daunting speed but met no resistance. The earls' small force ebbed away as they ran out of money, and they fled to Scotland, where the deposed queen's enemies quickly did their best to curry favour with England by hunting them down. England's Catholics evidently had spirit, but it was suddenly plain, they no longer had numbers. A second, desperate rising in Cumberland was bloodily put down in February 1570, and Elizabeth's soldiers now took full advantage of their opponents' evident weakness. What followed was a systematic, punitive campaign of repression without precedent in Tudor England. Suspects were tortured. Explicit quotas of 20 to 40 per cent were set for the proportion of suspects who should be executed. At least six hundred were killed. There was little pretence of justice: this was exemplary terror, and it worked. Catholic England would never rebel again.

The survivors, both at home and abroad, faced two choices. The first was laid out for them by Pope Pius V, who, in the wake of the risings, issued a bull excommunicating England's heretical queen and calling on her subjects to rise up against her. In this defiant spirit, the seminary at Douai and the others that joined it were training English Catholic exiles and sending them back home as missionaries, stiffening spines, keeping underground networks alive, and bringing the cutting edge of Counter-Reformation Catholicism to England's shires. In 1579, a recently founded English college in Rome itself was taken over by the age's most formidable missionary order, the Jesuits, who quickly made themselves the leaders of English Catholic resistance. This movement's message to ordinary Catholics was to be resolute; to shun conformity; to wait and pray; and to be ready. Meanwhile, the high command laid plans. Elizabeth might be assassinated. The Scottish queen might be freed. The king of Spain's Armada might transport a Catholic army to Kent, and an army of English Catholics might rise up to join him.

These hopes were not ridiculous. The regime took them immensely seriously. But realistic or not, the one thing we know is that they came to nothing. At best, they helped England's Catholics to become a stubborn minority, cherishing their martyrs and holding to the faith of their fathers for centuries to come. The cost was high. It was already plain that the Elizabethan state was perfectly ready to shed Catholic blood. The missionary priests met a storm of persecution. Henry VIII had executed dozens of papal loyalists, charging them with treason on the basis that they were recognising a foreign prince, the Pope, over their own natural sovereign. But no one had died in this way between 1544 and 1573. A trickle of deaths in the 1570s turned into a flood in the 1580s and 1590s: nearly two hundred in all. The fines for recusancy were ramped up to unpayable levels. Torture was again authorized. Simply to be a Catholic became, in effect, presumptive evidence of treason.

So it is no surprise that some English Catholics were tempted by the other choice: to emphasize their loyalty to their queen, and to try to find a way to practise their faith without betraying their country. The Jesuits staunchly opposed such compromises, and by the late 1590s the English mission was bitterly divided over this issue into pro- and anti-Jesuit parties. Elizabeth's regime, naturally, did everything it could deliberately to stir up trouble among these opposing Catholic parties. Rome eventually had to intervene to settle the dispute, and the compromisers were slapped down. As if to emphasize the point, in 1605 one group of very uncompromising Catholics nearly pulled off the most audacious plot of them all: to blow up the new King James I and his entire parliament with gunpowder.

Yet it was the compromisers who had time on their side. There would be no more spectacular plots. Regular persecution came to an end too. King James's diplomatic opening to Europe's Catholic powers, and especially his son King Charles I's marriage to a Catholic princess who was allowed to practise her faith at court, gave English Catholics friends in high places once again. There were spasms of bloody panic during the Civil War of the 1640s, and the Exclusion Crisis and the imaginary 'Popish Plot' of the late 1670s, but aside from such feverishly paranoid moments, it slowly became clear that a kind of equilibrium had been reached. England's Deformation was not going to be reversed by some political *deus ex machina*. Nor were England's Catholics going to be exterminated. They and their Protestant neighbours would have to work out a way of living together.

The Sussex town of Arundel points the way. This was the realm of the Fitzalan family, the earls of Arundel, who were staunchly loyal both to their Catholic religion and to their Protestant monarchs. In the Middle Ages, the town's collegiate church had also housed the Fitzalan family's chapel, with a simple iron gate separating the two. When Henry VIII seized the church's assets in 1544, the earl secured a unique coup: he managed to buy back the chapel as his private property. And so from then until now, St Nicholas' church in Arundel has been an entity at once unique and a microcosm of all England: a divided church housing a frozen conflict. Most of the building is the Protestant (or now, rather, Anglican) parish church, where the monarch is acknowledged as Supreme Governor. But on the other side of the gate – a gate that still stands, that was never unlocked between 1544 and 1977, and has only been opened a handful of times since – stands a Catholic chapel. This was of course illegal, but as long as the Fitzalans and their heirs the Howards pretended to conceal it, successive Protestant governments were willing to play along.

The pretence that England was no longer a Catholic country was simply the same game played on a grander scale. In fact, Catholicism is built into the very architecture of post-Reformation England. To ignore the fact that only a gate separates the two takes a continuous effort of the will. Whether you see that gate as a disfiguring scar, or as the kind of fence that makes for good neighbours, is up to you. But nothing would be simpler, or more destabilizing, than to swing it open.

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Further reading

Alec Ryrie, *The English Reformation: A Very Brief History* (2020)

Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cromwell: A Life* (2018)

Andy Wood, *The 1549 Rebellions and the Making of Early Modern England* (2007)

Krista J. Kesselring, *The Northern Rebellion of 1569: Faith, Politics and Protest in Elizabethan England* (2007)