



**Tudor Reformation**  
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'The Reformation', conventionally, means the process by which parts of Catholic Europe became Protestant. That process happened in England: but let's not be too distracted by it. From the point of view of law and of the sinews of the English state, the doctrinal, devotional and cultural transformations that we normally call The Reformation were so much froth: a by-product, or even a useful distraction. It's often said that the English Reformation was an act of state: a political event more than a religious one. That is not the whole truth, but it is a large part of it, and it's the part I'm going to dwell on in today's lecture. The Reformation may have transformed England's culture and religion, but it also brought the English state, and the British state that has succeeded it, into being: it still quietly and decisively shapes our national life today. And while the story I'll be telling is mostly an English one, that slippage between *English* and *British* is maybe its most important aspect: England's Reformation determined a set of relationships between the nations of Britain and Ireland that we still enjoy or endure five centuries on.

Medieval politics was marked by a long dance between 'church' and 'state' – or better, between the so-called 'spiritual' power wielded by the pope, bishops and great abbots, and the 'temporal' power wielded by princes, noblemen and cities. Sometimes these two spheres of power collided spectacularly; sometimes one of them fell into crisis, and the other took the chance to press its advantage. English history offered two notable examples of this. In 1170, a sudden and total breakdown of goodwill between King Henry II and his old friend and new archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket, led to Becket's murder, his canonisation as a saint, and a scandal which could easily have driven the king from his throne. Forty years later, under Henry II's son King John, a spectacular breakdown of relations between the crown and Pope Innocent III led to the effective excommunication of the entire country for several years, and eventually a humiliating royal submission in which the king actually made the pope sovereign ruler of England. This catastrophe not only led to the further royal humiliation known as Magna Carta, but also gave King John a reputation that has remained toxic down to the present – despite the Tudors' attempts to turn him into a hero of English national resistance, and even despite Shakespeare's valiant stab at rewriting the myth in those terms. The lesson of these two disasters is not that one side or another won out in the end – in both cases, the church probably won on points – but that the conflict itself was desperately damaging to both sides. This is why, despite the obvious potential for conflicts between spiritual and temporal powers, it was very rare for them to get out of control in this way. In general both sides recognized that working together was in everyone's interest. Instead of rivals, the spiritual and temporal powers were generally collaborators: staffed by members of the same great families, sharing the same ambitions for godly good order. The temporal powers were the Church's indispensable guardians and patrons. The spiritual power was the monarchs' indispensable reservoir of legitimacy and of bureaucratic expertise.

If pressed, both sides could be persuaded to make dramatic claims. The popes had, since the eleventh century, claimed superiority over kings, and in the early fourteenth century Pope Boniface VIII, who was locked in another of those mutually destructive struggles, this time with the king of France, declared that it is 'absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff'. In theory, this allowed popes unilaterally to eject kings from their thrones,

something which occasionally they had tried to do, with varying degrees of success – and which, as we will see, they tried again during the Reformation era. Periodically kings pushed back against these claims, whether by defying individual popes or promulgating laws which contradicted papal privileges. In England, most famously, since 1353 a statute called *praemunire* had criminalized attempts by English subjects to appeal to Rome over their king's head. This statute was not a declaration of independence from the papacy: it was a vaguely worded gesture of defiance, a warning growl that the church, whatever it might want to say about itself, would be well-advised in practice not to overstep its bounds.

Beneath all this posturing, however, the ground was steadily shifting. The papacy's political and legal power was ebbing away. Boniface VIII's defiance of the French king had ended in the pope's being seized and beaten by French troops, treatment from which he died a month later, and for most of the rest of the century the papacy as an institution was relocated to Avignon in southern France and was more or less under French control. An attempt to break free of this so-called Babylonical captivity in 1377 led to an even worse disaster, a forty-year schism in which there were two, and latterly three, rival popes, a catastrophe which was only brought to an end when a General Council of the Church, consisting of the assembled bishops from around Europe, deposed the rival claimants and installed a new one in their place: hardly a resounding affirmation of papal authority. The reunited papacy was a shrunken thing, from now on an office held almost exclusively by Italians, struggling at times even to retain its own territorial independence, its moral authority compromised by the dominance of families such as the Borgia and Medici. By the early sixteenth century, there was a tacit understanding that the papacy would continue to claim outlandish powers; that monarchs would acknowledge them in theory; and that no pope would risk the embarrassment of trying to exercise them.

But the papacy did retain very real powers were of a more prosaic kind. Rome's bureaucratic and legal reach was pervasive. The church courts were parallel to, independent of and largely separate from the secular courts of the temporal powers. All Christian rulers had to take into account a body of international law that was beyond their control. The comparison between the medieval Church and the modern European Union is a cliché, but with good reason. Both are entities whose messy reality does not quite live up to the high ideals and whose aspirations to supranational governance are honoured chiefly with lip-service, but whose power is pervasive: a bureaucracy that is inescapable and indispensable, woven into the fabric of Europe's law. It could be resisted, exploited, or negotiated with, but it could not be ignored, and as for leaving it – well, easier said than done.

This pattern suited England's first two Tudor kings very well. Like many of their predecessors, Henry VII and Henry VIII loudly proclaimed their loyalty to Rome, quietly defended their own sovereignty, and steadily chipped away at the legal privileges of the English Church. The most controversial issue was whether English churchmen should be subject to the normal criminal law, rather than, as had traditionally been the case, to the rather more lenient church courts. Both kings pared away the Church's privileges. In 1514–15 the leading bishops pushed back against such infringements on their rights. It was a very traditional spat: what is revealing is how it was resolved. The English Church's rapidly rising star, Thomas Wolsey, brokered a deal whereby the king and his secular lawyers conceded the Church's theoretical independence. The pope then granted the English state legal powers which amounted to those they had been trying to seize. The fiction of spiritual authority was preserved. Real power shifted another notch.

The same pattern held good across much of Europe when the Reformation crisis hit. By the mid-1520s, Martin Luther's movement was offering European princes something unprecedented: a real choice whether or not to remain loyal to Rome. Even those who were never tempted by heresy and schism were aware that the mere fact of choosing gave them a new leverage in dealings with the Church. A canny ruler like King James V of Scots, Henry VIII's nephew, could turn his avowed

determination 'to banish the foul Lutheran sect' into a protection racket. King James's loyalty to Rome was real, but its price was swingeing new taxes on the Scottish Church, and lucrative church offices for his own illegitimate infant children. This is how England ought to have gone: banging the drum relentlessly for papal authority while quietly hollowing that authority out.

But in 1527, Henry VIII butted up against one of the papacy's few undisputed powers: matrimonial law. The root of the crisis, plainly, was Henry's determination to trade in his first wife for a newer model, and to do so in good conscience. Generally it was in everyone's interests to try to find a way of making this work. Yet the tangled specifics of the case made it horribly difficult in law and not much better in politics. Henry's queen Catherine of Aragon had, for a few months, been married to his elder brother Prince Arthur, who died in 1502 at the age of 15. She was then pledged to the young Henry, but to marry a brother's widow in this way was normally illegal, and so a dispensation was required from Pope Julius II. The marriage had duly proceeded in 1509, but this unusual situation left a genuine seed of doubt about its legitimacy. Suddenly, in 1527, making that seed sprout into serious grounds for cancelling the marriage became the most urgent political project in England.

Cardinal Wolsey was the king's cardinal, and it was his job to make this happen. If anyone could have done it, he could. He set about the traditional two-step, protecting the papacy's dignity while securing the outcome his king needed. It was not impossible. The king's legal case was flimsy but not imaginary; Wolsey was a redoubtable operator; and if all other things had been equal, any pope would have tried to give an English king what he wanted. There were paths through the labyrinth. But the politics were poisonous. This began with Queen Catherine herself, who was every bit as determined to defend the validity of her marriage and the legitimacy of her daughter as her husband was to disavow her. Her unbending insistence that she was and would remain married to the man who now reviled her was the principle roadblock to any resolution. Not least, it drew in her nephew, Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, the most powerful prince in Europe, who was not only concerned to defend his aunt's honour but was also most reluctant to see England's king marry a woman he believed to be a French agent. And if it came to who had a better grasp on the pope's attention, Henry VIII ruled part of a small and faraway island, while Charles V had actually occupied Rome and briefly imprisoned the pope in 1527. Worse, Henry VIII was every lawyer's nightmare: the client who thinks he knows best. Wolsey's subtle strategies, which would have resolved the case with creative use of technicalities rather than stirring declarations, did not suit Henry's increasingly sulfurous mood. As often as Wolsey tried to soothe papal sensibilities, the king erupted with assertions that no pope had ever had the power to issue dispensations such as the one which had permitted the marriage, or with accusations that Wolsey and other English clergy were, merely by following proper legal procedure, showing more loyalty to a foreign bishop than to their divinely ordained king.

In 1528 Wolsey seemed to have triumphed: seizing the right diplomatic moment, he managed to persuade the pope to delegate the case to a special court which would meet in England, presided over by himself and one other cardinal. But the victory that seemed at hand kept dancing out of reach. Wolsey's colleague on the legatine court, Cardinal Campeggio, was determined to reach a negotiated solution, such as persuading Queen Catherine to become a nun – a manoeuvre of dubious legality, but that scarcely mattered, because she of course bluntly refused to consider it. Instead, she set out to torpedo the legal process. By producing a carefully concealed alternative copy of the original dispensation at the right moment, she invalidated the court's commission, delaying the trial for months. When it at last got underway at Blackfriars in London, on 31 May 1529, the queen immediately denied the court's impartiality and appealed formally to Rome. She gave a bravura performance before the court. The entire case Wolsey had constructed turned depended on the claim that the queen's teenage marriage to Prince Arthur had been consummated, a question which, in the nature of things, was not amenable to definitive proof. The queen now insisted that her first marriage had not been consummated, that she had come to

Henry as a virgin, and that he knew it. According to one witness, she challenged him in open court to swear an oath that this was not true, which the king would not do: he had a finely balanced conscience. When news of Katherine's appeal reached Rome, the pope revoked the court's commission. Before news of this reached England, Wolsey had already suspended the proceedings. More than two years on, the cardinal had achieved precisely nothing.

Henry's lustful determination was unshakable; so was his conviction that he was acting in good conscience. Yet he could not browbeat Rome into conceding. Other issues might have been fudged, but matrimonial law was to the sixteenth-century papacy what the principle of freedom of movement is to the modern European Union: a core competency which cannot be compromised. Under this intolerable pressure, something had to give, and that something was the king's religious convictions. It is the only moment in this lecture's story when a genuine religious conversion played a decisive role. For that is the only word that will do here. At some point in 1529 or early 1530, aided by proto-Protestants who had his ear, Henry VIII came to an astonishing conclusion: that one pope's illegitimate dispensation and another pope's intransigence proved that the papacy as such was entirely without legitimacy. Indeed, it did not even exist. The so-called 'pope' – the word would soon become unsayable – was merely an Italian bishop, heir to lies and conspiracies which had deceived Christendom for centuries until he, Henry Tudor, had finally seen through them. Plainly, self-evidently, the Church in England ought to be under the authority of the man God had appointed to rule the country as a whole.

The clergy now seemed to the king to be traitors, kowtowing to a foreign priest and his corrupt laws rather than obeying their lawful sovereign. The first move would have been farcical if anyone had dared laugh. Henry had, a decade earlier, worked hard to secure Cardinal Wolsey appointment as a papal legate, which amongst other things had allowed him to preside over the abortive Blackfriars trial. A few months later, in October 1529, on the basis of those very powers, Wolsey was accused under the law of *praemunire*: the very fact of being a papal legate, he was now told, was an offence to the king's authority. The same charge was brought against a group of other senior clerics in 1530. Then in 1531 the entire English church was collectively charged with the same crime, for the offence of presuming to operate courts and systems of law as it had done for centuries. This was plainly an overreach, and the immediate crisis was defused by negotiating a pardon in return for a substantial fine, but this had never been about money. When the matter came to a head in 1532, the crux was the English Church's independence from royal control. When they demurred at his demands, he accused them of being 'but half our subjects, yea, and scarce our subjects'. Why, he now wondered, do bishops even swear an oath to the pope? Surely that shows they are traitors at heart?

And so, under excruciating pressure, they gave in. The 1532 'Submission of the Clergy', which accepted that parliament would have ultimate authority over the English Church, was a revolutionary moment: as Thomas More recognized, for he immediately resigned as Lord Chancellor. It reflected the king's furious determination, but also the ruthless strategic brilliance of his new omniscient fixer, Thomas Cromwell. With his water-diviner's nose for the subterranean currents of real power, Cromwell had discovered a fount of law that could wash away anything the king wanted to be cleansed. The doctrine that statute law, law enacted by parliament and approved by the king, was sovereign – absolute, final and beyond question or appeal – has since 1532 become such a truism of the English constitution that it is hard for us to feel the novelty and power of its radical simplicity. It became the procedural trump card wielded by every Tudor regime. As long as a parliament could be persuaded or browbeaten into cooperating (which was not always the case), a monarch could in law do almost anything.

Cromwell was a pragmatic politician, not a visionary constitutional reformer, but he certainly had a sense of what this new tool he had fashioned could do, and he set about using it. A series of statutes progressively cut the legal ties connecting England to Rome. By the time the 1534 Act of

Supremacy formally recognized the king as the Supreme Head, immediately under Christ, of the Church of England, it was almost a *fait accompli*. Over the years that followed, the scope of statute law was progressively expanded. The principality of Wales, for example, had for centuries been governed on simple royal authority, direct or delegated: but now, statutes passed in 1536 and 1543 created a new framework for its government, bringing it into line with English norms. Defining the Church's doctrines, and pursuing those who defied it for heresy, had once been ecclesiastical matters: a series of statutes, especially in 1539 and 1543, secularized them. Witchcraft had been a crime for the church courts – until the Witchcraft Act of 1542. Even the succession to the crown itself, the untouchable mystery at the heart of a hereditary monarchy, was determined by an Act of 1543. That Act gave no rationale for its peculiar provisions, but it did not need to. Asserting the king-in-parliament's sovereign will was enough.

The most important feature of the 1534 Act of Supremacy was its vagueness. It said that the king was 'the only supreme head in earth of the Church of England called *Anglicana Ecclesia*'. But as that last phrase suggests, 'the Church of England' was not a terribly familiar category. Indeed, up till now it had most commonly been invoked by churchmen defying the crown: to go back to those two iconic catastrophes of church-state relations in medieval England, Thomas Becket was revered as a martyr for the Church of England's liberties, and Magna Carta required the king to promise to respect the Church of England's privileges. Now Henry VIII, as well as riding roughshod over Magna Carta and pulverising Thomas Becket's shrine, was seizing the term 'the Church of England' for his own purposes, applying it and all its nationalistic overtones to the new schismatic entity he was creating. His critics were asked where their loyalties lay: the Church of England or the bishop of Rome? Framed that way, the answer that had once been unquestioned orthodoxy sounded like self-evident treason.

And if this new Church of England was slippery, it was even less clear what the king's new title of 'Supreme Head' might mean. The title's powers were never and have never been defined. To define it would either be to enrage the king by imposing limits on it, to appal Christendom by openly conceding its extent, or both. As a result, the Supremacy was in practice negotiated over the following years and decades, a process which is still continuing. Henry's own view of the Supremacy was dizzyingly high. He saw the sacred kings of ancient Israel as his models, and even toyed with the idea that kingship gave him quasi-priestly authority, such as the power to ordain. He certainly believed he had the authority to micromanage his church's rites, liturgy and doctrines. He publicly argued points of detail with his bishops, and even tried to rewrite one of the Ten Commandments: this most covetous of kings reckoned that God's command not to covet ought only to apply to coveting 'wrongfully or unjustly'. As with several of his other more eye-popping positions, Archbishop Cranmer gently persuaded him to back down on this one, and none of his successors were quite so cavalier. Elizabeth I, recognizing the widespread disquiet with the title of Supreme Head, especially as applied to a woman, chose in 1559 to change it to Supreme Governor – which, since it was still undefined, changed nothing at all in law, but signalled that she intended a certain restraint. Even so, like her father and brother, she launched her religious policy with a sweeping set of royal injunctions for every parish, resting on her sole authority. She also retained a tendency to 'pronounce . . . resolutely and peremptorily' on Church matters, as if she were pope – at least, that is what her second archbishop of Canterbury told her. She proved him right by her response, which was to keep him under house arrest for the rest of his life.

But I have already started doing it: telling a story that is about the idiosyncrasies and personal foibles of individual kings and queens. That has become such a conventional part of the narrative of the English Reformation that we have lost sight of how bizarre it is. In no other territory caught up in the drama of the Protestant Reformation, not even Sweden, were the personalities of hereditary rulers so decisive a part of the story. If we look at many of the historic oddities of the Church of England – its weird mixture of firmly Protestant doctrinal articles with much more traditional liturgy and ceremonial; its retention of cathedrals, entities which served no coherent

purpose in a Protestant church but which nurtured the musical traditions Elizabeth I enjoyed – we have to conclude that they were not produced by some genius of Anglicanism, but are what happens if you place a church under the control of a series of lay people with amateur theological interests and no one to stop them. To be precise, that arrangement might be predicted to produce two results. One is a series of essentially harmless, even random quirks. If Henry VIII disapproved of former nuns getting married, if Elizabeth I liked having a crucifix in her private chapel ... well, it might be that neither of them had a very convincing theological rationale for their positions, but who was going to sit them down and tell them so? But the second result is more systemic: if your church's doctrines are determined by a king or queen, then they will have a pervasive royal flavour. Henry VIII's transforming vision of his own God-given authority may have been unique to him, but the fact that his successors all retained the Royal Supremacy he had created is not a random quirk of personality. In most of the family of Reformed Protestant churches to which the post-Reformation Church of England belonged, bishops were replaced by elected councils and synods, ministers drew their authority from their colleagues and from their congregations, and moral discipline was imposed with a degree of disregard for rank and title; many in the Church of Scotland aspired to treat their king as a mere member of the Church no different from any other, not that they ever stood much chance of success. In the Church of England, such aspirations never had a chance to draw breath. The Church of England retained bishops, not because they were essential to true Christianity, but because they were appointed by the crown, served the royal dignity and secured royal control over the Church. King James I, who as king of Scots had had more than his fill of uppity synods, gave a famously tart reply to English churchmen who dreamed of abolishing bishops: 'no bishop, no king'. That was not a theological statement, it was about power. Likewise, the ambition cherished by Protestant reformers from Archbishop Cranmer onwards for the English Church to create a fully comprehensive system of moral discipline was repeatedly rebuffed: not for any reason of theological or legal principle, but because no monarch was willing to countenance a new system of church law that might defy secular authority.

Nor was it only a matter of structures and laws. The Church of England's liturgies and its officially authorized homilies – collectively, the most effective broadcast network open to any government in this period – routinely prayed and gave thanks for the monarch, while never so much as hinting that the ruling powers might be anything other than simply righteous. Martin Luther, the first begetter of the Protestant Reformation, had believed that 'a wise prince is a mighty rare bird, and an upright prince even rarer. They are generally the biggest fools or the worst scoundrels on earth.' No hint of that sentiment made it into the Church of England's formularies. The anniversary of Queen Elizabeth's accession became a feast day marked by a special service of thanksgiving. Every post-Reformation parish church was required to display the royal arms prominently, almost the only pictorial image in these stripped-bare buildings. The Church of England generally refused to recognize 'saints' in the Catholic sense – but with one exception: after 1649, the beheaded Charles I was honoured as the 'Blessed King', 'Charles the Martyr'. In 1662 a commemoration of him was added to the Prayer Book's calendar. Astonishingly, even churches were dedicated to him as a saint; a handful remain to the present. Charles I is not in fact a very credible martyr for Anglicanism – this was the man who had been willing to accept Presbyterianism in 1648, in return for the chance to launch a second, doomed round of civil war. He was, however, certainly a martyr for the Royal Supremacy.

He was also its victim. His father James I had, in his other life as King James VI of Scots, seen up close what happened when a Protestant Reformation wriggled free of royal control, and once he had inherited England's more house-trained Reformation he was determined to maintain its discipline. He succeeded, but imagine he had he not done so. His son Charles I's religion was unusually quirky: he was captivated by a particular strand of ceremonialism that was unapologetic about drawing on Catholic piety. If King Charles had not also been Supreme Governor of the Church of England, with aspirations to the same role in Ireland and even in Scotland, those views would still have been controversial, but they would not have been felt by his more puritanical

subjects to be a mortal threat. They would not have driven Scotland and much of England to rebel against him in order to preserve their understanding of what a true Reformation was. The same vice trapped Charles' younger son, King James II, in the 1680s. James was driven from his throne not because England could not tolerate a Catholic as king, but because it could not tolerate a Catholic as Supreme Governor of the Church. The Royal Supremacy concentrated enormous power in the monarch's hands. As a result the country eventually decided that the monarch alone could not be trusted to exercise it.

For Henry VIII's decision not to define the Royal Supremacy had left open a momentous question: to what extent was the Royal Supremacy vested personally in the monarch, accountable only to God, and to what extent in the monarch-in-parliament, the entity which could create statute law? On the face of it, the 1534 Act of Supremacy was plain. It did not *make* the king Supreme Head of the Church, merely recognized that God had made him so. Still, it was an Act of Parliament, and the repeated recourse to statute law did make it look very much as if that was where final religious authority lay. The Book of Common Prayer derived its authority from parliament; so too did the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion which were enacted under Elizabeth. Parliament, however, was an increasingly secular body. Without the abbots of the great monasteries seated alongside the bishops, the Lords Spiritual no longer formed a majority in the House of Lords. It seemed increasingly incongruous that this assembly should wield such spiritual authority. The case for it was made most forcefully by the Elizabethan Church's most enduring theorist, Richard Hooker, who held a very high doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty over religion. It was rooted in his conviction that an English parliament represented the nation as a whole, and that all true English subjects were by definition members of the Church of England. For all his firm loyalty to his queen, this was a subversive sentiment. It came alarmingly close to the accusation allegedly made by Thomas More: that an English parliament was taking on itself the right to decide how God ought to govern his church, and so over-reaching its powers like the proverbial Canute. When parliament defied royal authority during the Civil War, royalists asked the question: would the next step be to decide on the existence of God by majority vote?

In fact, the tug-of-war between royal and parliamentary authority over the Church was never decisively resolved. Instead, the so-called 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688–9, when James II was deposed, changed its terms. That revolution set in motion a decisive shift of power away from monarchs: but that power was not transferred only to parliaments, but also to the ministers drawn from those parliaments who increasingly exercised what had once been royal powers on their monarchs' behalf. The two sets of powers have fared differently. Parliament's legal authority over English religion was unchallenged by the time of the 1688-9 revolution: the two Convocations, the English Church's own ancient synods which had been subordinate to parliament since 1532, ceased holding substantive meetings at all after 1717. But parliament's role looked increasingly odd. After the parliaments of Scotland and Ireland were merged into that of England in 1707 and 1801 respectively, and especially after the admission of Catholics and of Protestants outside the established churches to the British parliament in 1828–9, Hooker's claim that parliament spoke for the Church of England subsided from legal fiction to self-evident nonsense. During the nineteenth century, parliamentarians – like medieval popes before them – grew increasingly wary of attempting to exercise the authority they formally claimed. In 1919 this situation was somewhat regularized when parliament delegated its powers over the Church of England to a newly formed Church Assembly, subsequently re-formed in 1970 as the General Synod.

Even so, these bodies remain, in law, devolved bodies, dependencies of parliament, which ratifies and can in principle overrule their decisions. Notoriously, it did so in 1928, when the House of Commons blocked proposed (rather modest) revisions to the Book of Common Prayer – Conservative MPs overruling bishops and clergy on points of liturgy in a very Elizabethan manner. In 2012, when legislation to permit women bishops in the Church of England narrowly failed to reach the necessary supermajority in General Synod, the resulting outrage sparked serious talk of

parliament overturning the decision. When David Cameron, as prime minister, urged the Synod to 'get with the programme' and publicly mused about giving it 'a sharp prod', he was doing more than offering his private opinion as an Anglican layman. In 2014 the Synod obediently voted through a revised proposal. Parliamentary authority over the English Church, then, is sleeping but not dead. It does not need to be openly exercised for it to exert a gravitational pull.

Yet the authority claimed directly for the monarch under the Royal Supremacy also remains enormously important; it is merely no longer vested in the monarch personally. 'Royal prerogative' powers, exercised on the monarch's behalf by the prime minister, are a central part of Britain's makeshift constitution, as the constitutional alarms and excursions of the past few years have reminded us. In church matters, this chiefly affects the very many senior posts, including all bishoprics, which are so-called 'Crown appointments'. For centuries these appointments remained under direct government control. That has been progressively weakened, but even now, bishops are formally appointed by the prime minister on behalf of the crown. Until 2007 – astonishingly – the prime minister had a genuine choice of candidates for bishoprics, and while the Church committees could indicate who they favoured, a prime minister could overrule this and impose his or her own favoured candidate, as Margaret Thatcher did in 1987. It took a Scots Presbyterian prime minister, Gordon Brown, to confront and end this practice as the outrageous abuse it was.

Even with that last vestige of nakedly political control abandoned, however, the vast system of 'patronage' which governs the Church of England's appointments at every level remains in place. 'Crown appointments' are now more or less controlled by the Church's own institutions, which give a voice to its faux-democratic Synod. But even now most English parish priests are 'presented' for appointment by so-called 'patrons', who are often local landowners, or corporate entities like cathedrals or colleges, who have the legal right to nominate priests to particular parishes. This system is much less corrupt than in the days when it provided the narrative spine of many a nineteenth-century novel, but it still ensures that the congregations that constitute (and fund) the Church of England have a remarkably muted voice in their own pastoral care and governance. This is a direct legacy of the Tudor Reformations. The system of patronage has medieval roots, but it was when swathes of church lands were given into secular hands in the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI that the rights of patronage associated with those lands were transferred to their new, lay owners. There was no shred of theological justification for this, but those rights were property in the eyes of the law, and the new owners were unwilling to renounce them – not least because they were often able to use them to cream off substantial amounts of church income. Even at the time this looked indefensibly corrupt. In 1546 a future bishop of Ely, Richard Cox, prophesied that 'our posterity will wonder at us' for having permitted 'the wolves of the world' to subject the Church's ministry in this way to 'the greediness of a few'. Indeed we will. Over the centuries this stranglehold has been loosened, chiefly because landed wealth no longer dominates England as it once did, but the old lines of control persist. It was no accident that for many generations the Tory party, which represented England's landed interest, was also the political face of Anglicanism.

The legacy of the Tudor Reformation for the Church of England is perhaps obvious. But the final story I want to tell is even more consequential, perhaps also more malign. The Tudor Reformations transformed the relations between the peoples of the islands of Great Britain and Ireland. I already mentioned how the Reformation brought Wales fully into the structure of the English state. The so-called Acts of Union might be better known as the Acts for the Abolition of Wales, since under them Wales ceased to have any distinct legal existence, being treated as merely an extension of England. A notorious law of 1746 formalised this, declaring baldly that the statutory definition of England included Wales. This also applied in church life, with the bishoprics of Wales being part of the province of Canterbury and the church in the principality being known simply and unproblematically as the Church of England. And just as the Welsh language was denied any status in the secular law, so too the Church of England in Wales – the very



tortuousness of the terminology is telling – the Church of England in Wales was staffed by Englishmen; famously, not a single Welsh-speaking bishop was appointed in the entire 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1914, a law was passed by which the Welsh church was finally disestablished and a distinct entity called the Church in Wales was set up, although the First World War meant that this did not actually happen until 1920, when the driving force behind the law, David Lloyd George, had become prime minister. The new church kept its bishops, but also opted for the kind of conciliar, synodical structure of self-government that the British state had been opposing for centuries. In which respect, it is worth noting that both the legislation was passed in the teeth of ferocious opposition from the House of Lords, and that when it was eventually done, part of the deal was that a substantial slice of the Welsh church's property was declared to be national rather than church property, and was kept by the state. Just in case anyone had forgotten who always wins in the post-Reformation struggles between church and state on this island. At least there was now a church in Wales. A more general recognition in secular law that Wales itself existed would have to wait until the creation of the Welsh Office as a government department in 1965, and the passage of the Welsh Language Act in 1967.

Ireland was harder to digest. Although the island was formally a lordship of the English crown in medieval times, English control over large parts of it was nominal at best. The early Tudors were already discontented with this status quo, but Henry VIII's break with Rome made it intolerable – partly because his opponents in Ireland were quick to claim the mantle of papal loyalism, partly because the English lordship was of old based on a papal grant. In 1541 an Irish parliament declared Ireland to be a kingdom in its own right, with Henry VIII as its king. This set in motion over 60 years of intermittent but accelerating conflict as successive English regimes tried to turn their grand claims into reality, and as many of the Irish progressively hardened into resentment of the English and of the Protestant religion they were trying to impose. Finally, the gruelling Nine Years' War of 1594–1603 ended with England establishing genuine military control over the entire island for the first time ever.

One of the many prices of this victory was the long-term alienation of most of Ireland from both Englishness and Protestantism. England's solution was to import some instant Protestants, planting large numbers of Scottish and English settlers in Ulster, hitherto the heartland of anti-English resistance. In this fashion an inter-island conflict also became an intra-island one, as it has remained down to the present. Successive English and British governments have, between then and now, tried a great many solutions to the 'Irish question' that they created in the wake of the Reformation. Often – from the panic sparked by the Irish rebellion of 1641, through the Catholic emancipation crisis of the early nineteenth century and the late Victorian confrontations over Home Rule, to the Irish border crisis of 2019 – this 'question' has threatened to break British politics apart. There is a certain rough justice in this. The problems are, deep down, of the English and British state's creation. Yet the British population at large remains surprisingly ignorant of the tangled history that connects the two islands, broadly preferring – like successive generations of British politicians – not to think about Ireland until it forces itself on to their attention. Which, as a result, it periodically does.

Scotland's story is a considerably happier one, but is equally in the Reformation's shadow. Throughout the late medieval period, the kingdom of Scotland had guarded its hard-won independence against repeated English attempts at conquest, and had done so in part by an enduring strategic alliance with France against the shared 'auld enemy'. At first the Tudor Reformation seemed likely only to reinforce this pattern. Henry VIII's gauche attempts to persuade the Scots to join him in schism had no purchase in a kingdom which was served very well by the status quo. Another bloody, failed attempt at conquest in 1544–50 hardly helped. And then, in 1559–60, everything suddenly changed. France was threatening to turn from Scotland's ally into its overlord. The Scottish queen, Mary, was married to the French King Francis II; it seemed likely that their sons would be kings of a united realm in which Scotland would be a mere province.

Meanwhile, a burgeoning Protestant movement in Scotland – not least among the nobility – was butting up against the Franco-Catholic regime. When a military crackdown in 1559 against Protestant agitators sparked a much larger anti-French rebellion, it was too good an opportunity for the new, Protestant regime of Elizabeth I in England to ignore. By some mixture of good luck and good judgement, this time, for once, England's intervention north of the border was not only militarily decisive, but was managed politically in such a way that the bulk of the country's leaders came over to the pro-English, pro-Protestant cause. The rebels won their victory and it did not look or feel like an English conquest, not least because Elizabeth had so plainly been reluctant and indeed late to step in. The result was that the summer of 1560 saw a diplomatic revolution. Scotland's 250-year-old alliance with France was unceremoniously dumped; Scotland would henceforth be a Protestant state aligned with England, an alignment sealed by the deposition of its Catholic queen in 1567, her execution by her English cousin in 1587, and her Protestant son's succession to the English throne in 1603. By then some idealists had dusted off the name of an ancient Roman province and begun to apply it to the new entity that was slowly coming into existence on their shared island: 'Britain'. The Anglo-Scottish alliance that made Britain's existence possible has never been frictionless and has at moments looked fragile, but as I am saying this in early 2021 it is still just about standing. If and when that alliance is broken – and it certainly now feels more of a *when* than an *if* – it will be, as they used to say, the end of an old song. Perhaps it will also be a sign that these islands are, finally, collectively ready to move on from the legacy of the Tudor Reformation.

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