England's Protestant Reformation
Professor Alec Ryrie

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So far in this series of lectures on the English Reformation, we have been dealing with might-have-beens, with victims, with opponents, with opportunists and exploiters. I don't apologise for dwelling on those perspectives at length: they did constitute, between them, the experience of most English people. But it is true that the English Reformation was, for some people, neither an unwanted horror nor a tempting opportunity, but a pulse-quickening possibility, a moment eagerly to be seized. Threaded through all the grubby politicking is another story: one of ideas, and of faith, courage and renewal. Whether you are inclined to regard its protagonists as heroes or as fanatics, there is no doubting we are dealing with a different cast of characters from most of those we have heard from up till now. For many people both then and now, this is the 'real' English Reformation, a story which was suppressed at the time and has often been deliberately forgotten since, but will not go away.

In 1517 a German Augustinian friar named Martin Luther picked a high-profile fight with his local archbishop over his fundraising practices, a fight which quickly mushroomed into two dangerously intertwined conflicts. Luther was making his critique in the form of a sweeping set of theological principles which seemed to deny the basis not just of the letters of indulgence which had kicked off the whole argument, but also of most of the ministry the Church offered to its people, saying that all the true Christian needed was faith and the Word of God alone. His opponents in the hierarchy were responding, not by countering his arguments, but by insisting that Luther ought to submit humbly to the authoritative determinations of the Church. The only result was that Luther and his allies were soon defying the Church's authority as well as its teachings, and were doing so in printed pamphlets, sermons, ballads and a brushfire of rumour and excitement that was setting much of Germany by the ears. We can't yet call these people 'Protestants' – that word was only coined in 1529, and it would be some years after that before it became an accepted term for the whole movement. But there was, if not a party, a broad, loose movement which for want of a better word we can call *evangelical*, that is, literally, a movement of the Gospel, of the Christian good news. And if it seems breathtakingly self-assured, indeed presumptuous, for this new movement to lay claim to the Christian Gospel as its own property, well, breathtakingly self-assurance was very much this movement's keynote.

The heart of this fire was the German-speaking lands, where Martin Luther's uniquely inflammatory words were not damped down by translation, and where the particular politics of church and state made for bone-dry tinder. But sparks were quickly flying elsewhere, and everywhere they landed, some of them began to smoulder. The Netherlands, Denmark, Poland, Hungary. There was a surprising level of interest in Italy. France, with its long history of tetchy relations with the papacy, definitely looked promising. Perhaps the least promising of the major European territories was the larger of the island kingdoms off to the north-west. Not just for the political reasons we've mentioned in previous lectures, but structurally too, England was green wood for the heretics. The English church was unusually well-disciplined and well-led by European standards, without some of the more egregious scandals and abused that were common elsewhere. And it was also almost uniquely experienced in dealing with heresy: the so-called Lollard movement, which we'll come back to in a later lecture, had been sputtering away in

England for nearly a century and a half. Bishops and clergy elsewhere in Europe knew about heresy in theory; many of their English colleagues had direct and practical experience.

Even so, the sparks fell. The initial entry-points for the new doctrines, and the new mood of defiance that accompanied them, were the same as everywhere. Merchants plying the North Sea routes were early transmitters: as the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us afresh, international travellers are key vectors. A group of German merchants in London were arrested for possession of heretical books in 1526. 'Gospellers' and 'evangelicals' began to be spotted amongst Londoners too. Another critical entry point was the universities, Petri dishes for dangerous ideas. Scholars everywhere had long been granted a degree of freedom to explore provocative and questionable ideas: it was no accident that Luther's own protest erupted after having been incubated in a university setting for several years. And England's universities were particularly promising. Unlike neighbouring Scotland, with its three miniature institutions scattered across the country, England had chosen to keep its scholars concentrated in just two institutions, giving them each considerable critical mass. They both had a fair degree of legal independence, and their colleges and halls formed a rabbit-warren of jurisdictions. Neither one had a resident bishop breathing down their necks. And remarkably, given that England was in most respects an exceptionally centralised kingdom, neither one was in London; so the royal court was not breathing down their necks either. That perhaps limited their influence, not least because England's nascent printing industry was almost entirely concentrated in London, so scholars in Oxford and Cambridge could not rush provocative ideas into print the way Martin Luther had. But that also helped to avoid attracting attention. Plugged into the international world of Latin scholarship as they were, England's academics were amongst the first to hear the German friar's name. Luther's Latin books were on sale in Oxford as early as 1520. But Oxford, the university which had indirectly produced the Lollard movement, was twitchier about dangerous ideas. Cambridge, the younger upstart of the two, had recently put itself spectacularly on the map by hosting Europe's premier academic celebrity, Erasmus of Rotterdam, for a few years: England as a whole, and Cambridge in particular, had fallen good and hard for Erasmus' style of religion, which prioritised inner piety and simplicity over outward ritual, hierarchy and anything that could be called superstition. Luther was not a disciple of Erasmus', very much not, but to begin with plenty of people thought he was, and it's true that there were real common points between them. Cambridge, in other words, was fertile ground, and if not many scholars there became fully signed-up Lutherans – there was not really any such thing at this early date – there were certainly plenty of people who were Luther-curious, and who stayed up late into the night talking excitedly about the new ideas with their bright-eyed young friends, the way that students do. That mood of undergraduate excitement is one to hold onto. I said in the first lecture in this series that what Catholic reformers like Thomas More wanted to do, what he described in his famous *Utopia*, was to turn a society into a giant monastery. What the evangelicals and their successors who we can properly call Protestants wanted to do was to turn their society into a giant university, where everyone would spend their time earnestly debating doctrine, studying the Bible and fearlessly pursuing truth together. Before long this started to bubble out from the colleges. The first public crisis came at Christmas 1525, when a Cambridge friar was arrested following a sermon whose acerbic criticism of the church drew heavily on Luther. The church he preached in has been revamped of course, but they still have the pulpit. By the end of the decade there were networks of curious dabblers in evangelical ideas in both of England's universities.

One remarkable individual went further. In 1523 William Tyndale, who had been schooled at Oxford in Erasmus' idealism, proposed translating the New Testament into English. When he was denied permission, he did it anyway, moved to Germany to have his translation printed in 1525-6, and decisively threw in his lot with the reformers. He became the leader of a small but formidable group of evangelical exiles in the Low Countries, smuggling printed New Testaments and polemical tracts back into England. Book-running networks sprung up. Robert Forman, master of a Cambridge college turned rector of a wealthy London parish, oversaw a distribution web which

encompassed the City, both universities, Reading and Bristol. A few daring preachers, spreading out from the universities, began testing what they could get away with.

But England's well-oiled anti-heresy machine was not far behind them. Forman's network was cracked in 1528. As Lord Chancellor from 1529-32, Thomas More worked with the bishops in a formidable crackdown on the new heresies. Preachers were swiftly arrested. Satisfyingly, many of them could be persuaded to recant, but others held firm, and the regime was ready to follow through. Between 1530 and 1533, at least thirteen evangelicals were burned as unrepentant heretics, including the most brilliant of Tyndale's colleagues, John Frith, whose conscience would not let him sit safely abroad while his brethren at home suffered. A price was set on Tyndale's own head. Despite his extensive precautions, he was betrayed to the Netherlandish authorities in 1535 and executed the following year.

That should have been the beginning of the end of England's Protestant Reformation. The English church and state were more than capable of snuffing out such a movement, or at least reducing it to the level of an annoyance. But by the time of Tyndale's death everything had changed. Thomas More himself had now been put to death for his once-orthodox faith. And Henry VIII's dispute with, and then vendetta against, the Pope provided English evangelicals with what seemed a Heaven-sent opportunity.

Their alliance with the king was always an awkward one. For a few idealists there was no deal to be done: Tyndale took a stern view of a king trying to claim divine sanction for his adulterous lusts, and the king, whose ability to hold a grudge was formidable, never forgave him even as he read his books with approval and licenced a very lightly redacted version of his Bible translation. But for evangelicals who could persuade themselves that the king's first marriage really was unlawful – and most could, when they tried – the possibilities were mouth-watering. Denouncing papal tyranny suddenly became a route, not to the stake, but to royal favour. Many of the people around the king were now evangelicals: not least his intended new queen, Anne Boleyn, and his indispensable new minister, Thomas Cromwell. The two of them were never allies and by the end mortal enemies, but they did agree on one thing, and that was evangelical religion. Partly thanks to their patronage, Henry was now staffing his church with men like Hugh Latimer, a Cambridge evangelical who was by all accounts the most electrifying preacher of his generation, a man able to hold an open-air crowd spellbound even during a downpour, and able, under the right circumstances, to start a religious riot with just a few sentences. In 1535 the king was persuaded to make him bishop of Worcester. He needed no persuading to make the most senior appointment of all: in 1532 he lifted another Cambridge scholar, Thomas Cranmer, from academic obscurity to be archbishop of Canterbury: an appointment based not only his personal rapport with this earnest rising theologian, but also, and above all, on the fact that the new archbishop was going to have to preside over the replacement of Henry's first queen with his second, and so the king needed someone he could absolutely, utterly rely on to dislike the pope as much as he himself now did. This was going to become one of the defining features of Henry VIII's Reformation. He himself was no Protestant – he was his own thing, an idiosyncratic hotchpotch of doctrines whose keynote was his unwavering faith in his own God-given authority. He disliked Martin Luther's heresies and held firm to a great deal of Catholic doctrine. But he needed allies, and if it came to the crunch he was almost always more willing to extend a cautious hand to the heretics than he was willing to risk his kingdom once again being subjugated to the bishop of Rome. On that deep strategic advantage, England's tiny, well-placed evangelical minority built a Protestant Reformation.

Progress was slow. Promising diplomatic negotiations with the new Lutheran territories of Germany and Scandinavia, aimed at forming an anti-papal common front, limped on without any concrete progress. But the evangelicals were willing to be patient. They had reason to hope that the wind was blowing in their direction; that as more of them were able to replace the old guard, as the king was slowly worked on by his wife and his chief minister and his archbishop, he would join

their cause and bring the country with him. And so, for much of the 1530s, it seemed. Partial but real victories were chalked up for the evangelicals. The monasteries, those vast monuments to clerical self-satisfaction which leeched resources from the pious in order to mumble useless prayers for the dead, were suppressed. The network of shrines, pilgrimages, relics and indulgences which had lured the faithful into superstition and idolatry, the very issue which had first provoked Luther's protest, were banned and publicly mocked. And above all – the great achievement, the act which convinced any doubters that the king was fundamentally on God's side – the English Bible was first legalised and then made freely available in every parish. Henry VIII did this because of his touchingly naive belief that anyone else who read the Bible would discover in it what he had discovered himself – the doctrine of his own Royal Supremacy over the Church. The evangelicals' faith in the power of the English Bible was if anything even greater. For them it was the great flood that would wash away all the filth of Rome, the great enlightening that would dispel the darkness of popery. Once the English had heard the Word of God, so long hidden from them in Latinate obscurity, the scales would fall from their eyes and they would see the old church for the lecherous, corrupt monstrosity which had been exploiting them for centuries. Instead, the realm would become that giant university that the brethren in Cambridge had dreamed of. Listen to this description of one of the first towns where evangelical religion really broke out of its scholarly, clerical and mercantile ghetto, Hadleigh in Suffolk. If we were to read about a religious revival in a small town nowadays, we would expect tales of dramatic conversions, weeping, mass meetings and so forth, but this is what was said about Hadleigh in the 1530s:

> *"The people … became exceedingly well learned in the holy scriptures, as well women as men: so that a man might have found among them many that had often read the whole Bible through, and that could have said a great part of St Paul's epistles by heart, and very well and readily have given a godly learned sentence in any matter of controversy. ... The whole town seemed rather a University of the learned, than a town of Cloth-making or labouring people."*

But this was a dream as naïve as the king's. In fact, Hadleigh does not seem to have been nearly so godly as the reformers hoped, and neither there nor anywhere else did the English Bible sweep all before it. England's Protestant Reformation was going to come, but neither quickly nor easily.

At the end of the 1530s a series of incidents reminded Henry's subjects that he was not, and was not about to become, an evangelical. He personally presided over a heresy trial at which an outspoken evangelical was burned alive in 1538. The following year, negotiations with the German Lutherans broke down, provoking Henry into a grumpy legislative reassertion of the traditional doctrines they had tried to persuade him to drop. Cromwell tried to used a new royal marriage in 1540 to relaunch the diplomatic effort, but this match – Henry VIII's fourth – was such a humiliating fiasco that Cromwell lost his head over it. Evangelicals were dismayed, and some of them fled abroad.

But it was the traditionalists who hoped for a turn back towards Rome who were disappointed. During the 1540s, it became clear that Henry would neither go on nor back. Both religious factions scored minor victories. The king firmly stated his opposition to evangelical doctrines of salvation, imposed rather ineffective restrictions on the English Bible and permitted several limited bouts of persecution of evangelicals. He also authorised English-language orders for public and private prayers, ordered a further purge of images in churches and consistently undermined the doctrine of Purgatory.

The decisive change that took place during these confusing years in the 1540s was not in government policy, but amongst the evangelicals themselves. As they digested the fact that the king was not, and never had been, truly on their side, their doctrines radicalised and their positions hardened. The tipping-point came in the summer of 1546. A veteran evangelical preacher named

Edward Crome, a man with moderate, Lutheran-leaning views, was arrested for a provocative sermon and made a show of defiance. But when dozens of his suspected supporters were rounded up, he was persuaded to make an abject recantation. This was a well-rehearsed dance by now. Evangelicals had learned how far they could push their luck, and if they pushed it too far, they would pretend to apologise and the regime would pretend to believe them. It generally avoided nasty confrontations. This was the third public recantation of Crome's career. But some of his supporters either did not know the rules of the game or were tired of playing. A wave of more defiant figures surfaced in his wake, denouncing him for his faintheartedness, and abandoning his nuanced positions for more full-throated denunciations of Romish error. A group of them went defiantly to the stake that summer, led by the fiery Lincolnshire gentlewoman Anne Askew. This group had friends in high places: senior members of the king's council, even Queen Katherine Parr herself, were said to be supporting them. Interrogators went to the edge of the law and beyond to try secure damning testimony. Askew was tortured on the rack in the Tower of London: when the lieutenant of the Tower refused to take part in such a flagrantly illegal act, the Lord Chancellor operated the rack with his own hands. Askew was so badly injured that by the time she was executed, she could no longer stand, but she would not give them any names, and from the stake she shouted down the preacher who was trying to denounce her heresies to the crowd. She was celebrated like no English evangelical martyr before her, and she marks a turning of the tide. A swathe of previously moderate gospellers – not least Archbishop Cranmer himself – decided in 1546 that the time for patience and compromise was over. They needed to do more than simply wait: the world was not going to fall into their laps, the English Bible alone would not sweep all before it, they would need to act. They were hardening into a party, with a clear and radical agenda: this is when we can sensibly drop this mealy-mouthed talk of evangelicals and call them what they were, Protestants.

And then, almost at that moment, they were handed the keys to the kingdom. In January 1547 the old king died. It was not pure political chance that the regency government for the new, nine-year-old King Edward VI ended up in the hands of a Protestant clique. Henry VIII had entrusted his young son's education chiefly to evangelicals, for the reason I mentioned before: he might dislike their doctrines, but he could at least trust them not to be treacherous agents of the bishop of Rome. The result was that the nine-year-old king's Protestantism was inchoate but unmistakable. And so the strategic patience of the 1530s was vindicated just at the moment that it had been abandoned. The new regimes threw itself fully behind Archbishop Cranmer's project: to create a fully Reformed Protestant Church in England, now to be modelled less on the pragmatic settlements of Lutheran Germany than on the radical purity of Swiss and southern German cities like Zurich, Strasbourg and Geneva. The time for patience was over. These were revolutionary years, with a radical government determined to bulldoze through its agenda in the teeth of any opposition. God was on their side; the greatest danger lay in hesitation.

If Edward VI had lived longer, this is what would have happened. The Church of England would have adopted an assertively Protestant confession of faith, structure and order for worship. Cranmer went through two versions of his Book of Common Prayer, in 1549 and 1552, books which steadily weaned the population off traditional practice, ceremonial and doctrine; a third and perhaps fourth edition would have continued this trajectory. Cranmer's idealistic project to renew the English church's legal structure was blocked by the duke of Northumberland in 1552, but given another few years, a watered-down version would doubtless have been enacted. Bishops would have been replaced with superintendants. The cathedrals, entities which served no serious purpose in a Protestant church, would have disappeared. Cranmer and his allies would have wanted to use the wealth seized from them and from the rest of the church to train a generation of new Protestant preaching ministers, perhaps even to found a wave of new universities. In fact the government would most likely have swiped the lot. But whether well-resourced or not, England would have had a simple and unmistakable Protestant Reformation.

Instead, that moment of possibility would remain a mirage. At first it was replaced by a catastrophe: Mary I's accession, England's reconciliation with Rome and an unprecedentedly intense wave of persecution. Hundreds were executed, not least Bishop Latimer and Archbishop Cranmer himself. Cranmer, in a throwback to the days of compromise under King Henry, had under pressure offered a partial recantation of his convictions, but that game was no longer being played. He was burned anyway, and famously held the hand that had signed the recantations in the flames, triumphantly turning his moment of wavering into the reign's most dramatic demonstration of Protestant steeliness. Meanwhile, almost a thousand English Protestants fled abroad, forming themselves into churches in exile. They prayed for their nation's popish ordeal to end, implausible as that seemed. But they also did the other thing that passionate radicals tend to do. They split bitterly amongst themselves, a split felt most painfully in the exile church in Frankfurt. One party believed it was a moment stop the clock, sticking (more or less) to the 1552 Prayer Book and demonstrating their loyalty to the dead king's Reformation. The other party believed it was a moment, not to pause, but to accelerate: to embrace the spirit of Cranmer and Edward VI's Reformation by surging forward to the destination they had, or should have had, in mind. When this group of zealots were thrown out of Frankfurt, they found refuge in John Calvin's Geneva, and embarked on a series of radical projects. A new translation of the Bible; a new order for worship, based on Calvin's rather than on Cranmer's model; and, for some of them, talk of fomenting rebellion against Catholic rulers. Did the Bible not say that idolatry should be punished by death?

Then Mary too died, and Elizabeth restored a Protestant settlement, but the initial hopes that they could pick up where they had left off in 1553 were quickly disappointed. Elizabeth's 'settlement' of 1559 mostly restored the religious status quo her brother had bequeathed her in the last year of his life. Everyone, supporters and opponents alike, assumed that the engine would be fired up again and the relentless drive forward to further and further reformation would continue. It was, so it seemed, another moment for strategic patience from the Protestants: to recognise that the glass was at least half-full and that the tap would surely start to flow again, and so work with this new queen to reach their common destination. But it quickly became clear, however, that she was following her father's example as well as her brother's. Having defined her religious position in the first year of the reign, she would not budge from it. As the exiles returned and threw themselves into the work of Reformation, they brought the post-Frankfurt divide back with them. Many of them accepted office in Elizabeth's Church, either content with her settlement or optimistic that they could help to move it in the right direction. Two-thirds of Elizabeth's new bench of bishops were returned exiles. They did secure a handful of victories: in particular, the queen was plainly reluctant to permit priests and bishops to marry, but if she wanted to staff her church she had no choice. Meanwhile, a minority of the former exiles set their face against the new regime's unacceptable compromises. The wariness was mutual: the Genevans' talk of rebellion left Elizabeth permanently suspicious of anyone associated with that fanatical city.

And so, the story of the Protestant Reformation from Elizabeth's reign onwards can be told in two ways. The eye-catching, the prominent story is one of a running battle over the nature of her Reformation, a battle between the increasingly impatient reformers who were determined to pick up the pace of change and the queen and her allies, who were equally determined to draw the line, to say thus far and no further. Caught in the crossfire were the patient reformers, biding their time and waiting for the world to turn their way: an increasingly ill-tempered political struggle seemed to make a mockery of their modest hopes. The queen consistently blocked any aspirations for further reform. Battle was first properly joined in 1563, when the Church's parliament, Convocation, considered a relatively modest set of ritual changes, on issues such as the use of pipe organs or making the sign of the cross in baptism: hardly matters on which anyone's salvation turned, but for the regime these were harmless and familiar features of Christian piety to be defended, while for their opponents – who at this point began to have the derisive label 'puritan' slapped on them – for their puritan opponents, these things were the dregs

of antiChrist in which the half-reformed English church was still sodden, errors which must be swept away. Naturally, the queen and her allies made sure that the puritans were defeated. And so a pattern was set. The greatest moment of hope came in 1575 when she appointed a new archbishop of Canterbury, and chose Edmund Grindal, a former exile who was plainly committed to using his position to press for further reforms. The queen blocked his plans. When he stood up to her, she placed him under house arrest and tried to deprive him of office. 'Puritans' of one stripe or another repeatedly put forward proposals in parliament and in Convocation, some modest, some weighty: the queen's managers ensured they all died. A few despairing puritans began to trickle into exile again, believing that half a Reformation was no better than none. In 1588-9, one group vented their frustration in a series of scurrilous, wickedly satirical pamphlets aimed at the bishops, under the pseudonym Martin Marprelate. After thirty years of playing nice, it felt good. But it triggered a crackdown in which a string of dissidents were imprisoned, and a handful executed for sedition.

For these puritans, then, England's Protestant Reformation was halted almost before it began. Only in 1640-1 did they finally come to power, when the collapse of Charles I's government left him at the mercy of his parliament. It was the puritan moment: a chance to reform the Church, as they put it, 'root and branch'. No mere tinkering with ritual details: bishops, cathedrals, set liturgies, the whole rotten apparatus could be taken down and a proper Reformed Church set up in its place, governed by presbyteries in the way that Scots and other Calvinist Churches across Europe had pioneered, finally bringing the English Reformation to a close. It was so close: another revolutionary moment, like Edward VI's reign almost a century earlier. But it kept dancing out of reach. First the king succeeded in dividing his opponents enough to be able to mount a civil war against them. Still, Parliament controlled London and the South-East and slowly ground out a military victory, a victory that must, surely, leave the way open. In 1643, a year into the war, a Solemn League and Covenant linking the English church to its Presbyterian Scottish counterpart was sworn. Parliament abolished bishops (and in case anyone had missed the point, it had Archbishop Laud of Canterbury beheaded). Cranmer's Book of Common Prayer, which now seemed hopelessly redolent of the old ways, was banned and replaced with a new, purified order for worship. A formidable Anglo-Scottish assembly of theologians was assembled and charged with drawing up a statement of faith: the result, the Westminster Confession of 1646, remains a touchstone for Presbyterians around the world today.

But once again, the puritans' dreamed-of Reformation escaped their grasp. Four years of war changed the country. New radical movements were springing up and outflanking the puritans and presbyterians, who started to look like yesterday's revolutionaries: we'll be coming back to them in the last lecture of the series. In particular, the presbyterians had no good solution to the problem of what to do with the defeated king: they were horrified when the radicals cut his head off, but they had no practical alternative to offer, and they and the republican governments headed by Oliver Cromwell regarded each other as enemies. And when the British republic collapsed and the monarchy and the pre-war Church of England were restored in 1660-2, the presbyterians and other puritans were locked out of the national church they had come so close to making their own. Instead they formed 'dissenting' or 'nonconformist' churches: Presbyterians, Congregationalists, even some Baptists. They endured considerable persecution under King Charles II, and then, from 1689 to 1828, a legal regime of so-called 'toleration' which nevertheless systematically discriminated against them. They survived, and indeed from the end of the eighteenth century they were joined by another group of unrepentant Protestants ejected from the Church of England for their refusal to submit their consciences to its laws and processes: the Methodists. Together, these nonconformists have been disproportionately influential communities in English history and also in England's global reach. Yet they never succeeded in their aspiration to define the nation in the way that Presbyterianism, for centuries, defined Scotland. In this sense, England's Protestant Reformation was much imagined, but it never actually happened.

But as I said, there are two ways to tell this story, and that tale of politics, of high hopes that came to nothing, the purists' perspective, is only one of them. While the puritans of the Elizabethan church were fighting, and losing, their set-piece battles over contentious points of law and worship, another strain of 'puritan' had a different perspective. From their viewpoint, important as those contentious points might be, they were not what the Protestant Reformation was really about. They were only means to an end, and that end was what truly mattered: bringing the pure Gospel to England's people, so that souls might be saved and God honoured. The Reformation would not succeed or fail at the level of national politics, but parish by parish and soul by soul. And so a generation of moderate puritans, many of them impatient for structural reforms, nevertheless reconciled themselves to working within an imperfectly Protestant church, and began the slow work of building a Protestant nation from the ground up.

They thought they failed. Their rhetoric is full of the division between the 'godly' minority and the mass of carnal Protestants, church-papists and atheists. They were also widely resented. Moralising busybodies are easily to dislike; the lines dividing doctrinal self-confidence, obnoxious self-righteousness and rank hypocrisy are thin ones. Both puritans and anti-puritans could agree that puritanism's bid for the nation's soul had failed.

But we should not take them at their word. Puritans were by nature perfectionist, readier to see a glass as one-tenth empty than as nine-tenths full. Their imagined Reformation was an impossible mirage. But their achievements were real. For one thing, the Elizabethan and early Stuart church's commitment to full-blown Protestantism was undoubted. Elizabeth's third archbishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift, was a merciless hammer of puritan dissenters, but also ordered his clergy to study the sermons of the formidable Zurich minister Heinrich Bullinger and stamped out any open defiance of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Indeed, predestination – Calvinist Protestantism's most distinctive and divisive doctrine – became the English church's consensus position, if not quite its unchallenged orthodoxy, during the reigns of Elizabeth and James I. In 1618-19 England even sent delegates to an international synod of Reformed churches in the Netherlands summoned to resolve a Dutch dispute over predestination. The other Reformed churches unproblematically recognised their English colleagues as brethren; the English happily supported the synod's staunch reaffirmation of predestination.

More to the point, the Reformation on the ground was real. It was slow, far slower than puritans of any kind wanted, but for those who had the patience to wait for it, it was relentless. There were no new universities – in painful contrast to Calvinist Scotland, which after the foundation of Edinburgh University in 1582 had twice as many universities as England – but there were new colleges founded at the old pair, and by the 1580s foundations like Emmanuel College, Cambridge, were steadily pumping committed Protestant ministers into the church's bloodstream. Nor was it all book-learning. As well as a degree at Emmanuel, a string of aspiring young Protestant ministers served an apprenticeship in the Cambridgeshire village of Dry D0072ayton, under the minister Richard Greenham: a puritan of a different sort, who managed to avoid confrontations over his ritual scruples, and instead focused on taking his message out of his pulpit into painstaking, individual pastoral work with his people, walking with them in the fields as they worked, as much a counsellor as a preacher. In an age which groaned under too many hefty books of theological controversy, Greenham wrote very little; but his sayings and advice were lovingly collected and published by the many students who passed through his vicarage, and have a practical wisdom to them: suggesting those who could not control their tempers should simply moderate their diet, offering advice on how to avoid what he called 'tediousness in prayer', and warning long-faced puritans 'who thinck wee should keep a continual sorrowing. … Rather wee have a flat precept to the contrary, continualy to rejoyce.' Others took up the theme. The greatest theologian and the most internationally popular author of the late Elizabethan years, William Perkins, said virtually nothing in his many books about contentious ritual or structural issues. His focus was pastoral, on how to apply the forbidding Calvinist doctrine of predestination to the individual believer's life. That

doctrine can lead believers into either despair or conceit; Perkins successfully steered between those two rocks, affirming predestination in the strongest terms while also mapping out how Christians may live (and draw strength from) lives of the highest moral seriousness. His posthumously-published *Treatise of the Cases of Conscience* became a classic of Protestant devotion, and his works were translated into languages as diverse as Welsh, Spanish, Hungarian and Czech. But even Perkins' success was eclipsed by Lewis Bayly, bishop of Bangor, whose 1612 book *The Practice of Piety* has been published in 124 English editions and 199 in at least thirteen other languages, including the Wampanoag language of Massachusetts and – most recently, so perhaps this doesn't count – Korean. Modern readers might find its 800 pages hard going: the club of those of us who have read the whole thing is a select one. But what it offers is a systematic guide to living the Protestant life day by day, from morning to evening prayers at your bedside and everything in between. This, not the battles over bishops and liturgies, was what the Reformation was about.

And the preachers found audiences, and the books found readers. Local communities lent their support to the cause. Towns established endowed 'lectureships' to provide themselves with proper Protestant preaching. Even many of the impoverished upland parishes of northern England raised funds to build new chapels and to attract preachers. Handbooks of Protestant devotion written for ordinary believers became best-sellers. And the cheap pamphlets and ballads that passed from hand to hand in post-Reformation England tell their own story. These texts are increasingly suffused with Protestant imagery and assumptions. It is not simply that markers of Catholic thought and identity – saints, sacraments, prayer for the dead – were steadily retreating. Protestant notions of divine providence, Protestant patterns of piety, above all the Protestants' now-ubiquitous English Bible had become pervasive features of English culture. This was now the sea that the English swam in, puritan and anti-puritan alike. The puritans might have lost every battle, but if any of them had the patience to see it, they were quietly winning the war.

Between the Elizabethan settlement and the English Civil War, the Church of England was bluntly and unproblematically a Reformed Protestant church. It was also much closer to being a truly national church than it has ever been since. This has left some awkward legacies to later Anglicanism. The fact that many puritans were driven into nonconformity after the Restoration has given rise to a wholly unjustified myth amongst Anglicans: that puritans had been cuckoos in the Church of England's nest since the beginning, and so are not truly a part of Anglicanism's history. The majority of Anglicans are in longstanding denial over their puritan heritage, reluctant to recognise that these people are part of Anglicanism's story – and fully so, not on sufferance. Meanwhile, a minority strain within Anglicanism is so enthusiastic to claim England's Protestant, puritan Reformation as its heritage that it asserts that Reformation ought to be normative for Anglicanism, not merely a strand within it.

The plain facts are, first, that the Church of England was once a mainstream Reformed Protestant church, a Calvinist church; and second, that it is not any more. How it, and the English-speaking world more widely, should deal with that mixed heritage is a story of two books. The Book of Common Prayer is the more complicated of the two. When Thomas Cranmer introduced its first two editions in 1549 and 1552, it was an alarmingly radical engine of reform. Its form was radical: the old, Latin liturgy has been a framework within which lay people could pray their own prayers, but this new English 'common prayer' was intended to be a united voice, in which the minister spoke to the people as much as to God and in which the greatest part of worship was instruction. The outwardly traditional frame of the new liturgy was a *digestif* intended to make two novel features palatable to a largely conservative people: first, the huge slabs of the Bible that comprise the bulk of most of the services, a legacy of that early faith that the English Bible alone was enough to carry all before it; and secondly, the robustly Protestant theology that its texts taught, especially in the 1552 version. But when the Prayer Book was restored in 1662, although its text was virtually unchanged, its meaning was reversed. Despite its title, it no longer aspired to national

‘common prayer’. It was an instrument of division, not of unity. It was intended to smoke out those who wished to remain part of the national church but could not tolerate this half-reformed liturgy. And of course, its meaning has changed repeatedly in the centuries since, in the many contexts in which it has found a home. Partisans on various sides naturally try to claim one of those historic meanings as authentic and normative. That is not a good reason to believe them.

The second, and simpler book is of course the English Bible. The English Reformation did not produce any theologians of European stature, but in Tyndale it did produce a truly great translator. It is a plain fact that he did more than any other individual to shape the modern English language, and that the English Bible that he set in motion would become central to English identity for centuries. Tyndale once promised that, if an English Bible could only be set forth freely, he would be willing never to write another word. Henry VIII pursued Tyndale to his death, but he also did as he was asked. He promulgated an authorised version of the Bible in 1539; Elizabeth I promulgated her own authorised version, the Bishops’ Bible, in 1568.0020

But these royal attempts to seize control of the English Biblical tradition were thwarted. The exiles in Geneva in the 1550s produced a new English Bible, eventually printed in 1560. This ‘Geneva Bible’ had a shaky start, but – in one of his few achievements as archbishop before the queen silenced him – Edmund Grindal succeeded in popularising it, and it quickly outstripped its official rival. Filled with handy and firmly Protestant annotations to guide readers, it appeared in every format, for the pocket or for the lectern. It seeped into private homes and into England’s verbal landscape. When Shakespeare quoted from the Bible, this was the translation he used. When James I set in motion a project to update the English Bible, it was the ubiquitious Geneva version, not the unloved 1568 translation, that he was competing with. The translators who produced the King James Bible in 1611 took a generation or more to win that competition. When they eventually did so, it was partly because of the scholarly care and excellence with which they worked; partly because they very deliberately drew on Tyndale and on their Geneva predecessors, revising rather than reinventing the text; and partly because they shed those provocative annotations, making this a Bible for readers in every tradition. They would have been surprised to know that they had created a text that was still read and beloved around the world over four centuries later. But they might conclude that it showed they had faithfully done their duty; and notice that, with enough patience, it really does seem to have carried all before it.