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Catholic Puritanism in Pre-Reformation England

Peter Marshall

The title of this article, many might think, comprises a kind of three-fold solecism. ‘Puritanism’ is an evident and glaring anachronism. It was a term coined to satirize a particular strand of English Protestantism, and the first recorded usages date from the mid-1560s.¹ The category ‘pre-Reformation’ is not self-evidently meaningless or wrong. But as some medievalists have patiently pointed out to early modern colleagues, it can be unhelpfully teleological, and it has a tendency to telescope and flatten out a period characterised by its own dynamics of change and development.² Even ‘Catholic’ has its difficulties. Historians of late medieval and sixteenth-century religion have often regarded it as a problematic term of description, suggesting that to use it involves taking sides in the religious controversies of the Reformation, which involved furious debate about where the real ‘Catholic Church’, affirmed in the ancient creeds, was to be found.³ According to George Bernard, before about 1530 in England, ‘men and women were simply Christians... To call them “Catholics” is anachronistic’.⁴

Sometimes, however, the conscious application of anachronism can be a useful way of framing arguments and identifying trends. Catholic was not used in the later middle ages as a denominational label in its later sense, but it was often employed as a shorthand descriptor for true and orthodox religious belief. That makes it an appropriate parameter for the discussion in this article, whose principal concern is with developments taking place within the broad spectrum of late medieval orthodoxy, rather than with heresy or Lollardy (though heresy and orthodoxy are, of course, constitutive of each other, and the boundaries between them are in practice often permeable). With regard to another of the parameters, ‘Puritan’, historians of the later Reformation period have helpfully taught us to see Puritanism not as a break-away church in embryo, but as a strain of mainstream Reformed Protestantism, as a mind-set and a collection of attitudes, shared, in various combinations, by members of the Church of England, low and high, clerical and lay. In a similar way, my intention is to draw attention to a cluster of attitudes to be found within fifteenth and early sixteenth-century English Catholicism, attitudes which can, by metaphor and analogy at least, be usefully termed ‘Puritan’.

¹ See Patrick Collinson, ‘Antipuritanism’, in John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge, 2008), 19-33.

² Clive Burgess, ‘“A Fond Thing Vainly Invented”: an Essay on Purgatory and Pious Motive in Later Medieval England’, in Susan Wright, ed., *Parish, Church and People* (London, 1988), 69; Christine Carpenter, ‘The Religion of the Gentry of Fifteenth-Century England’, in Daniel Williams, ed., *England in the Fifteenth Century* (Woodbridge, 1987), 72. See also Fernand Braudel, ‘The Rejection of the Reformation In France’, in Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Valerie Pearl, and Blair Worden, eds, *History and Imagination: Essays in honour of H. R. Trevor-Roper* (London, 1981), 72.

³ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe’s House Divided, 1490-1700* (London, 2003), xix.

⁴ Bernard, Review of E. H. Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation*, *English Historical Review*, 119 (2004), 448. For other instances of reluctance to use ‘Catholic’ on grounds of supposed anachronism: Maria Dowling, *Humanism in the Age of Henry VIII* (London, 1986), ‘Note and Acknowledgements’; Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (New Haven and London, 1996), 3; Lacey Baldwin Smith, *Tudor Prelates and Politics 1536-1558* (Princeton, NJ, 1953), 132; Ellen A. Macek, *The Loyal Opposition: Tudor Traditionalist Polemics* (New York, 1996), 189. For a counter-argument that the term is in reality neither anachronistic nor unhelpful, see Peter Marshall, *Religious Identities in Henry VIII’s England* (Aldershot, 2006), chap. 9.

It is no new finding that later medieval Catholicism contained within it a significantly austere, moralistic and anti-formalist strain.⁵ This expressed itself in a wariness of promiscuous dealings with the sacred, and it tended to place great emphasis on authenticity and interiority at the expense of the material and external. It is possible to see that the tendency fused, around the turn of the sixteenth century, with some currents of Christian humanism, but it preceded them in time, and was never entirely subsumed by them. It will also be argued here that these currents fed into the first wave of evangelical reform in the 1520s and 1530s, though not in entirely predictable or straightforward ways. Hence the third solecistic parameter of my discussion: ‘pre-Reformation’. As a historian of the Reformation, I will confess that I am unrepentantly concerned with questions of origins and causation. The challenge in this context – and perhaps for historical scholarship as a whole – is to detect and explain patterns of change, while avoiding the habit of back-projection, and the temptations of teleology.

In recent decades, scholars have become increasingly acclimatized to the idea that the Reformation was in important respects a continuation and intensification of trends within later medieval Catholicism, rather than simply a wholesale rejection of it.⁶ Along with this has grown a recognition that a predisposition, or at least susceptibility, to ‘Protestant’ reform should be looked for in the ranks of the orthodox, as much as, or even more than, among small groups of dissidents or heretics.⁷ Yet there is still a great deal of work to do in establishing how these transmutations took place in specific social and cultural settings. This paper, anchored by its fourth (non-solecistic and geographical) parameter, England, is intended as a sketch of some directions that this work might fruitfully take.

It is scarcely controversial to observe that later medieval western Christianity, in England and everywhere else, was characterized by a strong emphasis on the numinous and the sensuous, by a powerful sense that the sacred, and indeed the divine, could be apprehended through material objects, holy places, sanctified rituals and hallowed representations. Caroline Walker Bynum has identified this period as one of an intensified Christian materiality, and speaks of the prevalence of ‘a sort of religious materialism – a frenzied conviction that the divine tended to erupt into matter’.⁸ Later Protestant and Enlightenment writers portrayed the era as exhibiting a uniformly credulous and unquestioning cultic religiosity. But such characterizations are wide of the mark. As Euan Cameron has shown, a desire to identify the boundaries of true worship, and to control or eradicate popular ‘superstition’, were recurrent concerns of orthodox theologians throughout the medieval period.⁹ Bynum’s insightful work on religious materiality in the middle ages is precisely concerned to point out that manifestations of enthusiasm for the tangible and corporeal in religion were paradoxically accompanied by growing suspicions and anxieties about it, resulting by the end of the period

⁵ See, for example, J. A. F. Thomson, ‘Orthodox Religion and the Origins of Lollardy’, *History*, 74 (1989), 39–55.

⁶ The historical-theological work of Heiko Oberman was foundational here: *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Cambridge, MA, 1963); *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought* (New York, 1966). See also Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford, 1987); Berndt Hamm, *The Reformation of Faith in the Context of Late Medieval Theology and Piety*, ed. Robert J. Bast (Leiden and Boston, 2004).

⁷ J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford, 1984), 56; Richard Rex, ‘The Friars in the English Reformation’, in Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie, eds, *The Beginnings of English Protestantism* (Cambridge, 2002), 38–59; Marshall, *Religious Identities*, 35–6.

⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia, 2007), 81. Cf Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York, 2011).

⁹ Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, and Religion, 1250–1700* (Oxford, 2010).

in something like ‘a crisis of confidence in Christian materiality’.¹⁰ Even Eamon Duffy, who is often – and not entirely fairly – suspected of presenting an undifferentiated and homogenized vision of fifteenth-century piety and practice, concedes that ‘a desire for simplicity... must often have been felt amidst the lavishness of late medieval Catholicism.’¹¹

In England, Bynum’s paradoxical dialectic – between embrace of, and alienation from, the physical and material in religion – can perhaps be seen in its purest form in the extraordinary period of spiritual, literary and devotional creativity which took place between about 1350 and 1420: the age of Chaucer, Langland, Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe. It was an era of lavish, demonstrative devotion, but also one full of evident longings for simple faith, focused on the basics of Christian charity – this was the essence of Langland’s poetic protest against a corrupt clerical establishment.¹² The circles in which Chaucer moved, one authority has suggested, were ones where an ‘austere, evangelical piety seems to have prevailed’, adding that this was a piety ‘entirely reconcilable with orthodoxy’.¹³ These, of course, were also the decades that witnessed the emergence of the Wycliffite revolt against various aspects of authority and doctrine in the church, and of the official backlash that saw numerous clerics and laypeople tried and punished for the crime of Lollardy.

Lollardy – notorious for its hostility to shrines, relics, pilgrimage and statuary, and for its scepticism about sacramental presence – was the pre-eminent expression of the puritanical impulse in late medieval thought and culture. Yet we should be wary of any suggestion that Lollardy contained this impulse, or drained it out of the orthodox mainstream. The late Margaret Aston was undoubtedly right to insist that ‘opposition to images can be regarded as one of the most consistent features of the Lollard heresy, and was a criterion for distinguishing its adherents at the beginning of the movement and its end.’¹⁴ But if all Lollards were critics of images and pilgrimage, not all such critics were Lollards.

Students of the pulpit tradition in England, from G. R. Owst onwards, have shown that clerical warnings about the dangers and excesses of popular religiosity were relatively common in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.¹⁵ The author of one middle English sermon collection had harsh words for those of his countrymen who ‘runneth from country to country, to images gotten or graven with men’s hands, of gold or of silver, of tree or of stone, wenyng and trusting that there be any divine virtue in them’. The modern editor of the cycle has given it the title ‘Lollard Sermons’. But in fact there is nothing in this highly moralistic homily, written for Quinquagesima Sunday, which could be regarded as formally

¹⁰ Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 267-86 (quote at p. 271); *Wonderful Blood*, 185-6, 250-4.

¹¹ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580* (2nd edn, New Haven and London, 2005), xxvii.

¹² For a brief but effective summary, see Eamon Duffy, ‘Religious Belief’, in Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod, eds., *A Social History of England 1200-1500* (Cambridge, 2006), 322-3.

¹³ Helen L. Spencer, *English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1993), 115.

¹⁴ Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London, 1984), 136.

¹⁵ G. R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (2nd ed, Cambridge, 1961), 48-9, 135-45; Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England: An Introduction to the Sermon Manuscripts of the Period c. 1350-1450* (2nd edn, New York, 1965), 292-4, 360-2; Helen L. Spencer, *English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1993), 143-4, 291-4, 305-6; Robyn Malo, *Relics and Writing in Late Medieval England* (Toronto, 2013), 127-47, 165-6. Such critiques had a much older history: see Colin Morris, ‘A Criticism of Popular Religion: Guibert of Nogent on *The Relics of the Saints*’, in G. J. Cuming and D. Baker, eds., *Popular Belief and Practice*, Studies in Church History, 8 (Cambridge, 1972), 55-60; Jonathan Sumption, *Pilgrimage: an Image of Medieval Religion* (London, 1975), pp. 35-41; Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (London, 2000), 239-42; Dee Dyas, *Pilgrimage in Medieval English Literature, 700-1500* (Cambridge, 2001), 53, 103, 141-4.

heretical. Elsewhere in the cycle the preacher endorses the sacramental powers of the priesthood, while urging them in strident tones to live up to their responsibilities.¹⁶

Similar problems of theological taxonomy have surrounded a more famous text: the early fifteenth-century dialogue on the Decalogue known as *Dives and Pauper*. This reforming, moralistic, and often anticlerical tract, whose author was probably a Franciscan friar, has long been regarded as pivoting on the very edge between orthodoxy and Lollardy. William Alnwick, early fifteenth-century bishop of Norwich, believed it was a text containing ‘plures errors et hereses quamplures’. But on the topic of pilgrimage and images, *Dives and Pauper* articulates the Lollard critiques largely in order to refute them, and it concludes that the creation and veneration of religious imagery is lawful and commendable. In fact, John Whethamstede, abbot of St Albans, and a notable critic of Lollardy, commissioned a copy of the text for his monastic library. Most informed commentary now affirms the fundamentally orthodox character of the text.¹⁷

Nonetheless, *Dives and Pauper* abounds with warnings on the dangers and excesses of image-worship. Its author was scrupulous about asserting the merely representational character of the image, insisting that prayers and offerings could be made before it, but not offered directly to it.¹⁸ This underlines the paradoxical finding that it is precisely in *anti*-Lollard texts that orthodox anxieties about material devotion are often to be found. Some anti-Lollard writers of the early fifteenth century, the Dominicans Roger Dymmok and Thomas Palmer, for example, or the Carmelite Thomas Netter, did cheerfully extol the affective power of imagery and praised its ability to stir emotion. But others were much more cautious, continuing in a fourteenth-century tradition of concern about the misuse of imagery and pilgrimage. This was exemplified by another couple of Dominicans, John Bromyard and Robert Holcot, as well as by Richard Fitzralph, Archbishop of Armagh, and by William Langland. Bromyard fulminated against those ‘who keep their pilgrimages not for God but for the devil... who sin more freely when away from home ...who spend their time on the road in evil and uncharitable conversation’. All these ‘make their pilgrimage away from God to the devil.’ Langland meanwhile solemnly advised that ‘folk who go on pilgrimages and visit the shrines of St James and the saints in Rome, must seek instead for the blessed Saint Truth, for He alone can save you’.¹⁹

As the literary scholar Shannon Gayk has recently shown, distinct apprehensions about the status and correct interpretation of imagery can be found in the writings of fifteenth-century authors as unimpeachably orthodox as Thomas Hoccleve, John Capgrave and John Lydgate.²⁰ It is to be found also, less surprisingly perhaps, in the vernacular writings of Reginald Pecock, the bishop of Chichester, who was himself convicted of heresy in murky

¹⁶ Gloria Cigman, ed., *Lollard Sermons*, Early English Text Society, 294 (Oxford, 1989), 114, 45-6. For scepticism about the Lollard character of this collection, Robert N. Swanson, *Catholic England: Faith, Religion and Observance before the Reformation* (Manchester, 1993), 14n.

¹⁷ Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts: Laws against Images* (Oxford, 1988), 144-5, 412-13; Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, 178-9; Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford, 1988), 417-21; Hudson, ‘“Who is my Neighbour?”: Some Problems of Definition on the Borders of Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy’, in Mishtooni Bose and Patrick J. Hornbeck, eds, *Wycliffite Controversies* (Turnhout, 2011), 84-90. See David Carlson, ‘Whethamstede on Lollardy: Latin Styles and the Vernacular Cultures of Early Fifteenth-Century England’, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 102 (2003), 21-41.

¹⁸ Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, 179. *Dives and Pauper* was also ultra-cautious about whether *latría*, the highest form of devotion, could ever be offered, even to a figural representation of Christ.

¹⁹ Shannon Gayk, *Image, Text and Religious Reform in Fifteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 2010), 8-9, 11; Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, 141; Dyas, *Pilgrimage in Medieval English Literature*, 143-4; William Langland, *Piers the Ploughman*, tr. J. F. Goodridge (Harmondsworth, 1966), 63.

²⁰ Gayk, *Image, Text and Religious Reform*, *passim*.

circumstances in 1457.²¹ In his *Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*, Pecock mounted a spirited defence of the devotional value of images, and of the social utility of pilgrimages and ritual. But his advocacy of these material expressions of piety was consistently tempered by an instance that reading texts and hearing the word preached was a much better way to make progress in the spiritual life, for laypeople as well as for clerics.²²

Another who wrote in defence of images against Lollardy, but with marked caveats and qualifications, was the Augustinian Walter Hilton. He recognised the potential for idolatry and recommended extreme care in the veneration of images. Hilton was both heir to, and torch-bearer for, an English tradition of inward-looking mystical theology. From this perspective, he may have felt little positive enthusiasm for several of the practices in popular religion he was stepping forward publically to defend. In a recent study, Nicholas Watson suggests that Hilton's views on the inner life 'evolved from an energetic body of imagery and ideas that in many respects belongs to the same thought-world as the Lollard radicalism he opposed.' As for images, Watson concludes that Hilton 'did not like them very much'.²³

Hilton did employ the standard orthodox defence of the use of images, attributed to Gregory the Great – that they served as books for the illiterate layman. This was rehearsed also by the author of *Dives and Pauper*, by Pecock and by countless others. Yet, as even a moment's reflection might suggest, this formula was far from a ringing endorsement of the popular saint and image-cults of the later middle ages. It was, rather, a minimalist, didactic and rather unenthusiastic argument in favour of sacred imagery, an elite concession that underlined its second-best status. The function of books was to instruct the mind, not to stimulate the emotions or overwhelm the senses.

Significantly, such cautions were not only to be found in the works of elite clerical authors, but in more homely vernacular works too. The *Speculum Sacerdotale*, an early fifteenth-century collection of homilies, designed as a resource for simple parish priests, was, like other compilations of the type, a hagiographical companion to the cycle of feasts in the liturgical year. But its author was deeply concerned to get the point across that offerings made at the shrines and chapels of saints should not 'ben done unto the seyntis, apostels and martires, but to hym that is god of hem'. Martyrs were to be examples of fortitude, and to be 'worschipid for meditacion'. But if anyone found themselves offering to saint, martyr or angel the trust they should repose in God himself, then 'they don ydolatre'.²⁴ Another, more widely circulated, late fourteenth or early fifteenth-century sermon collection was the *Festial* of John Mirk. This was avowedly anti-Lollard. But even Mirk did not present popular image-worship with a blank cheque. His sermon for the feast of the Purification of the Virgin, for example, takes a rather unexpected turn. It relates how there was once a woman of evil life, whose one good deed had been to maintain a candle before the image of the Virgin Mary. On her death she is carried off by devils, but they are intercepted by angels who plead her case and bring her before the throne of the Virgin. Mary's surprising judgement, however, is that the woman should return to hell, merely ordering the angels to keep a candle burning there in front of her soul. The devils object to this intrusion of the wrong sort of fire into their domain, and in the end the woman's soul is allowed to return to her body. But the point of the

²¹ See Sarah James, 'Revaluing Theology: The Case of Reginald Pecock', *Leeds Studies in English*, new ser. 33 (2002), 135-64.

²² Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, 182-3; Gayk, *Image, Text and Religious Reform*, 155-88 (see especially 181).

²³ Nicholas Watson, "'Et que est huius ydoli material? Tuipse": Idols and Images in Walter Hilton', in Jeremy Dimmick, James Simpson and Nicolette Zeeman, eds, *Images, Idolatry, and Iconoclasm in Late Medieval England: Textuality and the Visual Image* (Oxford, 2002), 97-8, 90.

²⁴ *Speculum Sacerdotale*, ed. E. H. Weatherley, Early English Text Society, 200 (1936), 1-2.

exemplum is to underline the need to seek sacramental remedies, and the profound insufficiency of ritualized devotion to the saints as a means of securing salvation.²⁵

Both the *Speculum Sacerdotale* and the *Festial* drew heavily on a famous earlier sermon-cycle, the *Golden Legend* of Jacobus de Voragine. The *Golden Legend* later acquired, and has kept, a reputation as a compendium of the most credulous sort of Catholic devotionalism. But even here, a certain ambivalence can be found towards the status of imagery and pilgrimage.²⁶ Apart from anything else, the sermons are replete with examples of iconoclasm – biblical saints tearing down pagan idols. And even within an established Christian context, some of the sermons, those on St James the Great and on St George, for example, criticize pilgrimages which are performed unworthily, as well as exactions suffered by pilgrims at shrines.²⁷

We are still a long way, in every sense, from the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Pecock's *Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy* was the last original, extended discussion of the validity of imagery to be composed in England before Thomas More took up the cudgels against William Tyndale and other evangelicals in the later 1520s. It is possible to argue that the ferment of the Lancastrian years simply played itself out.²⁸ After about 1450, Lollardy retreated to its secret rural fastnesses, and an orthodox, largely uncritical piety flourished in the parishes and on the page, increasingly the printed page. We have entered the world of *The Stripping of the Altars*, before the altars began to be stripped.

The situation is, I think, considerably more complex than this. The strain of what I have been calling 'Catholic Puritanism' remained in the bloodstream of orthodox religion, and began to mutate there. In part, this was a function of the ability of print to preserve old texts and reinvigorate old arguments. Stern warnings against pilgrimages which were not undertaken in a spirit of true devotion were found, for example, in Caxton's editions of fourteenth-century texts by Jacques Legrand and Geoffrey de la Tour Landry.²⁹ There were four printed editions of the *Golden Legend* in England between 1487 and 1527, and no fewer than seventeen editions of the *Festial* between 1483 and 1532.³⁰ It would be hard indeed to argue that either of these texts represented any kind of substantial challenge to traditional religion. But one might want to think differently about Robert Holcot's fourteenth-century commentary on the Book of Wisdom, which was printed in at least five editions before 1500: a copy in the British Library once belonged to Thomas Cranmer. Holcot held to the orthodox teaching that it was permissible, in front of an image, to show honour to that which the image represented. But he insisted that images, even images of Christ, should never be offered *Latria*, the highest form of worship. And he canvassed the idea – which Lollards were also repeatedly to espouse – that man was the true image of God, and that a living man was a closer representation of the divine than any carving of wood or stone.³¹

²⁵ Judy Ann Ford, *John Mirk's Festial: Orthodoxy, Lollardy and the Common People in Fourteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 2006), 51-2.

²⁶ Ongoing research by the Cambridge early career scholar Morgan Ring will do much to enhance our understanding of the complexities of this text, and I am indebted to her paper, 'Annotating William Caxton's *Golden Legend*', given at the Reformation Studies Colloquium, Cambridge, 11 Sep. 2014.

²⁷ Jacob de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, tr. William Granger Ryan (2 vols, Princeton, 1993), I, 242; II, 7.

²⁸ The case for there being a marked retreat from a fruitful period of 'vernacular theology' was made in an influential article by Nicholas Watson: 'Censorship and Cultural Change in Late Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, The Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's *Constitutions* of 1409', *Speculum*, 70 (1995), 822-65.

²⁹ Jacques Legrand, [*Here begynneth the table of a book entytled the book of good maners*] (Westminster, 1487), bk. 4, ch. 15; [*Here begynneth the booke which the knyght of the toure made and speketh of many fayre ensamples and thensygnementys and techyng of his doughters*] (Westminster, 1484), C2r, D2r.

³⁰ RSTC 24874-6, 24880; 17958-75.

³¹ Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, 156-8.

Dives and Pauper was another century-old text with a revived afterlife in print. There were editions by Pynson in 1493 and by de Worde in 1496, with a third by Berthelet in 1536. In addition to its strictures on the need to employ caution in the use of imagery, the work contained some striking monitions on what should be the priorities of a faithful Christian. The Word of God was ‘life and salvation of man’s soul’, and so any persons trying to inhibit preaching were nothing less than ‘manslayers ghostly’. In a straight choice between hearing a sermon and attending a mass, one should forgo the latter, for ‘it is more profitable to hear God’s Word in preaching than to hear any mass’.³²

This might sound like a dangerously radical attack on the sacramental emphasis of official Catholic teaching. But, in fact, it was something of a late medieval cliché. The great revivalist preacher of fifteenth-century Italy, Bernardino of Siena, told his audiences that, if it came to it, ‘you should let the mass go, rather than the sermon... There is less peril for your soul in not hearing mass than in not hearing the sermon.’³³ Exactly the same instruction is to be found in the famous early sixteenth-century devotional text of the Bridgettine monk, Richard Whitford, *A Werke for Housholders*. Whitford’s advice to heads of households was to make sure that all those under their authority were present ‘if there be a sermon any time of the day’. Furthermore, ‘let them ever keep the preachings rather than the mass, if (by case) they may not hear both’.³⁴

Whitford – the exemplar par excellence of orthodox Catholic piety on the eve of the Reformation – is an interesting figure for the purposes of this discussion, someone around whom we can see a number of threads starting to connect. The Bridgettines, the order to which Whitford belonged, were self-consciously the heirs in England to the teaching of Walter Hilton. They maintained Hilton’s advocacy of what he called the mixed or ‘medled’ life – a balanced vocation of meditative contemplation and external action, including energetic works of charity. Hilton’s vernacular *Scala perfectionis* was printed in four editions between 1494 and 1533, and supplied a model for the Bridgettine William Bonde’s *Pylgrimage of Perfection* of 1526.³⁵ Bonde’s text was a richly traditional affectively devotional one, to which only with great difficulty could the label ‘Puritan’ be ascribed. Its organizing metaphor endorses the practice of pilgrimage, and, while it condemns formalism, it is forgiving towards ritual actions performed with good intent, even if without full understanding. There is more evident emphasis on interiority in a publication of Bonde’s fellow Bridgettine, John Fewterer: the *Myrrour of Christs Passion* of 1534. This meditative work, a translation of a Latin text by the Nuremberg physician Ulrich Pinder, focuses directly on the events of the passion, and comprises a series of expositions of the relevant scriptural passages, each followed by an appropriate prayer. It has some similarities with a hugely popular late medieval English text, the Carthusian Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*. But while Love invited people actually to imagine themselves present at the

³² *Here endith a compendiose treetise dyalogue of Diues [and] paup[er]* (London, 1493), P6v-7r.

³³ A. G. Ferrers Howell, *S. Bernardino of Siena* (London, 1913), 218-19.

³⁴ Richard Whitford, *A Werke for Housholders* (London, 1530), D4r-v.

³⁵ *Here begyn[n]eth the medled lyfe compyled by mayster Water [sic] Hylton to a deuoute man in temperall estate howe he shulde rule hym* (London, 1530). See George R. Keiser, ‘The Mystics and the Early English Printers: The Economics of Devotionalism’, in Marion Glasscoe, ed., *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England* (Cambridge, 1987), 9-10; Jonathan Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries: Religion and Secular Life in Late Medieval Yorkshire* (Woodbridge, 1988), 251-97; Hilary M. Carey, ‘Devout Literate Laypeople and the Pursuit of the Mixed Life in Later Medieval England’, *Journal of Religious History*, 14 (1987), 361-81; C. Annette Grisé, ‘The Mixed Life and Lay Piety in Mystical Texts Printed in Pre-Reformation England’, *Journal of the Early Book Society*, 8 (2005), 97-124; Alexandra da Costa, *Reforming Printing: Syon Abbey’s Defence of Orthodoxy 1525-1534* (Oxford, 2012), 52-79, 143-63.

Last Supper and other episodes, Fewterer's emphasis was more intellectual, encouraging readers to unlock for themselves the allegorical meanings of key passages.³⁶

Whitford's *Werke for Housholders* was the most successful of all the Syon publications, the last best-seller of pre-Reformation England: it went through seven editions between 1530 and 1537. His book was a how-to guide, prescribing a 'customable course of good and profitable exercise' for the responsible lay householder and his charges. It was also a fairly demanding one. Every day should begin, for example, with elaborate makings of the sign of the cross, and should end with a detailed mental inspection of the subject's 'behaviour and demeanour, in work, word or thought'. There is a prefatory hint of later Puritan introspectiveness here, and also a sense – which English Puritans would subsequently hone to perfection – of the truly godly being a minority in the midst of the ungodly. Whitford recognized that, where people roomed together, the demonstrations of prayer and piety he was prescribing meant that 'some would laugh us to scorn and mock us'. In contrast to Bonde's work, pilgrimage as such does not feature at all in Whitford's *Werke for Householders*. And though he urges readers to call upon the saints in prayer, there is no advocacy of images, relics or objects as a focus for this activity.

Whitford is also the most likely candidate for the role of translator of a classic of late medieval devotional writing, the *Imitatio Christi* of Thomas Kempis: an English edition frequently ascribed to him appeared in 1531. The *Imitatio* had circulated to a limited extent in manuscript translation in the fifteenth century, but it became better known in England after Henry VII's mother, Lady Margaret Beaufort, commissioned, and indeed assisted with, a new translation by William Atkinson, fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge. Ten printed editions of the two sixteenth-century translations appeared between 1503 and 1535.³⁷

The circles of the European *Devotio Moderna*, from which the *Imitatio* emerged, advocated a sombre, Christocentric and contemplative piety, one in which images were often regarded as little more than props for beginners, to be discarded as progress was achieved in the spiritual life.³⁸ The *Imitatio* itself had little time for exuberant saints' cults, images and pilgrimage: the literary scholar James Simpson writes about its 'chaste, austere and largely imageless spirituality'.³⁹ As Max von Habsburg has shown in his study of early modern translations of the *Imitatio*, Atkinson actually played down or even omitted some passages where Kempis appeared particularly critical of popular religion and monastic life. Whitford's translation restored these. They included a suggestion that a solitary life of self-control was better than an ability to perform miracles; that 'the chau[n]gyng of lyfe and the mortifying of passyons', rather than the adopting of tonsure and habit, was what made a person truly religious; and a warning that devotion would soon cease 'yf we set the ende and perfeccyon of our relygyon in these outward oberua[n]ces'. A tart observation on how those 'that go

³⁶ Thomas Betteridge, *Writing Faith and Telling Tales: Literature, Politics, and Religion in the Work of Thomas More* (Notre Dame, 2013), 160-6; Alexandra da Costa, 'John Fewterer's Myrroure or Glasse of Christes Passion and Ulrich Pinder's Speculum Passionis', *Notes and Queries*, 56 (2009), 27-29; da Costa, *Reforming Printing*, 41-2.

³⁷ Maximilian von Habsburg, *Catholic and Protestant Translations of the Imitatio Christi, 1425-1650: From Late Medieval Classic to Early Modern Bestseller* (Farnham, 2011), 89-94, 278-9; Michael K. Jones and Malcolm G. Underwood, *The King's Mother: Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby* (Cambridge, 1992), 184-5.

³⁸ Rudolf Th.M. van Dijk, 'Towards Imageless Contemplation – Gerard Zerbolt of Zutphen as Guide for *Lectio Divina*' and Kees Waaijman, 'Image and Imagelessness: A Challenge to [the Modern] Devotion', in H. Blommesteijn, C.M.A. Caspers and R. Hofman, eds, *Spirituality Renewed: Studies on Significant Representatives of the Modern Devotion* (Leuven, 2003), 3-28, 29-40.

³⁹ James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford, 2002), 453.

moche on pylgrymage be seldom thereby made perfyte and holye' was similarly restored to the text.⁴⁰

Whitford's greater boldness about these matters may well be related to his humanist inclinations, and to his friendship with Erasmus and Thomas More. There is no need to go into detail here about Erasmus's critiques of traditional religion and of old-fashioned monastic piety – the theme is a well-known one, and the extent to which they may have predisposed people to accept the arguments of Luther has been much debated, in Erasmus's own time and since. But what has hitherto not been sufficiently recognized is that the enthusiasm for Erasmus and Erasmianism seeping into educated circles in England from the 1490s onwards had the potential to fuse with pre-existing orthodox traditions of austere and Christocentric piety, as well as with older satirical critiques of the supposed excesses and credulities of popular religion. One might point here to the interludes written in the 1520s by John Heywood, the nephew of Thomas More. These are patently indebted to the *Canterbury Tales*, another Middle English text that had appeared regularly in print from the 1470s onwards. Like Chaucer, Heywood parades in his works an array of dodgy pardoners, proudly displaying such relics as 'the great-toe of the Trinity', 'a buttock-bone of Pentecost', 'of All-Hallows, the blessed jaw-bone'.⁴¹

The censures of Chaucer, coated with a fashionable Erasmianism, still had the power to influence thinking about religion in early Tudor England. Of relevance here are some speeches given to the character known as 'the Messenger' in Thomas More's 1529 *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*. The Messenger, a vocal critic of popular devotional practices, protests indignantly how reverence is often paid 'to some olde rotten bone that was happely some tyme, as Chaucer sayth, a bone of some holy Iewes shepe'. He went on to object that 'some one sayntes hed is shewed in .iii. places. And some one hole sayntes body lyeth in dyuers countreys' – this was precisely the sort of thing Erasmus was given to saying.⁴²

The Messenger, until rescued by his creator Sir Thomas More, is well on his way to becoming a heretic. Thus far, the focus in this article has largely kept away from those who were classified in their own time as crossing the boundaries of orthodoxy. But Lollardy is nonetheless relevant to the discussion. This is not only because Lollardy and its orthodox counter-part emerged out of the same ferment of ideas around the turn of the fifteenth century, but also because Lollards can serve as witnesses to the persistence *within* orthodoxy of some tendencies of which they seemingly approved. Not all the texts discovered in the possession of heresy suspects in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were Wycliffite tracts or volumes of translated scripture. Quite often they were works produced for, and popular with, a mainstream orthodox readership. These included books of general religious instruction like the *Kalendar of Shepherds*, the *Prick of Conscience*, and *Dives and Pauper*, as well as *Ars Moriendi* treatises, books of hours, and expositions of the Pater Noster, Creed and Commandments.

It makes sense to assume that Lollards would often have read these books against the grain of authorial intent. In the early sixteenth century, John Edmunds of Burford was persuaded towards a memorialist position on the eucharist by reading the *Kalendar of Shepherds*, and by discovering there that 'the sacrament was made in the remembrance of Christ.' In fact, the author of this hugely popular work made only the unexceptionally

⁴⁰ von Habsburg, *Catholic and Protestant Translations*, 91-2.

⁴¹ John Heywood, *The Play Called The Four PP*, in *Medieval and Tudor Drama*, ed. J. Gassner (New York, 1963), 245-6; Heywood, *The Pardoner and the Frere*, in *English Miracle Plays, Moralities and Interludes*, ed. A. W. Pollard, (8th ed., Oxford, 1927), 117-18. See also *Cock Lorell's Bote: A Satirical Poem*, ed. E. F. Rimbault (Percy Society, London, 1843), 4-8.

⁴² More, *Dialogue*, p. 98. Cf. 'A Pilgrimage for Religion's Sake', in *The Colloquies of Erasmus*, ed. C. R. Thompson (Chicago and London, 1965), 285-312.

orthodox statement that followers of Christ ‘receive the sacrament of the altar in mind of His passion.’ But if Edmunds read meaning into rather than out of his text, the conclusion of Alice Cottismore of Britwell in Berkshire, tried for heresy in 1521, that the *Golden Legend* and an unnamed saint’s *Life* ‘did speak against pilgrimages’, is not quite as glaringly counter-intuitive as it at first seems to be. As we have seen, caveats about the risks surrounding the practice were to be found even in such unimpeachably orthodox sources.⁴³

Lollards were also sometimes able to find orthodox preachers whose sermons they were eager to attend. Thomas Boughton, shoemaker of Hungerford in Berkshire, confessed in 1499 that he always ‘had a great mind to hear sermons and preachings of doctors and learned men of the Church’. He was, however, a selective and critical hearer. For as long as preachers ‘spake the very words of the gospels and epistles, such as I had heard afore in our English books’, he heard them gladly. But he rapidly became weary if they talked of tithes or offerings, or ‘began to declare scripture after their doctors.’ The most famous case of Lollards being nourished by orthodox preaching involves another friend of Erasmus’s, John Colet, the humanist dean of St Paul’s. Colet’s strong emphasis on an authentic piety unencumbered by external observances was music to Lollard ears. Thomas Geffrey of Uxbridge confessed that he had persuaded John Butler to come with him on several Sundays to London, ‘to hear Doctor Colet’.⁴⁴

Another preacher whom Lollards are known to have turned out to hear in the 1520s was the Cambridge scholar, Thomas Bilney. The Essex Lollard, John Pykas, who went to listen to him at Ipswich, considered his sermons to be ‘most ghostly made, and best for his purposes and opinions as any that ever he heard in his life’.⁴⁵ Bilney, burned at Norwich in 1531, is widely considered the proto-martyr of English Protestantism, and his appearance brings this discussion within the purview of the Reformation proper. But Bilney has often been regarded as a puzzling, anomalous and incongruous figure. The question of whether he was really a heretic at all has been much debated, in the immediate aftermath of his death and in the centuries since.⁴⁶ Converted to something like Luther’s understanding of justification through his reading of Erasmus’s New Testament, Bilney strenuously denied being a disciple of Luther’s, or an opponent of the Church, and his understanding of the sacraments seems to have been conventionally orthodox. What got him into trouble were his coruscating attacks on saints, images and pilgrimage.

Historians have wondered how Bilney, a cloistered Cambridge don, could have been so influenced by the tenets of Lollardy. The answer is that he need not have been; that his deep antipathy to the prevalence of the material and external in religion was a manifestation, albeit a particularly intense one, of ambivalence about these issues long present in orthodox circles. To a considerable extent, in fact, Bilney’s heresy was contextual more than it was straightforwardly propositional – things that could perhaps have been said in mid-fourteenth-century England, and preferably in Latin, could not be rehearsed before the public in the vernacular at a time of growing official panic about the spread of Lutheran heresy.

It is possible to see a similar pattern attending a slightly earlier case, one which is somewhat less dramatic though no less intriguing in what it reveals about the confluence of

⁴³ Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, 208-12; Shannon McSheffrey, ‘Heresy, Orthodoxy and Vernacular Religion, 1480-1525’, *Past and Present*, 186 (2005), 64-7. On the *Kalendar of Shepherds*, see Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 50-1, 365-6.

⁴⁴ McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy*, 70; Foxe (1583), 851.

⁴⁵ Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford, 1988), 477-9, 494-6.

⁴⁶ See John F. Davis, ‘The Trials of Thomas Bilney and the English Reformation’, *Historical Journal*, 24 (1981), pp. 775-90; Greg Walker, ‘Saint or Schemer: The 1527 Heresy Trial of Thomas Bilney Reconsidered’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 40 (1989), 219-38.

religious patterns. In October 1525, the printer Wynkyn de Worde was charged with having produced without permission a suspect text called *The Image of Love*. Along with its translator, another printer, John Gough, he was summoned and reprimanded before the Vicar General of London. The work in question was a meditation on where the true image of love was to be found, and, throughout, its author contrasted the outwardly alluring with true inward things of value. Indeed, the conceit behind the book's title was that the writer, intending a new year's gift for a friend, had at first planned to seek out for the recipient 'some goodly pictures and images of our saviour Jesu, of our blessed lady, or of some other holy saints', but had then decided to look instead for 'an image of love'. The emphasis was on going beyond mere externals of worship to seek true spiritual enlightenment – in discovering the image of love, 'not in painted cloths and carved images' or at 'the most goodly appparelled altars', but in scripture, and on finding true charity in simplicity of worship, and in alms-giving to the poor. Margaret Aston considered the text's elevation of the inward over the external and ceremonial to be characteristically Erasmian. But in fact it has strong affinities with the much older tradition of reserved and austere Catholic devotion we have been tracking in this article. The author, like that of *Dives and Pauper* a century before, was a Franciscan Friar. John Ryckes was a fellow of Corpus Christ, Cambridge, who, sometime after 1517, gave up his university career to join the Observants. The recipients of the gift his book was intended to represent were the Bridgettine nuns of Syon Abbey. Sixty copies were sent to them, and had to be subsequently recalled.⁴⁷

Even Thomas More, who attacked the text in the second edition of his *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, had to admit that nothing in the *Image of Love* could really be regarded as formally heretical. Its author indeed made a point of warning that 'we maye not leue of the honourable and deuoute customes and holy ordynaunces of the chyrche'.⁴⁸ But Ryckes's high-minded critique of externalism in religion was at the very least extremely inappropriate, at a time when Lollard and evangelical attacks on shrines and images, verbal and sometimes physical, were markedly on the rise. More accepted that the author of the treatise might indeed be 'a right good man', but his arguments about images were flawed and decidedly 'undiscreet'.⁴⁹

The *Image of Love* has attracted a fair amount of scholarly attention. But very little interest has been shown in another work which was published in London seven years later, in 1532: *The Myrroure or Lokynge Glasse of Lyfe*. There is a direct connection. A new edition of the *Image* was produced by de Worde in 1532, 'cum privilegio regali', just as the official crackdown on evangelicals was easing and as Henry VIII's divorce campaign was coming to a head.⁵⁰ The translator of Ryckes's work, the printer John Gough, may also have been the translator, or perhaps the author, of *The Myrroure or Lokynge Glasse*.

Like the *Image of Love*, the *Myrroure* was not an obviously heretical work, and perhaps not a heretical work at all. It included much traditional devotional matter – discussions of the seven deadly sins, the works of spiritual and of corporal mercy, and the like. It contained a chapter on 'the virtue of confessyon', and urged its readers to use the sacrament often. It was equally orthodox on the eucharist, supplying prayers for a person to recite whenever 'I shall receyue my sorverayne... in forme of sacramentall brede'.⁵¹ And its

⁴⁷ Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 174-83; Susan Brigden, *London and the Reformation* (Oxford, 1989), 80-1; E. Ruth Harvey, 'The Image of Love', in Thomas More, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, ed. T. M. C. Lawler et al (2 vols, New Haven and London, 1981), II, 729-59.

⁴⁸ John Ryckes, *The ymage of loue* (London, 1525), E3v.

⁴⁹ More, *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, I, 40-7.

⁵⁰ RSTC 21472.

⁵¹ [*Here begynneth a lytell treatyse called, the (myrroure or lokynge glasse of lyfe) for co[m]fortyng of the soule*] (London, 1532), H2v-3r, D4v, G4r.

understanding of salvation could not be described as Lutheran.⁵² Certainly, it warned readers against trusting ‘in our good dedys and werks’ as a means of winning heaven, and it stressed how Christ ‘hath onely all hole and perfytyl redemyd vs’. But there was nothing intrinsically unorthodox about insisting that good works were not the root cause of salvation, especially when such statements were accompanied by the qualification that ‘no man... may be saued without good werkys’, along with exhortations to readers to perform them. There was no sympathy in this text for ‘cloked herytyks which are styffe neckyd / and obstynat’.⁵³

But the *Myrrour or Lokynge Glasse of Life* also contained a very large slice indeed of the Catholic Puritanism we have been concerning ourselves with in this paper. Pilgrimage, and the making of vows, were allowed, as ‘very expedyent and helpful’, so long as they were undertaken with ‘dyscrecyon & sobernesse, auoydyng all vayne glory’. But the shrines and images to which pilgrimages were undertaken were at the same time undoubtedly sites of potential danger, or at least distraction. No one was to think that ‘the same Karued ymage or payntrd picture, wrought with mannes hande, hath any lyfelynesse or grace, or comfort no more than hath any ymage of the same sort in your parysshe churche or els where’. To put any extra trust or confidence in them was ‘playne ydolatri afore god’. The author did not condemn people for making offerings of money or lights in the vicinity of images, so long as they did so of their free volition, and without hurt to their conscience. But God’s will could be more safely discerned in works of mercy directed to the poor and needy, ‘whiche is the blessyd ymage of god’. This was an echo of an old Lollard trope, and one also to be found in the *Image of Love*. Another passage in the *Myrrour* has a rather Erasmian ring, where the author criticizes foolish opinions and disputes about various matters, including whether one saint is greater and holier than another, or one pilgrimage or image worthier of devotion. There is also a distinctly evangelical feel to the author’s introductory epistle, which speaks about a personal conversion from sin, and insists that the true Mirror of a Christian’s life is the New Testament. The text drips with scriptural citation, particularly against the worship of idols. And, revealingly, the scriptural ban on the making of carved or graven images is said to belong to the second commandment.⁵⁴

As Margaret Aston has reminded us, this prohibition was subsumed into the first commandment in the conventional medieval enumeration of the Decalogue, an ordering to which Luther continued to subscribe. The alternative Hebrew tradition, long adhered to by the Orthodox churches of the east, was put forward by Leo Jud and Caspar Grossman’s annotations on Exodus, published in Zurich in 1527, but the renumbering was not widely publicised before its appearance in Jud’s German Catechism of 1534. The *Myrrour* was thus distinctly precocious in affirming what would later become a foundational principle of image-rejection in the Reformed Churches.⁵⁵

All in all, the *Myrrour or Lokynge Glasse of Lyfe* seems to present us with a very Bilneyian mixture of austere Catholic sacramentalism, humanist satire and scripturalism, and Lollard-tinged criticism of unrestrained image-worship. Such assemblages would not survive the later pressures of confessionalization in the sixteenth century. But they may not have been so unusual in the circumstances of the later 1520s and early 1530s, when evangelicalism was more of a network of reform-minded individuals, than a movement with a fixed doctrinal and political programme.

Gough himself would later develop into a leading figure of the evangelical book trade, and his will of 1543 leaves little doubt as to his reformed sympathies. Whether he was already so committed at the turn of the 1530s is less certain. He was arrested in 1528 on

⁵² Pace the claims of David B. Knox, *The Doctrine of Faith in the Reign of Henry VIII* (London, 1961), 141.

⁵³ *Myrrour or lokynge glasse*, B4v-C1r, C4r.

⁵⁴ *Myrrour or lokynge glasse*, F3r-4v, G1r, F1r-v, A2r-v.

⁵⁵ Aston, *England’s Iconoclasts*, 371-80.

suspicion of supplying heretical books which were being smuggled into Oxford, though managed to persuade Bishop Tunstall of his innocence.⁵⁶ It is certainly possible that the orthodox passages of the *Myrrour or Lokynge Glasse of Lyfe* were no more than a smokescreen under cover of which more subversive opinions could be smuggled into the hands of readers. But even if this is so, it supplies a revealing perspective on the combination of elements which might at this date still not seem wildly incongruous or inappropriate, and which could make a text acceptable and attractive to at least a segment of the educated, orthodox, book-buying public.

The involvement of John Gough with the *Image of Love* and the *Myrrour or Lokynge Glasse of Lyfe* links an incipient evangelical to a Franciscan tradition of praise for poverty and simplicity, and to the reformed monasticism of Syon and the humanist milieu of Richard Whitford. It points us to a nexus of attitudes and values in early sixteenth-century Catholicism within which more radical turnings could take place, and to the utility of print as a site for capturing some of these transitions in motion.

A couple of years after the publication of the *Myrrour or Lokynge Glasse*, in 1535, Richard Redman put out a short text called *Devoute Prayers in Englyshe of Thactes of Our Redemption*. This was in fact a slimmed down version of John Fewterer's translation of Ulrich Pinder's *Myrrour of Christs Passion*, which Redman had printed the year before. The new publication retained the prayers themselves, but omitted some extraneous material from saints' lives which Fewterer had included. In place of the detailed exposition of passages from the passion narratives, it supplied only a heading and a scriptural reference. The literary specialist Thomas Betteridge has likened the effect here to passing from a pre-Reformation to a post-Reformation church. He comments that 'whereas *The Myrrour of Christs Passion* would be objectionable for a number of reasons to Protestant readers, *Devoute Prayers*, apart from a few minor references to the specific saints, would not.'⁵⁷ Redman had converted the text, in more senses than one. But, if we are inclined to see this as a miniature of how minds and priorities were changing in the early, crucible years of the English Reformation, we should also note how this transformation took place without undue violence or contradiction to the principles enshrined in the original.

Half a century on, in 1587, a new edition of the *Image of Love* was printed in London. Its editor, the pamphleteer and playwright Anthony Munday, ascribed a Latin original to a Dominican friar called Adrian Savorine, and portrayed Ryckes as the translator rather than the author. There is no independent evidence for this attribution, and it may indeed be Munday's invention. But it enabled him to invite readers to note how this book 'being written by Friars, men of no smal reckoning among the Papists: yet how they write against their own idolatry, superstition and trumperie, & inueigh at the great follies and disorders'.⁵⁸ As was also the case with Chaucer and John Colet, the Observant Franciscan John Ryckes received in the post-Reformation world the posthumous honour of being adopted as a proleptic Protestant.⁵⁹

Detecting the routes into Protestantism taken by the first generation of evangelical converts, individually and collectively, is a decidedly uncertain business. Now that most scholars no longer believe that the late medieval Church was thoroughly corrupt, oppressive and spiritually repellent, the Reformation no longer explains itself. Increasingly, it makes

⁵⁶ Brigden, *London*, 115, 186, 270, 345-6, 408; Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, 492-3.

⁵⁷ Betteridge, *Writing Faith*, 166.

⁵⁸ John Ryckes, *The true image of Christian love An excellent, learned, and very comfortable treatise, meete and necessarie for these dangerous days* (London, 1587), 'Epistle dedicatorie'.

⁵⁹ On the 'Protestantization' of Colet, see Jonathan Arnold, *Dean John Colet of St Pauls: Humanism and Reform in Early Tudor England* (London, 2007), 5-6; for Chaucer, Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, 333.

sense to emphasize the fecundity and creativity, rather than the torpor and sterility, of late medieval orthodoxy as the seedbed from which revolt grew. The suggestions in the current article thus complement, though do not duplicate, some other recent thinking around this issue: Christine Peters' emphasis on devout Christocentrism as a 'bridge to Reformation', for example, or the interest shown by Susan Wabuda, Robert Lutton and others in the late medieval cult of the Holy Name as a potential point of connection between currents of orthodox renewal and early evangelicalism.⁶⁰

In seeking to identify roots and origins of religious change, determinism of any kind is misplaced. Catholic Puritans, if we can indeed call them that, were just as likely to be opponents as supporters of the Reformation. Richard Whitford was a leading anti-Lutheran polemicist in the early 1530s, and identified by the authorities as a trouble-maker at the suppression of his house a few years later. John Heywood was nearly executed in 1544 for his opposition to the royal supremacy. Unlike a fair number of other friars, there is no secure evidence that John Ryckes ever actually sided with the evangelicals – he appears, in fact, on a 1532 list of senior Franciscan Observants that Cromwell seems to have considered unreliable.⁶¹ As students of the Counter-Reformation would undoubtedly confirm, there was Catholic Puritanism around after the Reformation, as well as before. Nonetheless, people who had already accepted the idea that some external observances of Catholicism were at best unnecessary, and at worst potentially idolatrous, were perhaps easier to persuade that its theological underpinnings were themselves faulty and in need of replacement. In the ranks of the religious orders, and among university clergy and educated laity, such people may have been more common than we have been so far accustomed to think.

⁶⁰ Christine Peters, *Patterns of Piety: Women, Gender and Religion in Late Medieval and Reformation England* (Cambridge, 2003), quotation at p. 4; Susan Wabuda, *Preaching During the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2002), ch. 4; Robert Lutton, *Lollardy and Orthodox Religion in Pre-Reformation England: Reconstructing Piety* (London, 2006), 69-80; Lutton, 'Geographies and Materialities in Piety: Reconciling Competing Narratives of Religious Change in Pre-Reformation and Reformation England', in *Pieties in Transition: Religious Practices and Experiences, c. 1400–1640*, ed. Robert Lutton and Elisabeth Salter (Aldershot, 2007), 11–40; Lutton, "'Lovethis Name that is IHC': Vernacular Prayers, Hymns and Kyrics to the Holy Name of Jesus in Pre-Reformation England', in Elisabeth Salter and Helen Wicker, eds, *Vernacularity in England and Wales c. 1300-1550* (Turnhout, 2011), 119-45; H. Blake, G. Egan, J. Hurst and E. New 'From Popular Devotion to Resistance and eival in England: the Cult of the Holy Name of Jesus and the Reformation' in D. M. Gaimster and R. Gilchrist, eds, *The Archaeology of Reformation 1480-1580* (Leeds, 2003), 159-175.

⁶¹ *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, ed. J. S. Brewer, J. Gairdner, and R. H. Brodie (21 vols, London 1862-1910), V, 1312. Ryckes was responsible for a 1536 translation of a German work attacking astrology, dedicated to Cromwell, which included a biblicizing partial revision of the Church calendar. But it is difficult to see this as an overtly evangelical work: Harvey, 'Image of Love', 735-6.