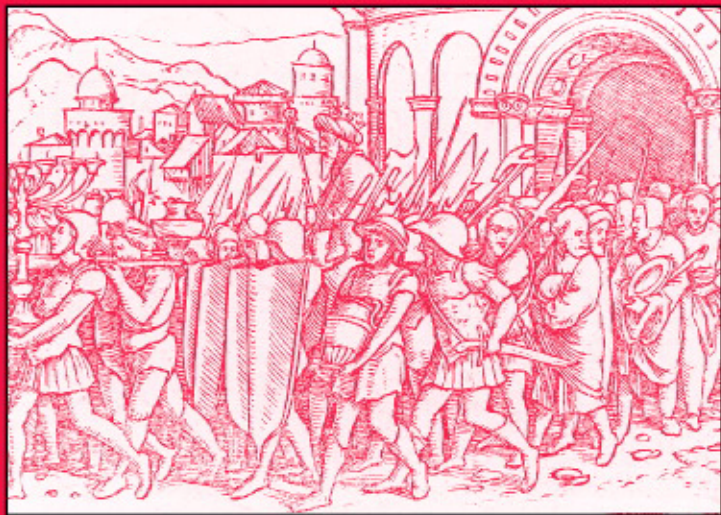


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POPULAR POLITICS AND THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

Ethan Shagan



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Popular Politics and the English Reformation

This book is a study of popular responses to the English Reformation. It takes as its subject not the conversion of English subjects to a new religion but rather their political responses to a Reformation perceived as an act of state and hence, like all early modern acts of state, negotiated between government and people.

These responses included not only resistance but also significant levels of accommodation, cooperation and collaboration as people attempted to co-opt state power for their own purposes. This study argues, then, that the English Reformation was not done *to* people, it was done *with* them in a dynamic process of engagement between government and people. As such, it answers the twenty-year-old scholarly dilemma of how the English Reformation could have succeeded despite the inherent conservatism of the English people, and it presents the first genuinely post-revisionist account of one of the central events of English history.

ETHAN H. SHAGAN is Assistant Professor of History at Northwestern University. He received his Ph.D. from Princeton University in 2000 and was a Junior Fellow of the Harvard University Society of Fellows. He has published articles in the *English Historical Review*, the *Journal of British Studies*, the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, and in numerous edited collections. This is his first book.

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ETHAN H. SHAGAN

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ABBREVIATIONS

APC	<i>Acts of the Privy Council of England</i> . Ed. J. R. Dasent. 32 vols. London, 1890–1907.
BIHR	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research</i>
BL	British Library
CCCC	Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge
CSP <i>Spanish</i>	<i>Calendar of Letters, Despatches, and State Papers, Relating to the Negotiation between England and Spain</i> . Ed. Martin A. S. Hume <i>et al.</i> 13 vols. London, 1862–1954.
CUL	Cambridge University Library
DNB	<i>The Dictionary of National Biography</i>
EETS	<i>Early English Texts Society</i>
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
Foxe	<i>The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe</i> . Eds. G. Townshend and S. R. Cattley. 8 vols. London, 1837–41.
GRO	Gloucestershire Record Office
HJ	<i>Historical Journal</i>
HMC Bath	<i>Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Marquis of Bath, Preserved at Longleat, Wiltshire</i> . 5 vols. Historical Manuscripts Commission. London, 1904–80.
JBS	<i>Journal of British Studies</i>
JEH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
LP	<i>Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII, 1509–47</i> . Ed. J. S. Brewer <i>et al.</i> 21 vols. and 2 vols. Addenda. London, 1862–1932.
<i>Original Letters</i>	<i>Original Letters Illustrative of English History</i> . Ed. Henry Ellis. 11 vols. in 3 series. London, 1824–46.
P&P	<i>Past and Present</i>
PRO	Public Record Office, London
SCJ	<i>The Sixteenth Century Journal</i>

<i>Statutes</i>	<i>The Statutes of the Realm</i> . Eds. A. Luders <i>et al.</i> 11 vols. London, 1810–28.
<i>St.P.</i>	<i>State Papers Published under the Authority of His Majesty's Commission, King Henry VIII.</i> 11 vols. London, 1830–52.
TBGAS	<i>Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society</i>
TRHS	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
TRP	<i>Tudor Royal Proclamations</i> . Eds. Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin. 3 vols. New Haven, 1964–9.
VCH Gloucester	<i>A History of the County of Gloucester</i> . Eds. William Page <i>et al.</i> The Victoria History of the Counties of England. 11 vols. London, 1907– .
Wriothesley	<i>A Chronicle of England during the Reigns of the Tudors, A.D. 1485–1559</i> . By Charles Wriothesley, <i>Windsor Herald</i> . Ed. W. D. Hamilton. 2 vols. Camden Society new series vols. 11 and 20. New York, 1965.
WRO	Worcestershire Record Office

NOTE ON THE TEXT

Throughout this text, spelling and punctuation have been modernised in all quotations except for the titles of books and places where the intended meaning is unclear. Parts of chapter 2 were previously published in my 'Print, Orality and Communications in the Maid of Kent Affair', *JEH*, 52 (2001), 21–33, used here with kind permission of Cambridge University Press.

Introduction

Europe's sixteenth century was an age of faith. Religion could be found everywhere, not only in churches and liturgies but in financial transactions, legal proceedings and scientific treatises. Spirituality structured the intimacy of family life no less than the conduct of foreign wars. Even time was reckoned according to sacred rhythms: so many hours to matins, so many weeks to Michaelmas, so many years since the incarnation of Christ. So pervasive was religion, in fact, that the great revolution of the early modern world was not a conflict over political philosophy or economic resources but rather a dispute over the path to Christian salvation. By destabilising traditional religion, the Protestant Reformation sent violent shock waves through even the most seemingly stable communities and institutions. As old certainties were questioned, old loyalties tested and old practices undermined, the Reformation seemed to dissolve the glue that held together the familiar coherence of the social world.

Yet if the centrality of religion for sixteenth-century experience underscores the importance of the Reformation, it also makes the Reformation very difficult to explain. For how could radically divisive ideologies have developed so swiftly within an intellectual framework so fundamental to contemporary society? Why would a revolution have been accepted or embraced by a population so heavily invested in the very belief system that the revolutionaries sought to disturb? These questions have been pondered for centuries, and they constitute the highest peaks that a Reformation historian might hope to climb; given their inherent complexity, it is unlikely that any scholar could scale them in a lifetime. This book suggests, however, that one possible approach to these peaks – from a base-camp, as it were, within the comparatively manageable subfield of Tudor England – might be to turn the questions themselves inside out and approach the issue of religious change indirectly. For, if religion permeated every aspect of sixteenth-century experience, that implies that religion itself was not a rigid or self-contained sphere but rather was structured through its interactions with the culture in which it was imbedded. Paradoxically, then, the very pervasiveness of religion in

the early modern world obliges us to explore the process of religious change not only in formal spiritual settings but also in more mundane sites where the social meanings of religion were constructed and contested.¹

This book thus suggests that an analysis of popular politics allows us to understand the English Reformation – and, *mutatis mutandis*, the European Reformation more generally – in fundamentally new and more satisfying ways. Approaching the Reformation through a study of popular politics may seem peculiar, not only because it appears open to charges of reductionism, but because an influential revisionist movement among Tudor historians would purport to render the whole project redundant. English people, we have been told, were almost uniformly conservative, stubbornly resisting a Reformation foisted upon them by a ‘predatory Crown on the prowl’, as J. J. Scarisbrick has eloquently termed the Tudor regime.² Yet, twenty years after Scarisbrick challenged the notion of a ‘popular Reformation’ in England, the remarkable penetration of England’s ‘Reformation from above’ remains largely unexplained. After all, the Tudor government possessed no bureaucracy, no police force, no standing army, and was utterly reliant upon local collaboration – from the haughtiest justice of the peace to the lowliest village constable – for the maintenance of ordinary administration. For whatever reasons, these local officials, as well as the peasants who were all-too-capable of unseating them when their duties conflicted with popular expectations, accommodated some aspects of the Reformation, embraced others and only occasionally reacted with unambiguous opposition. Only by exploring these conflicting responses can we hope to transcend the intractable revisionist paradox that the English Reformation produced a ‘Protestant nation, but not a nation of Protestants’.³

I

In the western tradition, the archetypal narrative of religious conversion is St Paul on the road to Damascus: a blinding light, the voice of the Lord, ‘and immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized’ (Acts 9:18). A no less remarkable conversion can be read in Augustine’s *Confessions*, where a disembodied

¹ Similarly broad conceptions of the Reformation and its cultural consequences can be found in, e.g., Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1999); Susan Karant-Nunn, *Zwickau in Transition, 1500–1547: The Reformation as an Agent of Change* (Columbus, Ohio, 1987); David Sabean, *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, 1984); Robert Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London, 1987).

² J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford, 1984), p. 135.

³ Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 279–81 and Conclusion *passim*.

voice tells the narrator to open the Scriptures and read whatever passage he falls upon. When Augustine reads the admonition in Romans 13:13 to 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires', he finds that he needs no further study: 'For instantly even with the end of this sentence, by a light, as it were, of confidence now darted into my heart, all the darkness of doubting vanished away.'⁴ These epiphanies, moved by the workings of the Holy Spirit in humble and receptive vessels, were conversions simultaneously of mind, soul and heart, the sorts of absolute breaks from the past that the later evangelical John Bunyan represented through his allegorical Christian, abandoning home and family in favour of 'life, life, eternal life'.⁵ Such conversions were, in a word, revolutionary. They represented the liberation of the divine within souls crushed by sin and the subsequent creation of new men out of the ashes of the old, not unlike eighteenth-century French 'citizens' or twentieth-century Russian 'comrades' working, as they believed, to liberate the untapped potential of oppressed human beings.

It should perhaps be obvious that, in reality, such remarkable and total conversions are extremely rare in any human society; continuity always pulls heartlessly at the seams of revolution. Moreover, if these absolute conversions are rare among individuals, they are virtually unthinkable on a wider, national scale; for a society to 'become Christian' or 'become Protestant' in the manner of Saul becoming Paul, too many of the threads that tie together thought, history and culture would necessarily have to be severed. Yet historians of the English Reformation, working in the tradition of such eminent sixteenth-century scholar-divines as John Bale and John Foxe, have until recently held remarkably tightly to the revolutionary ideal in their discussions of how England broke from the Roman yoke and embraced a new religion. The expulsion of the pope and the translation of the Bible cleared a path for the Holy Spirit to enter English hearts; the sermons of Hugh Latimer and the liturgies of Thomas Cranmer gave England a True Church; and Bloody Mary's terrible fires cauterised England's ragged amputation from Rome, bringing all but the hardest hearts into the fold just as surely as did the martyrdoms of the early Church. By 1559, then, the nation's conversion was over and something called the Church of England had been born, leaving the new dilemma of over-zealous puritanism, rather than the old dilemma of irascible Catholicism, as the principal threat to English religious unity. Scales had fallen from their eyes indeed.⁶

⁴ St Augustine, *St. Augustine's Confessions*, ed. W. H. D. Rouse, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1912), I, p. 465.

⁵ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. Roger Sharrock (London, 1965), p. 53.

⁶ The traditional interpretation of the English Reformation can be found in such classic works as Gilbert Burnet, *History of the Reformation of the Church of England*, ed. Nicholas Pocock,

This narrative, while always opposed by a Catholic counter-narrative, has only recently been challenged from within and systematically dismantled by a revisionist movement among English Reformation scholars. The agenda for revisionism was first established in 1975 with Christopher Haigh's *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire*.⁷ Haigh's classic study of one of the realm's 'dark corners' explored the difficulties faced by a government attempting to import an extrinsic Reformation into a fundamentally conservative culture. First, he showed that, far from being disenchanted with medieval Catholicism and hankering for reform, most Lancastrians were satisfied with their Church and the spiritual nourishment it provided. Second, he traced the enforcement of the Reformation upon a largely unwilling public, painting a picture of reluctant and disingenuous rather than enthusiastic Reformation. Third, he explored the deep divisions that arose in Elizabethan Lancashire as a result of the Reformation, concluding that, as the population settled into a conservative, hybrid form of worship, it remained the task of Protestant preachers to evangelise and convert the common people.

Haigh's attempts to undermine commonplace assumptions about the success of Protestantism were echoed by a variety of other historians, most notably J. J. Scarisbrick and Eamon Duffy. These scholars expanded Haigh's ideas into new narratives of the Reformation in which religious change was an aggressive and destructive process, not a movement of liberation but a violent attack on traditional society by an avaricious government. For Scarisbrick, the centrepiece of Reformation history became the resistance strategies employed by English subjects to counter the Tudor juggernaut. The Reformation, in this view, accomplished only negative goals like the destruction of church fabric; it erected nothing in place of the old religion, which thus remained the most potent and 'popular' belief system in England throughout the sixteenth century.⁸ Duffy had a somewhat darker view, suggesting that, because late-medieval Catholicism was a religion built around communal solidarity and outward ceremony, the regime's elimination of the external trappings of traditional religion had enormous effects. For Duffy, the breathtaking beauty of traditional worship could not be re-erected once its foundation was undermined, so the failure of Protestants to convert the masses was, for conservatives, at best a pyrrhic victory.⁹

7 vols. (Oxford, 1865) and John Strype, *Ecclesiastical Memorials*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1822). This model is most famously exemplified in recent historiography, although perhaps with more subtlety than the revisionists allow, in A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, 2nd edn (London, 1989).

⁷ Christopher Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1975).

⁸ Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People*.

⁹ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580* (New Haven, 1992). Other important contributions to the revisionist critique, by no means in complete agreement with one another, are in Haigh, *English Reformations*; Christopher Haigh (ed.), *The English Reformation Revised* (Cambridge, 1987); Eamon Duffy, *The*

As Haigh noted, two sets of questions were implicit in the revisionist critique.¹⁰ First was whether the Reformation was energised from above or below, in other words whether religious change was an expression of popular aspirations or an act of state enforced upon the populace. Second was whether the Reformation occurred quickly or slowly, that is whether the traditional demarcation point in Tudor history, the Elizabethan religious settlement of 1559, marked the end of the English Reformation or simply one stage in a much longer struggle for ideological control of the nation. The revisionist position, then, was a response to studies like A. G. Dickens's *English Reformation* that had described the Reformation as rapid and from below. Haigh and his fellow travellers instead suggested it was slow and from above, not being completed, if indeed it ever was, until the middle of Elizabeth's reign at the earliest.

Revisionism, in all its different formulations, has had a tremendous and largely beneficial influence on our understanding of the English Reformation, and few historians today would deny that in a simple contest between A. G. Dickens's interpretation on the one hand, and Haigh's or Duffy's interpretation on the other, Haigh and Duffy win hands down. The anti-Catholic prejudices embedded in the traditional model have rightfully been overthrown, and the newer interpretations have forced us to appreciate the coherence and vitality of the religious system that was so violently ripped apart in the middle decades of the sixteenth century. Yet, for all its benefits, the revisionist model remains no less imprisoned than its predecessor in a paradigm defined by the phantasmagoric goal of 'national conversion'. 'Success' for the Reformation remains a composite of individual religious conversions, each heaped upon the next, until the mass of Protestants in England tips some notional interpretive scales and the nation itself becomes Protestant. Listen, for instance, to Haigh trying to count the number of Protestants in Queen Mary's England:

We do not know about all mid-Tudor Protestants, or even all the Protestant cells. The Protestant iceberg certainly had a submerged section, but how large was it? What proportion of all Protestants were the 3,000 possibles discovered by combing the records from 1525 to 1558, or the 280 known to have been burned between 1555 and 1558? One in ten? One in a hundred? One in a thousand? We cannot

Voices of Morebath: Reformation and Rebellion in an English Village (New Haven, 2001); Margaret Bowker, *The Henrician Reformation: The Diocese of Lincoln under John Longland 1521–1547* (Cambridge, 1981); Sharon Jansen, *Dangerous Talk and Strange Behaviour: Women and Popular Resistance to the Reforms of Henry VIII* (New York, 1996); Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2000); Ian Green, *The Christian's ABC: Catechism and Catechizing in England c.1530–1740* (Oxford, 1996); Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1994).

¹⁰ Christopher Haigh, 'The Recent Historiography of the English Reformation', *HJ*, 25 (1982), 995–1007.

tell, but even the biggest multiplier would create only a small fraction of the total population... Is it likely, given the shortage of Protestant preaching and common hostility of popular response, that Protestants became even a large minority in only a short period? Could even a Latimer or a Bradford or a Knox shatter old loyalties and create a new consciousness by occasional evangelical forays?¹¹

By focusing his understanding of the Reformation so narrowly on the small minority in whom was created 'a new consciousness', Haigh uncritically adopts the analytic categories of the most radical reformers, dividing the world into two rival camps no less starkly than Latimer, Bradford and Knox themselves. In assuming that the confessional lens is the only lens that matters, he neatly dismisses as irrelevant to the Reformation's 'success' such fundamental transformations as the undermining of the four-century-old papal primacy, the erosion of the purgatorial scheme of salvation at the centre of medieval worship, and the almost complete destruction of the physical infrastructure of traditional religion. Hence Haigh can argue that, despite the success of the government in achieving conformity to its 'political' Reformation, the Protestant Reformation – always defined in evangelical terms – remained largely a failure.¹² This is, in a sense, a theological argument masquerading as an historical one.

Of course, at an empirical level the revisionists are correct to say that few English people experienced Damascene conversions in the first half of the sixteenth century. Yet this observation might more usefully serve as the beginning of an analysis of the English Reformation rather than the end of one: if people did not convert en masse to Protestantism, what *did* they do? The whole notion of 'success' and 'failure', I would suggest, imposes severe limitations on the kinds of questions we can ask of the Reformation. By asking whether England 'became Protestant', we accept the notion, itself imbedded in a confessional understanding of the period, that the Reformation was essentially about religious conversion. Yet it is easy to show examples of people who did not 'become Protestant' none the less acting in ways that would have been unthinkable only a few years before. Some people plundered religious institutions, others denounced their priests in royal courts for their attachment to Rome, still others used English Bibles to construct arguments against the economic exploitation of the peasantry. These are all instances of 'Reformation', neatly traceable to Luther's revolt, yet none required an ideological commitment to *sola fide* or *sola scriptura*. Similarly, it is easy to show examples of conventionally pious Catholics arguing bitterly with one another over the nature of their Catholicism: what role did Rome play in True Religion? How could essential doctrine be distinguished from adiaphora? Did the unity of Christ's True Church depend upon the unity of the visible, institutional Church? Studying these fissures in traditional religion

¹¹ Haigh, *English Reformations*, p. 199.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 285–95 and *passim*.

reveals a profound process of change; the ways people understood and legitimated even the most traditional beliefs altered dramatically. These changes represented an incursion of religious innovation into English culture without necessitating that the people who actualised them did so systematically, and without requiring the sorts of epiphanies that we associate with conversion narratives. We see in these phenomena neither the 'success' nor the 'failure' of the Reformation, but rather a process of cultural accommodation that is not easily mappable onto a simple, confessional axis.

In other words, the whole meta-narrative of conversion which historians have used to conceptualise the Reformation has impeded our ability to ask a different set of questions, to see the Reformation not in globalising terms but as a more piecemeal process in which politics and spiritual change were irrevocably intertwined. This perspective might be accused of reductionism, denying that the Reformation was motivated by genuine ideological commitment. Yet, on the contrary, it does not deny that evangelical conversion was possible, but simply asks what modes of analysis remain open to the historian once it is conceded that few such conversions in fact occurred. Rather than beginning and ending with the few sixteenth-century English people who experienced the Reformation as a coherent battle between two incommensurate worldviews, this analysis concentrates on the majority who neither wholly accepted nor wholly opposed the Reformation. For these people, ideas were not always solid objects stacked like bricks in coherent ideologies, but rather were rapidly shifting modalities that could have different meanings in different contexts. The ideas themselves are still central; no one is accused of acting disingenuously. But, in the practical world of political negotiation, ideas can be disassociated from their moorings and put to disparate uses. Far from being antithetical to the notion that ideas have power in history, this study argues that the amphibiousness and ambidexterity of new religious ideas is exactly what allowed them to penetrate English culture, seeping into the myriad crevices in the dominant belief system where ideas and practices were not fully aligned. Hence, sites of social friction like disputes between priests and their parishioners, or disputes between princes and their people, were exactly the places where new ideas were brought most forcibly to bear. It was at these sites that even subtle changes in beliefs could alter political dynamics in important and tangible ways, leading to significant changes in people's relationship to the sacred even if those people never imagined themselves as enemies of the old religion.

II

If, in the view of some revisionists, there were successful 'political Reformations' in Tudor England but not a successful Protestant Reformation, it immediately becomes incumbent upon us to examine the religious life of

the people in terms divorced from the political. In other words, a history of sixteenth-century religion becomes a study of 'popular piety', a notional convergence of inward beliefs and outward ceremonial practices that forms, in an almost Durkheimian sense, a religious sphere within society. To this end, numerous historians in the past decade have made 'popular piety' their object of study, leading to an enormous growth in our knowledge of popular religious practices and the place of those practices in traditional society.

Revisionists, it should be noted, are far from agreed about the content of 'popular piety' in the early sixteenth century. The most comprehensive and convincing account is Duffy's *Stripping of the Altars*, which describes a richly complex religion based in communal solidarity and the outward, ceremonial forms of worship.¹³ Christian piety consisted of participation in a vast structure of observance, from processing along the parish boundaries at Rogationtide to mortifying the flesh by 'creeping to the cross' on Good Friday. Every aspect of social life was constructed around the Church, from the cycles of feast and fast by which people measured time, to the great 'bede rolls' through which they remembered their dead. Duffy's analysis of the complexities of traditional religion, however, does not sit easily with Haigh's understanding of late-medieval Catholicism as an essentially *easy* religion that presented a less arduous alternative than the strict Biblicism and austerity of Protestantism. Haigh suggested that traditional Catholicism provided 'religious minimalists' with 'an undemanding scheme of salvation which rewarded decent living and participation in the sacraments; the Church would do the rest'. It was these 'minimalist' Christians, in Haigh's opinion, who rejected the new religion most forcefully, since 'the Protestant insistence that justification came from faith in Christ undercut the status and the prospects of the unthinking'.¹⁴ While Duffy might grant the existence of these 'unthinking' Catholics, he would hardly ascribe to them the central role they play for Haigh; indeed, their presence undercuts Duffy's central claim that 'no substantial gulf existed between the religion of the clergy and the educated elite on the one hand and that of the people at large on the other'.¹⁵

The most important flowering of scholarship on 'popular piety', however, has come from historians following in the wake of the revisionists but not strictly adhering to their interpretations. The work of Beat Kümin, for instance, followed Duffy by focusing on the parish as the basic unit through which English people organised their religious experience. It was at the community level, in this analysis, that such important phenomena as prayers for the dead, the worship of saints and the rituals of prayer were all understood.

¹³ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*; see also Duffy, *Voices of Morebath*.

¹⁴ Haigh, *English Reformations*, p. 286. ¹⁵ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 2.

Yet, diverging from Duffy, Kümin suggested that to understand religious change at the popular level we must look at how the economic organisation of the parish gradually shifted.¹⁶ Historians such as Andrew Brown and Martha Skeeters have studied the contours of traditional religion in individual localities, adding encyclopedic knowledge of local customs to our general sense of late medieval and early modern Catholicism as a religious system.¹⁷ Caroline Litzenberger has most recently focused this technique on one particular source, wills from the county of Gloucestershire, providing a far more careful treatment than was previously available and showing the wide range of language through which sixteenth-century testators could express their beliefs.¹⁸ These and other studies are to be commended for their attempts to peer through the fog of religious conflict and analyse the thought-systems of the ordinary people to whom the various confessions would increasingly appeal. Kümin's study was particularly successful in capturing not just the theoretical contours of those thought-systems, but the fault lines that inevitably emerged in their practice, for instance the structural difficulties faced by parishes balancing the saving of souls with the investment of scarce resources.¹⁹

Within the concepts of 'popular piety' or 'popular religion' invoked by all these works, however, there lurk some rather formidable theoretical pitfalls. Most importantly, it is by no means clear that the delineation of a Durkheimian sphere of 'religious' belief and practice makes sense in a sixteenth-century context. This is not only because, as scholars habitually note, every aspect of early modern society was imbued with religion, but also because religious belief and practice was never understood solely as a private exercise reflecting the conscience of the practitioner. As Duffy has shown, worship was largely a communal activity; even salvation, which we might

¹⁶ Beat Kümin, *The Shaping of a Community: The Rise and Reformation of the English Parish c. 1400–1560* (Aldershot, 1996). Duffy has since followed Kümin's approach in his *Voices of Morebath*.

¹⁷ Andrew Brown, *Popular Piety in Late Medieval England: The Diocese of Salisbury 1250–1550* (Oxford, 1995); Martha Skeeters, *Community and Clergy: Bristol and the Reformation, c. 1530–c. 1570* (Oxford, 1993). A very different and more politicised local study of the Reformation is in Muriel McClendon, *The Quiet Reformation: Magistrates and the Emergence of Protestantism in Tudor Norwich* (Stanford, 1999).

¹⁸ Caroline Litzenberger, *The English Reformation and the Laity: Gloucestershire, 1540–1580* (Cambridge, 1997).

¹⁹ Other important, recent works on Tudor popular piety include Christopher Marsh, *Popular Religion in Sixteenth-Century England* (New York, 1998); Robert Whiting, *The Blind Devotion of the People: Popular Religion and the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 1989); Margaret Spufford (ed.), *The World of Rural Dissenters 1520–1725* (Cambridge, 1995); Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*; Katherine French, Gary G. Gibbs and Beat A. Kümin (eds.), *The Parish in English Life, 1400–1600* (Manchester, 1997); Eric Carlson (ed.), *Religion and the English People, 1500–1640: New Voices, New Perspectives* (Kirkville, Mo., 1998).

assume to be a private matter between Christ and the individual Christian, was in practice mediated by the efforts of family, friends, priests and saints. As such, religious order depended to a large degree upon social cohesion, and the maintenance of a properly functioning Church was therefore a task shared by officials at all levels of government, both ecclesiastical and civil. For instance, while ecclesiastical courts had jurisdiction over offences against the Church, those courts were overseen by bishops who were themselves appointed by the Crown and held high offices of state. The resources of individual parishes were received and redistributed by lay churchwardens, who might also hold petty offices from the royal government or sit on manorial juries under the jurisdiction of local landlords. The 'advowsons' of clerical livings, the right to appoint priests to their positions as parsons, were often held by laymen, and at law the right of 'advowson' was treated as a piece of property that could be bought, sold or leased. Priests were maintained through tithes, but tithes were often farmed by laymen who leased the collection rights. When the church courts condemned heretics to death, the Church could not execute those heretics but rather had to hand them over to the royal government for burning. Many other examples could be given of the absolute dependence of traditional religion on the unity and univocality of Church and state.

Usually such nuances were irrelevant to the practical functioning of parish religion, and, indeed, many historians of European Catholicism have stressed the autonomy that communities traditionally exercised over their own religious lives.²⁰ The mid sixteenth century, however, was no ordinary time. The English Reformation, as an act of state intended to diminish the power and jurisdiction of the Church, energised exactly those fault lines in Christian society where piety collided with politics. Religious observance had always received much of its meaning from its invocation of properly constituted authority; going to church could not be divorced from what we might call its 'civil' functions – reinforcing community, hierarchy and obedience – any more than the state could function without divine sanction. But, if a properly functioning Church depended upon the invocation of an idealised social and political harmony, what were Christians to do when that harmony was fractured by a dispute between Church and Crown, especially a dispute played out in their own communities? If a radical priest altered the forms of local worship, for instance, was 'traditional religion' better maintained by obeying that priest or disobeying him? If a Catholic priest committed treason by defending the authority of the pope, did his conservative parishioners

²⁰ See, for instance, Jean Delumeau, *Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire: A New View of the Counter-Reformation* (London, 1977); Henry Kamen, *The Phoenix and the Flame: Catalonia and the Counter-Reformation* (New Haven, Conn., 1993); Philip Hoffman, *Church and Community in the Diocese of Lyon, 1500–1789* (New Haven, Conn., 1984).

better serve 'traditional religion' by hiding his words from the authorities or reporting him to a Justice of the Peace?

These questions point us towards the dangers of a decontextualised notion of 'popular piety' in which religious beliefs and practices are disassociated from notions of authority, legitimacy and power.²¹ Even a wholly consistent religious practice, backed by a wholly consistent religious doctrine, could change its meaning dramatically in different political contexts. English people throughout the sixteenth century heard Catholic mass, for instance, but whether they heard mass in a church in 1533 or in a barn in 1553 radically changed the nature of that experience. English people throughout the sixteenth century went on pilgrimage to saints' shrines, but whether they did so openly in huge caravans or secretly in the dead of night changed their relationship to the divine. In both cases, even if practices remained unchanged, the bases of those practices, the sorts of authority that were invoked, the kind of community relationships that were defined, and the potential audiences to which the practices appealed, all shifted dramatically. Rather than reflecting divine order and invoking the victory won by Christ on the cross, they came to represent a struggle, invoking conflict and the failure of fallen humanity to resist temptation by the devil. Rather than representing the unity of Christendom, they played out a new casuistic calculus through which civil authority and religious authority were separated in people's minds, and the contradictory loyalties owed to them were carefully parsed and weighed.

The import of this discussion is that there was no 'popular piety' that existed prior to or independent of authority and obedience; all religious belief and practice necessarily depended upon *authorisation*, even if in most circumstances that dependence was unstated. When the Reformation forced to the forefront the issue of authority and obedience within the Church, every belief or practice, no matter how seemingly innocent, had to be interrogated: upon what basis, whether biblical, patristic, papal, royal or purely local, was that belief or practice held? If aspects of 'popular piety' were suddenly de-authorised, either by heretics in positions of power or, just as often, by Catholic reformers purging the Church of 'superstition', those de-authorised practices were torn loose from the edifice in which their meanings had been constructed. In confrontation with legitimate authorities like bishops or kings, these contested aspects of 'popular piety' might form the basis of nascent resistance, or they might be abandoned and quickly fade into distant memories. But they could not remain within a distinct religious sphere where conscience or inner piety existed independent of 'political Reformations'.

²¹ See David Aers, 'Altars of Power: Reflections on Eamon Duffy's *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580*', *Literature and History*, third series, 3 (1994), 90–105. I would like to thank Judith Maltby for bringing this review to my attention.

III

Questions of authority and legitimacy naturally created moral dilemmas. As Haigh has described in fascinating detail, English people were never asked to embrace some overarching 'Reformation', but instead had change presented to them in a series of tiny bundles, rarely worth fighting over individually but insidiously adding up to substantial innovation. As such, they daily confronted issues of resistance and collaboration: was it ethical to disobey authority if obedience tended to further the growth of heresy? By what practices could an authority de-legitimise itself? At what point did passive obedience slip into active support for the regime's policies?²²

Beginning with Haigh's *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire*, the revisionist model has stressed the importance of resistance. This concept has been defined very liberally, in large part because of what is perceived as the totalising power of the Tudor regime: in an atmosphere saturated with coercion and brutal repression, any action (or inaction) short of absolute obedience can be glossed as resistance. So, for instance, when Henry VIII demanded in 1535 that priests erase the name of the pope from their service books, one priest 'resisted' simply by covering the word *papa* 'with small pieces of paper' that could later be removed, thus arguably complying with the letter of the law but subtly expressing his discontent.²³ This understanding of resistance, well attuned to recent theoretical literature of which James Scott's works are the most prominent exemplars, is a great improvement over earlier assumptions that silence or compliance were equivalent to consent.²⁴ We would not want for a moment to downplay the importance of even subtle attempts by English Catholics to retain their religious autonomy, whether through private prayers, the concealment of sacred objects, or that most flexible of responses to ecclesiastical visitations: '*omnia bene*'.²⁵

If all is well in the revisionists' *theory* of resistance, however, their *practical* use of the concept is none the less problematic. In particular, a preoccupation with conversion narratives has led English Reformation scholars to ignore the very process of politicisation which scholars like Scott have suggested we should be looking for within the 'hidden transcripts' of peasant resistance.

²² I owe thanks to Benjamin Frommer for numerous conversations on these issues.

²³ Haigh, *English Reformations*, p. 142.

²⁴ James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, Conn., 1985); James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Conn., 1990).

²⁵ Here, however, it is important to remember Hannah Arendt's proviso that in the political realm actions are de-coupled from motivations and become exterior and subjective, so that 'following orders' has very different connotations for public figures than it does for private citizens: 'Politics is not like the nursery; in politics obedience and support are the same.' See Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York, 1963), p. 255.

Let us take, for example, the Tudor regime's demands that subjects remove 'abused' images from their churches. Revisionist scholars have rightly noted a variety of responses to this government-sponsored iconoclasm that we might usefully characterise as 'resistance': some 'resistors' delicately hid away sacred images rather than destroying them, some 'resistors' refused to remove those images at all, and some 'resistors' took up arms against the regime that dared to order their removal in the first place. From a purely theological point of view, of course, these three groups shared something essential: a rejection of Protestant reinterpretations of 'idolatry'. But this theological perspective has obscured the fact that in a practical, political sense they were as likely to fight each other as to unite against a common enemy. To take another example, the priest described above, who finessed the demand to erase the name of the pope from his service books, may have 'resisted' in some sense, but he could hardly have won the approval of John Lyle, a Somerset priest who refused to erase the pope's name altogether and dared to erase the king's name instead!²⁶

While revisionist historians have stressed the concept of resistance, moreover, they have almost totally ignored the concept of collaboration.²⁷ In part this is because conformity can so easily be glossed as *mere* conformity – 'only following orders' – when demanded by a repressive regime, especially a regime widely considered legitimate. More importantly, however, this omission has been possible precisely because the Reformation is seen as a *theological* event, an inward spiritual process for which outward behaviour is merely an imperfect cipher. From this perspective, *real* collaboration could only exist where the motives of the collaborators matched the motives of reformers in the government, in other words only in the rare cases of genuine evangelical agitation in the countryside. Other cases of accommodation with the regime might result from fear or greed, but in these cases outward behaviour ceases to be an accurate gauge of religious sentiment and hence ceases to reflect a process of 'Reformation'. Certainly many English subjects bought the property of dissolved abbeys, for instance, but, since we know that Catholics could do so without injury to conscience, and since we assume that the Reformation was about conversion from Catholicism to

²⁶ PRO E 36/120, fol. 53r–v.

²⁷ The word 'collaboration' has almost uniformly negative connotations, just as the word 'propaganda' used to have, because it is most commonly applied to collaboration with the Nazis, where its association with mass murder flattens any moral ambiguity that might be attached to it. My goal here, however, is to suggest that the morality of collaboration with the Reformation was far from clear, and we have no business imposing moral judgments upon people who believed that the benefits of collaboration with the Reformation exceeded the liabilities. I therefore use the term 'collaboration' without opprobrium to refer to political actions in which subjects contributed to the effectiveness of controversial government policies.

Protestantism, we cannot consider these purchases examples of collaboration with the Reformation.

Needless to say, a fresh approach to collaboration is needed if we are to explore the political dynamics of Reformation. Thankfully, such an approach has been made available by a flood of theoretically sophisticated literature in modern European history which has thoroughly reassessed the relationships between repressive regimes and their people. As an increasing number of scholars have shown, the 'police state' paradigm, with its strict separation of state and society, does not make sense unless we believe that the 'police' do not go home to their families and communities at the end of the day; otherwise, the enforcers of state policy must be understood as imbedded members of the society to which they belong.²⁸ Within this new, society-centred approach – an approach all the more sensible for the early modern period, when there were no 'police' at all – various theoretical conclusions have emerged which can usefully be brought to bear on our understanding of the English Reformation.

One theoretical innovation – which undermines the notion that collaboration must be based on ideological unity – involves the ability of collaborators to form symbiotic relationships with authority and co-opt the state just as the state is co-opting the people.²⁹ This has been demonstrated most thoroughly in places like the Stalinist Soviet Union, where the regime's willingness to act upon denunciations from ordinary citizens put the state's formidable punitive powers into the hands of those citizens: the instruments of social control were essentially privatised and made available to anyone willing to use them.³⁰ So many people fabricated accusations against their room-mates to ease overcrowding in urban living quarters, for instance, that Russians coined a new term – 'apartment denunciations' – to describe the phenomenon.³¹ Whether to score points in ongoing disputes or merely to prove their own loyalty, people make bargains with even the most odious regimes in more cases than we would usually care to admit. We will find

²⁸ I owe this formulation to Robert Crews. See also Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately, 'Introduction to the Practices of Denunciation in Modern European History', in Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately (eds.), *Accusatory Practices: Denunciation in Modern European History, 1789–1989* (Chicago, 1997), pp. 4–5.

²⁹ This idea has recently been brought to bear by Steve Hindle and Michael Braddick on the relationship between state and society in early modern England, but neither has explored how the Reformation itself, as an act of state, might fit within their models. See Steve Hindle, *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England, c.1550–1640* (Basingstoke, 2000); Michael Braddick, *State Formation in Early Modern England c.1550–1700* (Cambridge, 2000).

³⁰ Jan Gross, 'A Note on the Nature of Soviet Totalitarianism', *Soviet Studies*, 34 (1982), 367–76.

³¹ Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'Signals from Below: Soviet Letters of Denunciation of the 1930s', in Fitzpatrick and Gellately (eds.), *Accusatory Practices*, p. 109.

these sorts of considerations time and again in the English Reformation, for instance in the case of the Yorkshireman Robert Jackson, whose denunciations led to two of his neighbours being executed for treason in 1538. We cannot know exactly why Jackson chose to play the role of government informant, but it was presumably no coincidence that he was simultaneously 'a suitor unto the king', and immediately after giving evidence against his neighbours he asked that the Council of the North write to Westminster to ensure 'the better speed in his said suit'.³²

But symbiosis can also emerge in more complex and ideologically fruitful situations where the state and its citizens experience a 'convergence of interests' over certain policies; in Vichy France, for instance, many conservative citizens were reluctant to hand over their fellow Frenchmen to the Nazis but made exceptions for French communists because anti-communism was an area of overlap between the two ideologies.³³ These convergences – what we might call 'points of contact', to update Geoffrey Elton's term for the links between governors and the governed³⁴ – often had practical considerations as their heart, but that does not mean that ideas were irrelevant. As Stephen Kotkin has put it: 'The presence of coercion, subtle and unsubtle, does not mean the absence of a high degree of voluntarism any more than the holding of genuine ideals precludes the energetic pursuit of self-interest.'³⁵ Even small areas of overlap could have enormous consequences as people found themselves unintentionally committed to the logic of their own behaviour.

In the English Reformation context, we can see this phenomenon in the ways many people who had no apparent Protestant leanings none the less chose to act as mouthpieces for the regime. In 1538, for instance, an Essex ropemaker named John Luke overheard a visitor defend the authority of the pope at the 'vitelling house' that he operated out of his home. Luke's response was to denounce him to a Justice of the Peace, and while we can only guess at his motives – loyalism, concern for business, personal vendetta – certainly he could just as easily have kept the conversation to himself.³⁶ In 1535, parishioners from Halifax, Yorkshire, sued their vicar in the royal Court of Chancery for making them pay 'Peter's Pence', a traditional tax to Rome,

³² PRO SP 1/242, fol. 116r [LP Add., 1377].

³³ Rab Bennett, *Under the Shadow of the Swastika: The Moral Dilemmas of Resistance and Collaboration in Hitler's Europe* (Basingstoke, 1999), p. 60.

³⁴ G. R. Elton, 'Tudor Government: The Points of Contact', in his *Studies in Tudor and Stuart Politics and Government*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, 1974–92), vol. 3. Steve Hindle has noted that the court, Privy Council and parliament were only the 'highest institutional expressions of state authority' and that in reality there was a great deal more 'social depth' to the 'points of contact' where governors secured consent for their authority: Hindle, *State and Social Change*, p. 21.

³⁵ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley, 1995), p. 358.

³⁶ PRO SP 1/130, fols. 151r–152r [LP XIII, i, 615].

before they could receive their Easter communion; they added to their bill of complaint an enthusiastic confirmation that 'the king our sovereign lord is the *supremum caput anglicanae ecclesiae*'.³⁷ In 1541, the king paid the Essex carpenter John Crowe 7d per day 'in taking down and breaking up the boards of the cloister' in the dissolved abbey of Barking, a commission which Crowe probably solicited and certainly could have refused.³⁸ These were all acts of collaboration in which ordinary English subjects furthered the project of state-sponsored Reformation in the process of co-opting state power for their own purposes. Though their actions may not have had unambiguous theological content, they contributed to government programmes that were clearly associated with religious reform, embedding those programmes within English society and rendering them increasingly quotidian.³⁹ When carpenters created rationales for participating in the destruction of monasteries, for instance, even if those rationales were consistent with Catholic orthodoxy, the mere fact of their casuistry represented a significant victory for the regime over those English subjects who actively resisted the dissolutions.

Another aspect of collaboration which we must bear in mind is that collaboration with the spirit of the law can be as important as collaboration with the letter, and in many cases the most significant forms of collaboration with a government's agenda in fact violate official policy. For example, Sheila Fitzpatrick has described the process of 'self-dekulakization' in the Soviet Union: the regime encouraged the ostracising of 'class enemies', and as a result many people forged new identities to avoid penalties for their social origins. This was strenuously opposed by the government, but despite its illegality this form of deception clearly functioned as a form of collaboration with the regime's broader ideological programme, leading people to internalise official categories of social relations.⁴⁰ Moreover, if illegality could sometimes function as collaboration, so, too, in some circumstances 'resistors' and 'collaborators' could be the same people. This has been described most thoroughly for well-placed public figures whose aid was essential to 'resistance' movements but who could only provide that aid if they

³⁷ PRO C 1/827, fol. 1r-v. ³⁸ Bodleian Rawlinson D. MS 782, fol. 2r.

³⁹ On this point, Václav Havel has offered a thought-experiment involving a greengrocer behind the Iron Curtain who puts in his shop window a government-issued sign reading, 'Workers of the world, unite!' In itself this action is insignificant, but when many greengrocers simultaneously display these signs 'they may create through their involvement a general norm and thus bring pressure to bear on their fellow citizens'. They may even 'learn to be comfortable with their involvement, to identify with it as though it were something natural and inevitable'. See Václav Havel, 'The Power of the Powerless', in his *Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990*, ed. Paul Wilson (New York, 1992), quotes on pp. 132-3, 143.

⁴⁰ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 132-8.

maintained their offices through vigorous collaboration. Thus the mayor of a small town in occupied France might resist the Nazis by night, but that did not make his collaboration during the day any less real.⁴¹ Even Marshal Pétain, leader of Vichy France and collaborator *par excellence*, claimed to be a resistor in the sense that he embraced the Germans only in order to maintain his position and hence his ability to mitigate the effects of France's loss.⁴²

In the English Reformation, as we will see, there were many parallels to this complexity. Since Henry VIII's Church was theoretically as opposed to Zurich as it was to Rome, there were any number of circumstances in which English Protestants contributed to the government-sponsored Reformation in ways that were technically illegal. Moreover, the Tudor government promulgated many policies, like the dissolutions of the chantries, in which the regime's financial interests and its spiritual interests might diverge. In these contexts, people often 'resisted' the Crown's economic predations and stole from the government in ways which, paradoxically, abetted the spiritual campaign of which those predations were a part.⁴³ And, of course, Edwardian priests who obeyed government orders and read to their congregations from the *Book of Homilies* and *Book of Common Prayer* every week did an incalculable service to the Protestant cause no matter how carefully they hid away the missals and antiphoners which those books had replaced.

We are thus in a position to revise considerably the revisionists' emphasis on 'resistance' as the dominant paradigm of popular responses to the English Reformation. In his 1993 textbook *English Reformations*, for instance, Haigh's understanding of resistance allowed him to make the remarkable claim that Elizabethan parishioners were 'resisting' the Reformation when they insisted that their ministers use Thomas Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer*!⁴⁴ Their actions may have 'resisted' the sort of Reformation preached by the radical puritan Thomas Cartwright, but they just as effectively 'resisted' the sort of Counter-Reformation preached by the Jesuit Robert Parsons, and they collaborated with the sort of Reformation promulgated by Archbishop Whitgift.⁴⁵ Clearly, then, we need to analyse potential examples of resistance and collaboration within their political contexts rather than superimposing our own idealised conversion narratives upon them. Duffy, with somewhat more subtlety, suggested that the Reformation could be resisted through the 'evasion of the spirit' of the

⁴¹ Bennett, *Under the Shadow of the Swastika*, pp. 48–9.

⁴² Robert Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order 1940–1944* (New York, 1972), p. 358 and ch. 5 *passim*.

⁴³ See below, ch. 7. ⁴⁴ Haigh, *English Reformations*, pp. 289–90.

⁴⁵ On the different meanings attached to the Prayer Book, see Judith Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1998).

government's injunctions, for instance when people in 1538 obediently removed candles that had burned before images but then relit those candles in rood-lofts rather than destroying them.⁴⁶ 'Evasion of the spirit' is certainly an important concept and could constitute a form of resistance, but in context it could also partake of many other, sometimes conflicting impulses, and even Duffy's own example permits a more complex reading. Burning candles in the rood-loft instead of before images, after all, resisted the starkest versions of Reformed iconophobia but also implicated parishioners in a Lutheran-style emphasis on concentrating visual devotion on crucifixes rather than on other images.⁴⁷ Moreover, since this transformation resulted from a process of compromise, and hence allowed parishioners to continue worshipping without crises of conscience, it was far more insidious and potentially corrosive for traditional religion than more radical transformations against which parishioners might have been able to unite.

IV

All of these issues and contradictions arising from the current interpretive framework for the English Reformation – a framework defined by questions of national conversion, popular piety and resistance – suggest that new approaches are needed. We do not need to accept that the most interesting questions to be asked of the English Reformation are about conversions to Protestantism, nor do we need to accept that, bluntly put, Dickens's *The English Reformation* and Haigh's *English Reformations* are the two poles between which scholars of sixteenth-century religious change must forever oscillate. We can take as read the best work of revisionist scholars, accepting that English people did not, for the most part, embrace evangelical Protestantism; once this assumption is made, however, we can seek to understand just what English people did do and why.

This approach involves something that I call, for want of a better term, popular politics.⁴⁸ In using the adjective 'popular', I do not mean to imply

⁴⁶ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 419.

⁴⁷ I owe thanks to Diarmaid MacCulloch for correcting some of my earlier hyperbole on this issue.

⁴⁸ The best discussion of popular politics in early modern England is the introduction to Tim Harris (ed.), *The Politics of the Excluded, c.1500–1850* (Basingstoke, 2001), and the essays in that volume form an important new body of thought on the subject. An important recent discussion on a Europe-wide basis is Wayne Te Brake, *Shaping History: Ordinary People in European Politics, 1500–1700* (Berkeley, 1998). For theoretical discussions of popular politics in England before 1700, see I. M. W. Harvey, 'Was there Popular Politics in Fifteenth-Century England?' in R. H. Britnell and A. J. Pollard (eds.), *The McFarlane Legacy: Studies in Late Medieval Politics and Society* (New York, 1995); Clive Holmes, 'Drainers and Fenmen: The Problem of Popular Political Consciousness in the Seventeenth Century', in Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (eds.), *Order and Disorder in Early*

that 'popular politics' was somehow hermetically sealed from or antithetical to 'elite politics'. On the contrary, the two were irrevocably intertwined and in constant dialogue with one another, and popular politics could involve priests and gentlemen as often as peasants and artisans. Popular politics was also not necessarily or even commonly oppositional; the conservative imperative of loyalty to the monarch was often at the core of popular political activity. 'Popular politics' simply refers to *the presence of ordinary, non-elite subjects as the audience for or interlocutors with a political action*. Hence, in practice nearly any political action by peasants was 'popular', since even actions directed towards the king presumed auxiliary audiences who were asked to assent to and legitimate those actions. Political actions of the social elite, on the other hand, could sometimes be 'popular' and sometimes not, depending on their perceived audiences; a gentleman might try to accumulate power solely through machinations at court, for instance, or he might do so by bolstering his 'public' reputation and building a power base among his tenants. What defined popular politics, then, was not the social class of the people politicking, but rather the extent to which the governed played a role in their own governance. Popular politics presumed, in practice if not in theory, that issues of substantial importance to the life of the nation would be discussed and debated in public, and popular politics accepted, again in practice if not in theory, that those debates would significantly affect how the issues were decided.⁴⁹

This dynamic was perfectly illustrated by the successful tax revolt in 1525 in which peasants, artisans, priests and gentlemen all played a significant role in forcing the government to withdraw its demand for a so-called 'Amicable Grant' to support proposed military adventures in France. The actions of these different social groups were all unequivocal examples of popular politics, since each appealed to the others for support and legitimation; none could have succeeded without the support of the whole. Perhaps less obviously, the king's demand for the Amicable Grant was itself a form of popular politics. In his instructions requiring bishops and nobles to collect the Grant, the king elaborately defended his claims to the French Crown, explained why he needed immediate funds for an invasion, and promised to return the money if circumstances changed and that invasion proved unnecessary. When the bishops and nobles tried to collect the tax,

Modern England (Cambridge, 1985); Keith Wrightson, 'The Politics of the Parish in Early Modern England', in Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox and Steve Hindle (eds.), *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (New York, 1996); Keith Wrightson, 'Two Concepts of Order: Justices, Constables and Jurymen in Seventeenth-Century England', in John Brewer and John Styles (eds.), *An Ungovernable People: The English and Their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1980).

⁴⁹ See Ethan Shagan, "'Popularity' and the 1549 Rebellions Revisited", *EHR*, 115 (2000), pp. 121–33.

they gathered representatives of the commonalty and, in the words of the Bishop of Ely, '[declared] to the king's subjects there his grace's mind, intention, and pleasure, moving and persuading them by all the reasons and persuasions mentioned in the king's said instructions and as many more as I could devise'.⁵⁰ In other words, the king never assumed that revenues would be granted easily; his request, like the promulgation of many taxes in the pre-bureaucratic age, represented a self-conscious prologue to negotiation. This is certainly not to say that Henry VIII believed that the commonalty had a legitimate role in politics, but rather that he was not so naïve as to think he could coerce rather than persuade the population in matters of the purse.

By this definition, it is not hard to see that virtually any attempt to inculcate religious change at the local level constituted popular politics, since innovations were not merely promulgated by the regime but also explained, defended and glossed. The government not only told people in 1534 that they owed no more allegiance to the pope, for instance, but also told them *why*, defending the royal supremacy with an avalanche of tracts, sermons, statute preambles and so on. This was not because the commonalty were perceived by the regime as fitting interlocutors in the creation of policy, but because the Tudor regime lacked the power to govern without some degree of consent.

Responses to religious change, whether negative or positive, also constituted popular politics, since those responses were hardly ever mere affirmations or denials but rather were intended to win concessions, sway public opinion and influence policy. The Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536, for instance, was on one level an elaborate appeal to conservative courtiers like the Duke of Norfolk, and as such it was an elite political event. But on another level it was an enormous act of political theatre performed before the whole nation. When Robert Aske triumphantly rode into York at the head of four thousand rebel horsemen, for instance, his entry was mirrored by a procession of clerics who marched out of the cathedral to welcome him. This carefully staged event provided the citizens of York with powerful evidence that the pilgrims rather than the royal government now represented good order in Church and commonwealth.⁵¹ A similar dynamic governed positive responses to religious change. One clerical supporter of the royal supremacy, for instance, sarcastically 'set forth and made an image of the bishop of Rome in snow . . . not only of him but also of other his adherents'. According to the priest, 'a great multitude of people to the number by estimation of 4,000' came to gawk at the spectacle.⁵² This was a quintessentially 'popular' form

⁵⁰ BL Cotton MS Titus B. I., fol. 271r. See also BL Cotton MS Cleopatra F. VI, fols. 262r–65v and BL Cotton MS Cleopatra F. VI., fols. 267v–68r.

⁵¹ See below, ch. 3. ⁵² BL Harleian MS 283, fol. 127r [*LP* VIII, 1067].

of politics, adapting royal propaganda to a sub-literate, carnivalesque genre of satire in order to undermine belief in the holiness of the pope and his cardinals.

The interdependence of religious controversy and popular politics was exacerbated by the fact that Reformation battles were habitually fought over issues of *authority*. Debate over the theological merit of religious beliefs was, in the public arena, usually subjugated to quasi-secular issues of law and governance. Even in cases of heresy, the most inherently spiritual of offences, we find time and again that public debates centred on the practical and political questions of who had the power to define heresy and enforce the law. In the Essex town of Langham in 1534, for instance, a questman of the parish named John Vigorouse accused his neighbours of heresy for 'saying their matins together upon an English primer'. The accused parishioners, who seem to have had genuine evangelical sympathies, defended their actions not on theological grounds but rather on the grounds that the book in question had been printed with the king's 'royal privilege'. Vigorouse's response, likewise, was not to affirm the essential heresy of their actions but rather to question the efficacy of an appeal to so capricious an authority as Henry VIII: 'The king was never so glad to make them but he shall be so glad to pull them down again, and that within a short space.' This debate over the nature of royal policy, moreover, was mirrored by a remarkable mini-debate over the power to define heresy in the locality. One of Vigorouse's young servants, echoing the rhetoric of his master, 'did quarrel and brawl with other children . . . whom he called heretics'. The other children, echoing the rhetoric of their masters, called Vigorouse's servant a 'Pharisee'. With no royal authority available to enforce order in so mundane a conflict, Vigorouse decided to enforce it himself, instructing his servant to 'cut off their ears . . . if they so call thee hereafter'.⁵³

When we look through the lens of popular politics, then, the question of national conversion quickly takes on a secondary significance in Tudor history, with other questions opening up far more fruitful avenues for exploring the process of religious change. When people said/did Protestant sounding/looking things, for what audiences did they perform those statements or actions? When people spoke seditious words against the Crown or heretical words against the Church, how did their neighbours decide whether to report them to the government? When people arose in armed rebellion against innovations in Church or commonwealth, what sorts of negotiated settlements were acceptable to them and why? These questions are not reductionist, since they do not deny the importance of religious ideas. But they differ from previous interpretive frameworks by accepting that the English Reformation, like every aspect of early modern governance, depended on the

⁵³ PRO E 36/120, fols. 59r-63v [LP VII, 145].